

POLITICS, IDENTITY  
AND PUBLIC SPACE

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS IN AND  
THROUGH THE PRACTICES OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART

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*For the trio of my life: Schirin, Yuri & Aila*



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**PREFACE**

**FACE**

POLITICS, IDENTITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

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My thanks to Henk Slager, Mary Jane Jacob, Bart Witte, Luc Janssens, Ted Purves, Vasif Kortun, Johan Öberg, Tere Vadén, Sami Wahlsten, Don Mader, and most important, with admiration and respect, to all the artists involved.

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Ljubljana lecture series on Art in Public Space, at the P74 Center gallery in the fall of 2008; a Zagreb series of lectures on the concept of micropolitics, organized by BLOK, also in the fall of 2008; a conference talk at the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Shanghai Biennial in September, 2008; and a talk at the Art in Public Space conference at Garaj, Istanbul, organized by the British Council in March, 2009.

In terms of teaching situations, I have had the opportunity to rehearse these arguments at the MFA workshops at the MAHKU, Utrecht School of the Arts in the spring of 2009; at a workshop for the Social Practice department of CCA (California College of the Arts), in February, 2009; at the 2009 summer semester seminars of the Public Art and New Artistic Strategies program at the Bauhaus University, Weimar; and finally on a continuing basis in seminars with the PhD students' cluster that I am responsible for as Professor for Artistic Research at the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg. My gratitude and thanks go to all these organizations, their brilliant organizers and especially to the students for their engaged comments and questions.

A previous version of the beginning of chapter II was published in *Ut-opia/Super-City*, *Expodium Files* (eds. Bart Witte and Luc Janssens), *Expodium*, Platform voor jonge kunst, 2009. Part of chapter III is a re-written version of a text published in the *Taipei Biennial Reader*, 2009, and an earlier, now re-worked version of the latter part of chapter IV was published in the exhibition catalogue *Between Two Deaths*, 2006, ZMK Karlsruhe.

This argumentative and discursive effort in book form is a follow-up to my previous effort in *The Politics of Small Gestures – Chances and Challenges for Contemporary Art* (art-ist, 2006). My aim there was to try to walk with that central argument, already present in the title, as an act of never writing about something, but rather writing and arguing with it. My claim here is that while I keep insisting on the importance of constantly returning to the localized and committed need to participate in the production of content of concepts (sign, symbol, image or act), I am able to proceed with addressing the central issues (politics,

identity and public space, and especially how they affect one another) with new performative impulses, different takes of intensity and challenging rhythms. The step taken in this book is about the move from a static social imaginary towards self-reflective and active social imagination – a move from a stable space into the acts of becoming a place.

I have absolutely no wish to create anything completely new, nor make the pretension of having done so. This is a book as a situated and non-naive local participation in a long tradition of discourses (plural). It is an act of participatory articulation of discussions that certainly come from somewhere, are manifested currently in certain different ways, and which then must keep on keeping on and evolving towards something else. My hope is to push these things along somewhere, little by little, to shake up that complex bag of issues, and to make us move, to deke and dangle (to borrow two terms from a very specific vernacular practice) us into yet partly unknown perspectives and balancing acts. The task is to do this by inviting, luring and provoking you, as agents in the same large field of ethical and political issues (empowerment, civil society, reciprocal recognition and mutual respect), to take part in and to generate sites and situations of loving and caring conflict.

## INTRODUCTION

**"IT IS ABOUT HEARTS AND MINDS – NOT EITHER/OR, BUT IN IMMEDIATE, DIRECT AND INTENSIVELY TIGHT COMBINATION. IT IS ABOUT THE NEED TO KEEP GOING ON TWO DIFFERENT BUT ALWAYS CONNECTED PATHS OF INQUIRY, LINKING AND GENERATING THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ADDRESSING THE SAME ISSUE FROM THE MORE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE (MINDS) AND THEN AGAIN AT THE SAME TIME FROM A MORE EXPERIENCE-BASED VIEW (HEARTS) – AND NOT ONLY CREATING SITES WHERE THEY CO-EXIST, BUT INSISTING ON THE WAYS EACH SIDE AFFECTS THE ANOTHER."**

Why is it so difficult to confront and deal with the big issues? You know, issues like politics, identity and public space – and, not to forget, how each of these relate to, react on and reflect upon the others. Why is it that what we try to say and articulate about these main concepts too often remains abstract and so very fleeting? Why the sinking feeling that we always come up too short, sound too tacky and say nothing concrete? And finally, why is it that we nevertheless must face and deal with these big, hard issues, never as generalities but always by seeking ways to locate and to situate them, leaving no other choice but to ask: how can we address and anchor these themes through our practices?

One of the main propositions of this book is the claim that we have to be able to both accept this task and take seriously the inherent character of concepts such as politics, identity and public space, a character that is not something neutral, solid and given. We need to recognize how the content of any concept is constructed, contested, conflictual and contextual, and cherish that fact. What's more, consequently, it is about circumstances and processes that are by necessity at least partly confusing but also hopefully filled with compassionate participation. It is about hearts and minds – not either/or, but in immediate, direct and intensively tight combination. It is about the need to keep going on two different but always connected paths of inquiry, linking and generating the interplay between addressing the same issue from the more theoretical perspective (minds) and then again at the same time from a more experience-based view (hearts) – and not only creating sites where they co-exist, but insisting on the ways each side affects the another.

It is a give-and-take process in and through which we must be able to focus beyond what some concept seems to mean and denote, to ascertain how its content is made and shaped in a given site and situation. In consequence, we need to understand that due to a changing reality and changing interpretations of it, the content of a concept (image, act, symbol or a sign) is not one, but plural – all of which, when put and kept together, is not supposed to become a hindrance but rather lead to a productive and committed point of departure. You open the window, you face the trampoline and yes, off you go – you jump. Speaking metaphorically, you do not jump from a springboard, but from that thing called trampoline, because the purpose is how to act on and react upon constant returns and take-offs, bounces that take you up and down, up and down.

But where, in what conditions of the conditions, and how high do we jump? Should we worry about landing? In order for us to be able to concentrate and tackle the production of knowledge through the construction of the content of concepts, we must not only get rid of the illusion of our being detached and objective. More, much more, is required. We must be able to allow ourselves to notice how things hang and process together. Whatever we do and however we do it, the meaning and content of a concept is made and shaped through inter-connected acts, not in isolation, not in safe havens or peaceful pockets of solitude. We are in a mess, and we are a responsible part of it. We are situated and we are stuck, but not necessarily in a negative way. The point is this: what we do when we do what we do is not an abstract enterprise. It is a practice that is linked to where it comes from, where it is at and where it seeks to go. Our responses evolve and emerge from a process that demands constant and hopefully coherent, sequential versions of how what we do and try to achieve gets its temporary manifestations and materializations.

The benefit of the opening horizon of this book and the constructing idea of connecting and activating the dots between politics, identity and public space is that we are setting ourselves in motion. We are moving. We are moving away from the frozen or static categorizations and illusions of security. We are moving towards the idea of seeing and reflecting the world as we take part in it as a process. It is not what something is, it is what something can and might become. It is about what versions of politics, identity and public space we are talking about. It is about what values, wants, fears and aims we will use to try to define these inter-connected and procedural contents of concepts. It is about relationships, for example the combination of private and public, the inherent inter-connectedness of each partner in crime, and about how these sides evolve and exist, bouncing off each other and going through the emotions of the motions. It is about a setup that falls into the traps of dualism unless the focus is kept tightly on how they form, inform and generate one another in the process of clashes and caressing.

But what do we mean by concepts of space and place, or with public sphere and public space? The intention is not to provide a series of all-encompassing definitions of these terms. Nor is the intention to address all potential issues connected to these complex fields. The starting point is to view public sphere as the umbrella concept within which social space and social place are then constructed, generated, created and maintained – or ridiculed, neglected, denied and destroyed.

Thus, public sphere is seen as a very pragmatic, but not innocent concept covering the presupposition of a common participatory domain that is there for the exchange of ideas and as a site for debates. The aim is not to locate or determine a consensus or a common mind, but to find a site upon which we can reach reasonable disagreements, achieving a suitable and sustainable sense of a loving conflict.

The focus here is on how we can both perceive and affect social space and place (within a public sphere) through seeing them as real and imagined, as an imaginary site and as a site of imagination. Therefore, the domain of a public site is more about what it can and could be. There is no pretension here of necessarily calling that site democratic. An illusion of a nostalgic return to some wished-for idea or an abstract utopia which denies embedded conflicts and collisions does not help us to do anything right here, right now. Yes, we are definitely talking about participation and empowerment, and how it is possible and accessible to achieve, but not through a fantasy of a public site being completely open and “there” for everyone. Due to limitations of time, energy and location, nothing is ever open and accessible for everyone – not to forget limitations due to interest, ability and access to social, political and economical capital.

However, it is very important to emphasize that we are also not focusing on the problems of the current state of public space in terms of its one-dimensional commodification, privatization and economics of fear as manifested in the booming surveillance industry. These are obviously very important issues, and very well dealt in many other publications. (See, for example, Low and Smith 2006, Harvey 2008, Hardt and Negri 2005, Bode and Schmidt

2008)

What I want to try to do here is to address the issue from another dimension and angle. I will be talking about how to see and perceive and define these issues as something else. This ‘something else’ is very strongly and inherently connected to the necessity and availability of using imagination as a direct and conscious means in performing the content of sites and situations. It is about the potentiality of the becoming of a place within a structural and structured space. Thus, it is about playful and meaningful interventions and activations of where we live and how we live – and how we feel, see and think within a public space. Instead of asking who owns or controls a site and whatever is within it, we are dealing with how to engage with it, and with who does this, and especially how they (and of course, we) go about it.

This does not imply a false differentiation and separation of the priorities within this theme of public space and how it is shaped, made and controlled. Of course, all these matters of privatization and commercialization are strongly linked to our ability to imagine and to act upon it, but the focus here is deliberately on that potentiality of imagination that is local, embedded and situated. It is a vision we can label non-naïve localism. Instead of dreaming about a constructed purity or harmony, it strives fully toward achieving a particular and non-essentialist locality at that very site, which both acknowledges and cherishes internal conflicts and inherent plurality of views. As a locality, it is grounded on the never-ending push-and-pull of the necessary checks and balances, clashes and conversations (see Hannula & Vadén 2003).

This then is the politics of making things become possible – of changing the parameters of a site and situation that, through a conscious and purposeful act, allows or forces something which until now was neglected or denied to have access to the common agenda and the core of social imagination. It is an act arising within the content and the discourse where it is generated, which underlines a change in what is seen as meaningful, potential and possible. It is an idea that, in accordance with Judith Butler (2005), is what it can be only when it is aware of how it relates to and negotiates itself in connection to the structures within which it exists. Empowerment, the sheer possibility of it, is not comprehensible in a vacuum, but only in a strict relationship to its own limitations and structural anchoring. This is a version of the political that must be embedded and situated, but it is also a version of politics that actively performs its content of the political, striving towards alternative articulations and sites where differences talk to differences that in turn talk to differences which remain exactly that: alive and kicking variations of the changing same rather than cut-down and lamented categorizations.

Here, it is beneficial to recall the distinctions about how to define politics and political, a tool of the trade that shapes the four-level conceptualization of a polity, policy, politicking and politicalization. This crucial distinction starts from the structural sides of the concept, marking the difference between polity and policy, a comparison where the former (polity) stands for the rules of the given system (for example, representational democracy or a kingdom), while the latter (policy) is about what kind of policies are articulated and taken onto and then seriously dealt with on the agenda of that particular system. (This latter leads to the wide variety within the same polity of a self-defined

democracy that is demonstrated differently in Sweden, Singapore or United States of America).

The other pair of politicking and politicalization is then more focused on how to produce an effect, not within, but on the structures, and especially on the content, of policy and polity. Politicking is about the ways of affecting the content of the agenda of the policy. This is where we encounter the various groups that lobby for this or that policy being taken into account and pushed forward in the legislative processes. The main distinction here between politicking and politicalization is that the former, by its character, has to have decided what it stands for and what it supports, before it acts. Conversely, politicalization is what it is only when it opens up, starts questioning, and keeps that process of opening up and asking the annoying questions going on and on. This is the level of making things become possible, and therefore political, as in altering the ways of social imaginary and also social imagination. (see Hannula 2006)

In this book the processes of participation in the production of the content of concepts (such as policy and politicalization) are analyzed according to the possibility of seeing the idea of a becoming place as an inter-play, but also the distinction between addressing these ideas as social and spatial imaginary and social and spatial imagination. At its core, the focus is on the exchange and interaction between something stable and changing, something called space (standing for stability), within which something temporarily becomes a place (standing for change). It is an interpretation, situated and committed take on the content of a concept (as in a word, image, act or a symbol). It is also – while being already in the process of evolving and emerging content of concepts – about the crucial distinctions of scale and intensity between static imaginary acts and actively imagined acts (all of which we will deal with throughout this book, with especial focus in chapters II and VI).

But already here basic clarification is needed. In this conceptual construction, place refers to the result of how something is about to become, or has become, what it was striving toward. In comparison, space is the structural frame in which this place becomes. A space is more general in its frame, but yet always committed, conditioned and biased. Both a place and a space have dual characteristics. They are physical and discursive. The concept of space refers to the general frame of the sites, and as a sum of these spaces it is labeled as the public sphere, while a place is a manifestation of the potentiality of its

singularity. It is very much about the difference in character between the permanency of a space and the temporality of an act of becoming a place. Or when articulated with a perspective of scale, it is the difference between macro and micro levels – both in their presuppositions and elements of surprises.

However, neither a space (as a more than less stabilized site, or as an act of summing up several of them) or a place (in its potential singularity) is given or natural. More than that, how they are comprehended and used is only meaningful in relationship to each other's and their own contextual social and political backgrounds and currently activated uses. A too strict dual and binary distinction is both dangerous and strikingly unhelpful, since a potentiality of a place cannot exist without the space where it is trying to come about. They are in a reciprocal relationship that implies the need to constantly re-navigate the boundaries and distinctions that always exist between constructed binaries and opposites, casting them into becoming processes of interaction and interdependency. It is about how space becomes a place within the huge mass of participants and elements that both cause an effect and are acted upon. This is a type of deep-seated reciprocity and interconnectedness that does not deny differences and conflicts, but seeks ways to deal with them productively. It is a realization that, for example, in terms of the discourse on public and counter-publics, an alternative version cannot escape having a strong relationship to what it criticizes. The task is to find ways to negotiate these alternative positions by challenging themselves as well as their chosen adversaries, in order to properly address a public space and get closer to its being and becoming as potentially transformative gestures. (see Warner 2005, 63)

When focusing on the potential acts of becoming a place, we have already here moved far away from seeing the content of these concepts as ready-made, solid definitions. Space is perceived, it is conceived, it is shaped and it is definitely experienced and lived. But this occurs in direct intertwined activity, with all these notions co-existing: the ways something currently is, and what might become of and with it. But it is not experienced as detached, alienated or authentic. Experienced first hand, it does not make sense as being abstract, general or collective. What we see and feel is specific, particular and individual – and always partly formed by the site and context within which we are currently 'having' an experience, an experience that is often structured through-and-through, but is never fully determined. Again, it is about nuances and differences of what, where and how we experience as being committed and situated selves.

Thus we confront the role of both imaginary and imagination in the process of spatial and political construction, narrative and participation. We are not talking about stable and neutral facts. Instead, we are dealing with how we experience our realities and our chances of making a difference in them. It is to focus on social and spatial imaginaries, as in the aspects of what in a given site and context are seen and recognized as possible and meaningful. We are then facing the systems and structures of how our world at large is produced, maintained and developed. We are considering what values, wants and fears make up the daily fabric of our lives, and how the content of concepts, images and symbols is made and shaped. It is also, in the long run, about how to question them (i.e., taken-for-granted views, implicit biases, hidden agendas and accepted hierarchical orders of values), open them up, shake them about and make them become political, as in making and producing possible alternative ways of seeing and being.

One central presupposition here is that, however we want to define politics or identity, for example, these acts are always and constantly doing two things at the same time. We are describing and defining. It is both the idea of how to do things with words as descriptions of a version of a reality, and also that these words are at the same time deeds (see Skinner 2002, 103-104). We are not proposing or producing truths, but versions and interpretations of who we are, where we are and how we would want to be. Following Gadamer, understanding is an event (2004, 308). It is a process of becoming something that is a combination and interaction between understanding, interpretation and application, a process that has a rather clear direction, as in an aim and as an ideal, but where it actually goes and how it moves towards it is always open and not possible to control fully. Nor is this aim and a wish for something else innocent. These aims and ideals are also definitions. In their character they are regulative, both allowing some views and visions and excluding others.

The ground we stand on is a ground that can be labeled plural realism. It is the starting point for losing our naivety and both becoming more aware of and participating in the distinctions and play between what is defined as a factuality and what is viewed as a facticity of an interpretation that is not something by itself but becomes something (see Dreyfus 1991, 24, 262). In a larger perspective, it is about both realizing and respecting the plural character of our life-worlds and interpretations in and through it. It is a condition that is undeniable and permanent within a civil society of relatively free institutions (that is to say, those having the ability to self-articulate and act upon their agenda) structured on

checks and balances, not as a given fact or a reality but as a possibility of becoming such. It is a condition within which it is not very helpful to go good will hunting for the final truth and universal rationalism, but instead requires that we aim at a reasonable pluralism, and therefore also the recognition of the limits of reasonable disagreements, a sort of hands-on realization of a dilemma that does not dream of solving it by naming it, but which relies on the ways in which this comprehension allows us to understand how to deal with the dilemma, and how to seek strategies of bypassing either/or solutions. It is a starting point which lays heavy demands upon us. It is all summed up in the one word ‘reasonable’ – and how it is to be comprehended. Following Rawls, the content of ‘reasonable’ is associated with *“the willingness to propose and honor fair terms of cooperation, and second, with the willingness to recognize the burdens of judgment and to accept their consequences.”* (1993, 49)

If we approach the same issue from another angle, and talk about images instead of concepts, we face the dilemma of the status and reality effect of an image. It is not only about the truth value of an image (whether it is original or copy, real or fake), but even more about how images are constantly doing two things: they reflect and produce reality (previously articulated as the process of describing and defining a content of a concept). This is what can be labeled as the dilemma between the relationship and content of the truth value of an image and the face value of an image. This dilemma was classically stated as the problem of whether, if a tree falls in a forest when nobody is there to witness it, it has actually happened. With the hugely increased volume of mass media over-determination of commodifying information and images over the past four decades, this dilemma has turned into the realization that there are whole forests constantly being wiped away and nobody pays any attention, unless there is a full blown imaginary produced and distributed of and with it. This realization points not only towards the mis-balanced relationship between reality and representations of it, but even more cruelly towards the power games and actualizations of what is distributed and how. It is a dilemma where the over-designed image is repeated non-stop and with relentless rigor, while deliberately camouflaging the value-laden interests connected to it.

Here we remember the pessimistic voices. Without much of a pause, we recall the writings of Frederic Jameson<sup>(1998b)</sup>, his characterization of the total saturation of cultural space by multiple uses of media, ending up in emptying the content of any image or cultural product.

It is the dilemma of a totality of consumption proposed by Jean Baudrillard, already in the French context in the early 1970s, and later described as our wish to be entertained to death. It is an echo with scary dimensions, restated in the quote: *“All the repressive and reductive strategies of power systems are already present in the internal logic of the sign, as well as those of exchange value and political economy. Only total revolution, theoretical and practical, can restore the symbolic in the demise of the sign and of value. Even signs must burn.”* (1981, 163)

The contemporary version of the question is whether there is a critical yet constructive take and strategy to go against what Baudrillard so well defined as the conspicuous and vicarious consumption of the sign, but to do this so as not to become overwhelmed by the rhetorics of despair and the cruelty of deep-seated cynicism and its self-congratulatory pose. This is to say that while the description of the sign of the times and its agonizing process towards things going from bad to worse (from '70s to the first decade of the new millennium) in terms of colonialization of our life-worlds through commodification is (unfortunately or not) valid, the solution ought to be something other than falling back on different variations of essentialism or mysticism. Instead of passivity or various ways of denying we are part of the structures we exist in, we must find performative and situated ways through which a sign can again be made to become a singular place of thisness.

It is a common dilemma of both choices about what to do with images and how to use and/or abuse representations that was recently actualized with amazing clarity and directness through the daily politics of international relations and power games. The reference is to the so-called gas war in early 2009 between Russia and The Ukraine, where the issue was how gas flows from its point of origin in Russia to its customers in Western Europe, and how much it costs, how it is transported and via what route. It was a construction of a scene that was certainly mind-blowing. Sometimes you just wonder. There is nothing more left to do than to stand there with your mouth wide open, hands held high in surrender. You give up. And you give in and admit that yes, despite of your preoccupation with believing differently, reality always bites harder than fiction – especially when that reality is so very close to being fictional.

The case in point is the reality-TV spectacle presented by the Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin and the counterpart in this unintended gag, the head of the Gasprom company (never mind his name, it's all

about Putin here). The scene was amazing. At least once a day during the early January cold spell these two men staged a spectacle on the main Russian state channel. Their coup de théâtre involved discussions between the prime minister and the Gasprom chief, debating the current dilemma of gas not flowing as the Russians would like from its source to the customers freezing in central Europe, Bulgaria and Serbia mainly feeling the chill – not to forget the other partner in the crisis, The Ukraine – while the big EU players wondered out loud about the reliability of their elementary strategic energy resources.

Regardless of the content of the crisis, and regardless of who cheated who and what should be done so that this tragic-comedy does not repeat itself come next Christmas, it was a unique demonstration of power by Putin. The sheer naiveté of the act, the scene of two men playing their roles in dead-seriousness, the Gasprom honcho looking slightly down, talking in a semi-low voice, explaining the recent developments of the problem – all the while we see Putin leaning back a bit, resting his head on one hand and acting as if he was extremely focused on the issue, asking questions, such as, what do we tell our Western friends, and what would you suggest we do, and ahaa, is it really true that they steal our gas, and OK, harasoo, then let's turn the gas off.

But why this silly show? Why this horrible amateur make-believe acting of how Putin and his allies make decisions? This is where we get straight into the dilemma of why we see the increasing trend of basing one's credibility on the authenticity and truth of what has been done in an exhibition, how a movie was constructed and how you can do this (whatever it is) because you belong to that particular culture, scene or weltanschauung. In one word, the return to essentialist positions and arguments.

This is precisely the point where we hit the wall that makes us painfully aware of the sign that says 'Slippery when wet'. This sign connects us to the dangers of no longer being able to tell the difference between the truth value and the face value of an image. It is a sign that throws us all the way back to the critique by Jean Baudrillard mentioned above. But once again, returning to the magnificent judo meister Putin, why this tacky effort at mimicing a situation that never took place? Why pretend? Perhaps it shows that even the most powerful head of a state is desperately seeking approval for his actions. Perhaps it also shows that in the contemporary terms of how the signs of our times are constructed and comprehended, unless there is an image of an act or an event as a proof that it took place, with the implication that it is a true

act or event, it simply, oh sorry, let me rephrase this, it positively, absolutely and fundamentally does not exist.

But hold on for a second, please. How is it possible to claim that this constructed and produced image proves something to be real, true and authentic? How can this connection be made, if and when we have the legacy of critical theory, which for at least the last four decades has relentlessly argued that any content of a concept, any content of a sign and an image is in itself nothing. As the well-known and ceaselessly repeated litany goes, a concept or an image is not neutral, solid or natural, but by its character is constantly made, shaped and maintained; it is on the move. It is on the move between where it comes from, where it is at and where it is going. In other words, it's the game and negotiations between roots and routes – a movement in and through which we must face up and take up the responsibility to make those moves and not just enjoy watching them. It is about the singular becoming of these complex relationships, instead of repetitions and reproductions of them.

The task in this book is to address how this interconnectedness happens, how to make it less easy to hide behind the illusions of innocence or authenticity, how to re-construct the embedded constellations of power positions and power games, and finally, how one can potentially take part in forming and also reformulating it as an ongoing process. The task is to argue that our responsibility as participants is to provide and push forward alternatives – alternatives that articulate in great detail and accuracy both the truth value and the face value of a given image in a specific context. It is to provide and generate hope against the cynical pose and the pessimistic blame game, by participating in the production of content of concept (image, sign, act or symbol).

It is a situated and committed necessity that functions as a wall against the corrosive elements of whimsical browsing around, and the inability to find the stamina to focus for more than three seconds on anything more demanding than choosing what kind of yogurt to purchase. It is the interconnectedness of, well, basically everything, but here the focus is on the ways in which what we do both describes and defines, both reflects and produces reality, and affects but is also affected. It is an argument that does everything to avoid the divisions of celebrating the hollowness of everything being free-floating and disconnected, without becoming completely lethargic due to presupposed over-determination. It is a division that we can only avoid if and when we are able to admit that we are stuck in our own problems (and

our limited and situated freedoms and responsibilities within them), and that it is not about who has got it right, but how do we deal with the sites and situations of the honest dilemmas we face. It is about navigations and negotiations. There is no truth that can save us, no hero of hypocrisy that can take away our pain and hurt, our pleasures and benefits.

But how do we do this? As stated already in the very beginning, we must trust and concentrate both on our individual, but also on our collectively shaped and maintained practices of critically thinking through what we do when we do what we do. It is to go into the details and connotations. It is, instead of making a big point out of nothing, to make and perform a small gesture with something specific, and with special content that plays with our expectations, anticipations and the horizons of what is seen as possible.

When connecting and activating the dots between politics, identity and public space, we start by focusing on the idea of social and spatial imaginary which, albeit being about imaginary, is still unnecessarily a very static version, and then contrasting it with the more active and less rigid version of social and spatial imagination. This is to be done by looking carefully into the making and makings of these central concepts of identity, politics and performance of a place and how these affect one another – and again, not as free floating, unattached concepts, but in and through the practices of contemporary art that are actively anchored into social, political and economic structures (see the wide variety of individual cases that we will focus on one by one in all the upcoming chapters).

It is about relationships and inter-connectedness among different fields that study and address the same overall issue, though always from very different positions and from within a wide variety of pre-suppositions and traditions that shape and color their interpretations. Here the idea is to bring the current debates that are evolving in the social sciences and in the field of contemporary art closer to one another. While the main scope of the former is the fairly recent but impressive move towards the idea of imaginary social spaces and content of concepts (see Taylor 2004), the latter focuses on what it means when artistic production goes outside the white cube (serving here as an overall concept that covers the more or less similar structures of representation within museums and galleries for contemporary art, while still recognizing all the internal variations and differences). Thus, what this book seeks is a conscious effort to set two different

views of the social and spatial production of knowledge next to each other. What is happening here is both a comparison and further development of certain versions of how social scientists, philosophers and historians face and articulate these issues, and how certain artists face and articulate these things.

The task is to see what happens in these comparisons and interconnected settings, and this is only possible and meaningful if and when both sides are handled with the same committed attention and reflective self-criticism. As one important point, what this book tries to do is to win back ways in which we are able to critically and constructively discuss the whole range of crucial issues of the content, quality and potentiality of practices. It is about practice, not as a squeaky clean and hermetic operation but as an open-ended process that seeks confrontations and give-and-take situations. What this means is that any inter-connectedness is denied and brushed aside if each side (social science vs. contemporary art, but obviously enough, not just any type of social science or contemporary art, but the versions that actively face the questions of both social imaginary and social imagination) does not rise to the demand to be able to question and alter its own prejudices and suspicious, and yes, also its central beliefs, and either hidden or visible sacred cows.

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It is not about arriving at, but about focusing on how to keep the process up and running. It aches and itches to be a process, not progress. It hopes to create comprehension of both how much time and energy must be invested in these interactions, and how much more than meets the eye it is possible to gain from a long-term commitment to an interdisciplinary activity. It is a process in which we must get rid of the illusion that anything and everything we do is just simply fantastic. We must break loose from the self-congratulatory mood of being affirmative and cynical. We should not dream of getting all the way beyond it – any more than we should allow ourselves to be told that we are forever stuck where we are right now. It is about both the transparency of our ideas and the chances to slowly but surely transform them by pushing our limits, by challenging our mental borders and by letting ourselves be lured into experiences that we cannot control or turn into commodities.

In terms of social imaginary (as practiced by social scientists) this requires a move away from their currently too static and narrow comprehension of the chances and challenges of the production of content of concepts (image, act, sign or a symbol) as in becoming a place – the

very act of producing new and alternative meanings and ways of relating to and reflecting reality. On the other hand, what this requires from the side of the practices of contemporary art is to take much more seriously the multi-layered and deeply unsettling problems of what it means to work in situ and in relation, rather than in the much more taken-for-granted setup of a museum and a gallery. Waking up must start with the admission that nothing we do is anything in itself. Art is not inherently good or interesting. Playing the violin or having a brush in hand does not make you immune to stupidity, evilness and petty power games. As in anything we do, it is in itself only productive. Something happens, we breathe in and out, something is transformed and sometimes even translated – but the question is not what, but how, and the ever-crucial nuances of what is meaningful in that given and contextual, localized and committed act of doing what you do when you do what you do.

The main question that always remains and haunts us is: what makes an act a meaningful and transforming act in its own context? More than that, it is about how to take yourself seriously and then communicate, make and shape that practice of what do you do when you do what you do, not just to dress up for it, but really performing with inherent risks and chances of failure, acting on what you are doing as relevant and serious, connected and committed. It is the acts within a multi-layeredness of a practice of how to turn and churn a space into becoming a place. You know, really rattle and shake, move the mental mountains and create those beautiful symbolic fountains of mutual respect and reciprocal care.

It is an act that faces the task of interpreting the current version of that more general space (the whole range of it in a content of concept, image or symbol in a public space) and how that knowledge in combination of actively creating alternatives would make it possible to generate that becoming of a singularity of a place (content of concept, image, act, symbol or a sign). It is also an act that can only be meaningful and serious when these potential singularities have an acute awareness of a collective dimension, that is, when they are connected in and through the same or similar temporary events that by their both physical but especially discursive interconnectedness shape and make that very content – one after another but also next to each other, always colliding and caressing.

All told, it is a participatory and open-ended process of the double act of defining and describing, producing an effect and being affected.

It must be located in a willingness to face and not deny conflicts and oppositions, while at the same time being located in and focused on the ability to constantly re-negotiate the ways to avoid, to deal with and to fend off the ever powerful and dangerous binaries, biases and dead-ends that come in shapes and forms both mental and metallic, discursive and physical.

**SOCIAL IMAGINARIES**

**“SOCIAL IMAGINARY LEANS STRONGLY TOWARDS THE LIVED AND THE EXPERIENCED, THE SPOKEN AND THE SHARED THAT IS LOCAL, VERNACULAR AND NOT POSSIBLE TO CONTROL OR EVEN GUARD. IT IS NOT ABOUT THE DETERMINATION OR DOMINATION OF THIS OR THAT STRUCTURE WITHIN WHICH THE STORIES ARE TOLD. IT IS ABOUT A BALANCE OF POWERS, ABOUT THE POWERFUL ACT THAT IT IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE, TO TELL THE STORY DIFFERENTLY IN ANY SITE AND ANY SITUATION.”**

Public sphere, public space and civil society: three central and significant concepts that deal exactly with those things with which critical yet constructive reflection is suppose to confront us; they deal simultaneously with our hearts and our minds. These concepts unite and bring together both the motions and the emotions of who we are, where we are, and how we are. What's more, they are concepts that are constantly on the move. Their definition is not neutral, given or objective – no matter whether articulated by major, respected and highly influential names in contemporary philosophy such as Jürgen Habermas<sup>(1981)</sup>, in his idea of a non-coercive consensus achieved in a public sphere by discursive interaction, or by John Rawls<sup>(1993)</sup>, in the idea of public reason being based on discussion of the original position and on debate on the overlapping agreement of reasonable disagreements, or by Seyla Benhabib<sup>(1992)</sup>, in the idea of situated yet universal self-participation in civil society, or by anonymous newspaper editorials or city planning officers, or by just about anyone commenting on where they live, how they live and how they would want to change it.

Definitions of these main concepts (in fact, of any concepts we use) are always constructed, conflictual and contested. It is not a passing moment, a trick of the light or an unfortunate mistake, it is their inherent character. The content of concepts is not solid, like a rock. They are made and shaped, maintained and questioned. Definitions are not naturally given, they are intentionally cultivated. The intriguing point is this: they are always value laden and contextual (see Koselleck 1985). What's more, the site (that is, the public arena and sphere) where this production of contents of concepts takes place is not neutral and not necessarily at all informed. Instead, where these actions try to become a place can very well be a site that is terribly biased and convincingly uninformed, or even aggressively arrogant. Nevertheless, as Michael Warner so accurately points out, *“the idea of a public is motivating, not simply instrumental. It is constitutive of a social imaginary.”*<sup>(2005, 12)</sup>

Concepts and their contents are exactly what they claim to be: they are ideas and ideals – a combination of two related but distinct concepts, where ideas lean more towards open speculation and ideals contain more of a normative approach and aim. But at the same time, they are ideas and ideals of what, where and how we participate, and also ought to participate, in both conscious and unintended activities. They are words as deeds, which as an aim form a regulative idea that can be very powerful, both engaging but also, looking at the other end of the scale, strongly limiting and exclusive. Thus, to participate with the aim of both being challenging and being challenged yourself is to

go against the flow and to ask: what's so funny about peace, love and understanding? That is the question which serves as a non-articulated (but not hidden) sentimental sub-title for this whole chapter.

This presupposition of an understanding and acceptance of plurality and the process character of ideas (and again its cousin, ideals) is a notion to which we are now becoming more and more accustomed, and to which we are giving greater attention within the reflective sectors of the social sciences, but which for a remarkably long time has been quite unreflectively a central part of the field that we call site-specific and socially engaged contemporary art. In this field, what we are talking about when we talk about our practice is how things are never what they seem, but through spatial, conceptual and visual interventions they are made to become something different, hopefully something special.

Therefore, it is about how they become something – a site, a place, gaining their temporary singularity at a particular location. Becoming, and the both physical and discursive act of moving towards something that is yet not there, has gone missing, or there is a great lack of it. Never mind how neglected it has been in the majority circles of the social sciences, this act of tending towards and not being so horribly worried about the outcome is a process that does have one very strong, but strangely not often used proposition, to be found in a notion articulated by Jürgen Habermas in a book originally published in the early 1960s. This is the idea of how contemporary public sphere and public space (in the original German *öffentlichkeit*, which has slightly different connotations but can be viewed as connoting happening, emerging and evolving in a similar enough frame of intentions) is never there automatically. It must be generated and maintained, acted on and acted upon in each site and in each instance (Habermas 1962, 239). Significantly enough, it is striking how Habermas's view has since evolved strongly towards solid and also stagnated conceptualizations of a much more normative character – a move that in itself reveals why this notion of a becoming a place in its publicness is so under-articulated and under-used.

But what happens if and when we combine the theoretical discourse of public space from the social sciences with the more experimental and inventive (which here means open, inter-disciplinary, often non-profit, with a copy left and open source character) practices of contemporary art in connection to public sphere and public space? (As points of reference, let's here pick up three very different practices

and themes that will be discussed in detail later on: a) Santiago Sierra and the question of free will, dealt with in detail in chapter v; b) Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset and the question of the politics of representation, focused on at the end of chapter vi; and finally c) Irene Kopelman and the act of narrating and performing the natural science museum and re-activating its sources into a unique transformation of embodied knowledge, addressed at the end of chapter v.)

And yes, with the label of experimental and inventive we are here referring to practices which seek to maintain a critical attitude towards their own production, and practices that clearly state the need to constantly activate positions that are more than affirmative, more than just another project on the road, more than just business as usual. They open up and enjoy the uncertainty, rather than hysterically close down options and categorizations. They are acts that seek to rattle both our hearts and minds, trying to have an effect on both of them and keeping a close focus on how to generate a give-and-take exchange between the two, while articulating how they affect one another.

This book is an experimental process not only in bringing together and letting (but not forcing) social science and contemporary performative art practices clash and collide, but also in the way it is written. Following the legacy and the strategy of writing with, not about, the aim is not to invent a completely new style or way to address these complex issues. In practice, it will be typically reflective and participatory writing that draws more from speculative, essayistic, risk-intensive and experimental aspirations, rather than academic rules. It also will seriously take up the challenge of being reflective with regard to its own practice. What this means is the experiment of how to combine the idea of hearts and minds in the content and the style of writing. The latter connection ought to be obvious, and the former will be very clear for all readers as soon as they get through more than four pages of this effort.

What I want to address with the 'hearts' part is something that comes 'naturally' and is available everywhere. It is omnipotent in its secular meaning. The reference is to what I will call pop music, just for the sake of economy and simplicity. This is music that generally follows a three minute format so it fits into radio play, and that is purchased and consumed in all forms of media, like songs, movies, TV, in elevators, at swimming pools and in the waiting room at the police station. As the sound of our everyday lives – surrounded and even tortured by all kinds of noises and so-called songs – it is a site of social imagination.

My intention is to articulate the beneficial rhetorical and performative opportunities of the lyrics, and especially the refrains of pop songs, and to combine them with the more serious and less cheeky ways of articulations of performing the content of a concept (image, act, symbol or sign), as found in the practices of reflective social and political theory.

It is a version of a pop song that is catchy; it is fast and furious, or banal and tender. It is articulation of the most common feelings and anxieties in the form of a refrain – words that take very little physical space but fill in a great deal of mental space – in terms of anticipation and expectation. There is a lightness of touch that (potentially) means so much. It is pop lyrics as condensed information about our social imagination (as everything possible between love and hate) that here pop up between the lines in a fashion that some readers without any doubt will find annoying and cheap, but it does serve a purpose. They re-activate and challenge our very local versions of social imaginaries, which are – whether we admit it or not – strongly shaped and colored by the soundscapes of our daily lives, the overall audio-visual environment which begs for definitions and conceptualizations of the overtly hyped and trendy type. They provide an opening that allows me to put the main emphasis where it belongs and do some actual social imagination which helps us to develop and characterize a sea change in the time line and the structure of the concept and clarity of the social in question and in use – whether focused on its attentions and tensions of space, place or hope.

That is a difference from an era which still was potentially meaningful to characterize in semi- encompassing terms by a sign of times, where what used to be seen as solid is now completely segmented and fragmentalized. Whereas it is possible to claim that the crucial band for the socially challenging imagination of the end of the '70s was an angry entity called the Dead Kennedys, and that the similar band for the next decade, the next paradigmatic shift of the end of the '80s was (for good reason) the even angrier Public Enemy, the point I am making with this inherently silly categorization (that absolutely demands to be contested and ridiculed) is that when we try to pick a similar band or a singer for the end of the '90s, we come up empty-handed. It has become impossible, even on the level of a mental game, because there is no longer even an illusion of a common market or a mainstream audience that can be encountered and really challenged with serious alternatives. What we have instead is endless sub-divisions, endless variety of segmented publics, producers, audiences and discourses.

True, we have top-of-the-pops and the best-of lists, but their coverage both in terms of volume and breadth (not to mention credibility) is significantly less than ever before.

This is the extremely important change that Manuel Castells (2000, 442) labels as the network society. This is a concept that indicates how a society is constructed around flows of technology, capital, information, organizational interactions, images, sounds and symbols. In this constellation, the main unit is no longer an individual or a collective that can be framed in the much more fixed categories employed above. Instead, *“the unit is the network, made up of a variety of subjects and organizations, relentlessly modified as networks adapt to supportive environments and market structures”*. (Ibid. 214)

However, I am convinced that the potentiality and the vital need to try to move towards shaping and generating performative public spaces and collective sites of activity is not less, but much more of a burning and healing issue than before. It is the positive lack of an illusion of oneness that in fact allows and nurtures the production of these sites, not the contrary – a claim that is openly sentimental, and also part of a process of hoping for and acting for that production. These are then potential sites of becoming a place; places that in their temporality carry along the chance to connect them to other similarly temporal singularities, which then emerge as and generate that special version of an imagined social collectivity. This is then obviously a reflective and self-critical version of an ever-evolving collectivity that is made and shaped within, in and through participating in the various, often over-lapping ‘flows’ – not outside of them, not affirmative of it, but situatedly and energetically affecting them inside-in and inside-out. It is a version that is committed to a de-centered comprehension of a civil society. Following Cohen and Arato (1992, 697), it is a reflective and self-critical version that *“it is not constructed as a collectivity (of collectives) or as a unified social body integrating the whole society, but as the plural, differentiated, institutional dimensions of the lifeworld”*.

But yes, meanwhile back in the jungle residency of pop wisdom, it is worth stressing that I do not invent these phrases, and I do not go looking for them (just to be a bit provocative, let’s throw some examples to the diamond dogs: Keep on Keeping On, Act Your Waist Size, and yes, what about this slightly longer one, *“Just because you’re going forwards doesn’t mean I’m going backwards”*, a song that later continues, *“Just because I dress like this, doesn’t mean I am a communist”*). They are already there – in the context of our daily soup of a life, ready to be made use of.

They are within the shared social imagination of the soundtracks of our lives. Most of us recognize some of them immediately; some of them are not all that familiar. Some of them make sense, some of them don't. Some of them are part of the audio-visual wallpaper of my growing up; some of them are from my personal social and political imagination of trying to get linked with things far out there physically, but yes, so very close to a hungry and confused hearth. And some of them are clearly and deliberately silly. I will not try to lift pop refrains to the level of philosophy. Instead, I will respect them on their own terms, in their own logic and repetitive force. A writing style like this is an experiment that seeks to combine these two inter-related ways of addressing social imagination – pointing out the futility of both, but also the possibilities and power of re-describing when it manages to be situated and committed to a given site and situation, truly giving new and alternative contents to age-old concepts, stealing them back from the one-dimensionality of commodification.

These are then practices (plural – both writing, in works of contemporary art that perform the social space in the act of becoming a place, and reflecting on the process of this kind of writing) that obviously do not evolve in a discursive vacuum, but happen within the larger framework from which this current book also stems. What we are talking about are, for example, the writings by Rosalind Deutsche (1996), who made us aware of the conflictual and unstable notion of a social public place, while also drawing attention to the simultaneous character of this concept being both a physical and a discursive one. Deutsche also acted as an important benefactor in criticizing the most vulgar versions of the liberal idea of public space as deceptive and oppressive in its one dimensionality and one-sidedness – a limitation that for us is most poignant in the illusion of a radically unsituated subject (see Sandel 1982, for comprehensive and constructive criticism of the liberal unsituated subject),

The second imaginary trampoline and central body of work to relate to in this issue from the side of contemporary art theory discourse is Miwon Kwon's (2002) insistence on the particularity of all actions and interventions; acts that are only meaningful in and through their locally made and shaped contexts. Finally, the third train of thought that we are here anchored to and following is the idea and practice by Mary Jane Jacob (1998) that is directed towards the relationship with the public. It is this turn towards re-activating the productive question of who our audience is, and then seeking ways of performing the public (and with it) that addresses the ways in which contemporary art can be part of the everyday life, and what the implications of this are. It is

a strategy that focuses on the chances that we have through generating meaningful conversations and beneficial confrontation, that work through the issues of collaboration without becoming closed up and essentialistic activities.

What comes out of this exercise when we shake the bag and open it up, watching all these different components go scrawling and bawling down the streets and narrow corridors of connotations? Well, I do hate to promise much too much, but I would like to propose that perhaps this even partial and tentative clash and collision can give us a version and an example of how to win back the moment where and when it is no longer naive, stupid or silly to address and articulate – both collectively and individually – contents for the concepts thrown up in the air in the (hidden) sub-title of this chapter - the concepts such as peace, love and understanding that are definitely worth rescuing and bringing back as daily realities that bite and burn, heal and caress.

But before that, we need to move sideways. We need to take it slow, real slow. We are required to do what comes naturally to us: we map the terrain of discourses before we can match them up with one another. When doing this, we need to trust the evolution of connotations and the anticipation of a productivity of not going straight ahead, but instead searching for side paths and detours. We need to allow ourselves the quest for uncertainty, not all that far from what the American pragmatist John Dewey<sup>(1984)</sup> was talking about at the end of the 1920s when he tackled this important issue of the ability to accept uncertainty and see the interconnectedness of knowledge and action. It is a quest for practice-based knowledge production that must accept that an illusion of security and objective accuracy is a dangerous hindrance in the process of trying to keep things going on and evolving, instead of taking pleasure in the short-term security of witnessing them stagnating and getting overtly controlled and categorized. For Dewey, the task of participatory reflection was to achieve conceptual tools that allow us to both cast aside the presupposition of an unchanging reality and at the same time motivate us in striving for ways which express that change is possible.

In short, first we need to map out and test the characteristic of social and spatial imaginary through social sciences, and then later (especially in chapter v) we can move on to the characteristic social and spatial imaginations within the field of experimental and risk-taking contemporary art. What we might achieve is absolutely not some kind of answer or scheme, but a tool for thinking, as in a mind-map that

has only one ambition: it seeks to provide food for thinking on these issues. And yes, since what we must have are ways to both stay with the location and theme but also alter and develop it too, we constantly need to be looking for productive tools for shifting the balance, and for being aware of alteration in the processes of constantly going too far or staying way too close, in a process that begs the precision of asking how, where and when and in which ways these different acts are interconnected, mutually respected and reciprocally recognized.

### The Social and Spatial Imaginary in the Social Sciences

When analyzing the moves within the road map from comprehending the content of concepts as closed entities towards the attitude of appreciating their procedural character, we obviously have a wide range of critical thinkers to pick from and focus on. The choice here is directed by a wish to, and an interest in connecting the theme of public sphere and public space with what is necessarily embedded in it anyhow, namely identity and the nation-state. It is to highlight that these concepts of public sphere and space are not all that meaningful unless they are thought through and articulated in contact with how the concepts of identity and the nation-state are used and understood in a certain time and space.

When looking through this opening of an interdisciplinary and complementary (not suffocating) perspective, the last couple of decades permit us to choose to focus on three main interventions. The first of these is activated on the level of creating conceptualization on the idea of seeing communities not as authentic elements or building blocks but as collectives that are always produced through the site-specific imaginations of a particular situation. This train of thought relies strongly on the writings of Benedict Anderson <sup>(1991)</sup>, who emphasized the role of imagining, and also wishing for, in the processes of narrating collective identities. Second, we are drawn strongly towards the analyses by Eric Hobsbawm <sup>(1990, see also 1983)</sup> in his trail-blazing studies on how we understand and construct history as narratives – and always partially as inventions – traditions, as we now recognize, which are not historical facts or neutral knowledge passed on to the next generation, but are heavily value-laden, biased and constructed.

The third intervention is to make us more articulate and aware of the basic ingredient of these main concepts: the fact – and here there is a deliberate choice of words at play – that even if they might be served up to us as ‘truths’, they are nevertheless both changing and changeable.

Thus, ‘facts’ of any kind must be seen as constructed and contested. They are interpretations and arguments, not universal and transcendental truths. It is especially thanks to Charles Taylor’s consistent effort on this issue that we have a body of work that makes it possible and meaningful to stay put with the issue – to stay with the whole grid of the problems of how anything we do (whether with words, images, acts or symbols) is inherently an intertwined combination of us describing reality but at the same time providing a temporal definition of it. It is a minefield of conceptualization, which it is as essential to remain close to as it is tempting to get stuck on. It is a modern problem that is encountered constantly in moving between the difference between something being seen as a factuality and its being actively interpreted through its facticity (see Dreyfus 1991).

But hold on: what exactly is imagined? And where, by whom, and how? What is this notion of the imaginary, and later of imagination, about? To let the reader in on a secret, the aim is to make the distinction between imaginary and imagination clearer and more activated and agitated. As a tool of thinking, it is a distinction that makes us aware how passive the former is and how active the latter can be made to become. It is important to note that neither ‘is’ anything in itself. The question is how static or energetic they are imagined and thought to be, potentially, in use. The difference is not found in comparing their poses or their self-images, but in and through analyzing the levels of commitment and the scales of intensity, how well and how much they cherish internal conflicts – coming down to the differences between the abilities to act and re-think critically and self-reflectively, allowing one’s own views and prejudices to alter and to emerge.

Let us start with the idea of what the social imaginary could be. It is what is seen as possible and available, how the world is sensed and experienced. For a proper version of it, it is appropriate to quote Charles Taylor: *“What I’m trying to get at with this term is something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking rather of the ways in which they imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations, which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.”* (2007, 171)

Therefore, it is important to serve notice that social imaginary is not a synonym for any type of lifestyle concept. It is not about some sort of perception, either factual or wished for, of a Zeitgeist. Nor, when

looking at perhaps the other extreme, is it about the theoretical genealogy of a concept and its manifestations. To link social imaginary with Foucault's concept of episteme, for instance, would give it the wrong kind of bounce. Social imaginary leans strongly towards the lived and the experienced, the spoken and the shared that is local, vernacular and not possible to control or even guard. It is not about the determination or domination of this or that structure within which the stories are told. It is about a balance of powers, about the powerful act that it is always possible and accessible, to tell the story differently in any site and any situation.

The point is that it is imaginary because

- A It is comprised of stories, narratives, etc.
- B They are shared by many – a common background and picture
- C It is experienced, not composed theoretically
- D The social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy (Ibid. 171)

Finally, quoting the same source again: *"It is 'social' in two ways: in that it is generally shared, and in that it is about society."* (Ibid. 323) All told, the important thing here to take and keep with us along the bumpy road ahead, is not only to allow but to cherish the idea of a process and the notion of narration connected to it, and the idea of the process being extremely dependent on how we feel and experience ourselves and our ability to be in the world. These then are the tools with which we are able to dig deeper into a ground that seems to be very slippery, tending to disallow and avoid any ways of actually being able to stay with it – to stick around, to find the energy and patience to pay attention, slow down rather than to speed away. It is the ur-classical problem of how to articulate something that is constantly on the move, not wanting to capture it while still aching to make some sense of how and where it is moving. It is not just that what we are aiming at is changing its position. It is also changing its shape, color and smell. And yes, that is exactly why we are greatly in need of these tools for thinking, which sometimes might seem clumsy and didactic, but which are materials we must have at hand anyhow, because otherwise we would so easily lose ourselves into the scary scenario of being 3rd rate statistics in the 33<sup>rd</sup> remake of Ghostbusters.

The point being: when you try to pin down how things hang together temporarily, not to freeze them but to get a better understanding of them, of what's going on (in the words of Marvin Gaye) in and through

the world we are located in and struggling with, this balancing act is not unlike the act of chasing ghosts. Philosophers have called it the life-world (Apel and Habermas) or the background (Wittgenstein and also later Searle). There should be no doubt that a background of presuppositions and expectations concerning a stock of knowledge, relied-upon solidarities and abstract personal competencies exists, and that as a both formally and informally constructed structure it plays an essential role in effecting who we are and how we understand ourselves. The question is this: how do we conceptualize it, and again, how do we imagine this background that is an ongoing negotiation of give-and-take combinations and the inter-relatedness between the three main structural components of culture, society and personality?

The main problem with the versions of social imaginary briefly described above is that even if they are already a long way from the previous story of seeing concepts as solid and objective entities, they do not go far enough. They are still caught in the trap of describing, and insufficiently aware that at the same time they are doing a very dirty thing: they are also defining their reality. The central reason why so much of what goes under the label social imaginary is so static bounces right back to this very illusion: the inability to comprehend and to admit that you are part of the mess, part of the power games (be they petty or substantial), part of the problem, and that acknowledging this situatedness is not a dead-end but a beginning.

Thus the question is: how deep does this idea of the social imaginary get? Can it be critical, or just affirmative? Can it include and cherish conflicts and productive internal differences, and aim not at consensus but at reasonable disagreements, which allow disagreements and collisions of views and wants? How do we tackle this, and how do we articulate it? How can we participate in making, shaping, reinventing and maintaining the social imaginary and through that transform it into the processes of social imagination? To summarize: how do we comprehend these processes as something that is truly productive and not containable? These are processes that can be – and are – used and abused to and for a wild variety of aims, wants, wishes and fears for defining and making a difference.

Let us first look at the three main changes that have irrevocably taken place in most of the OECD-countries during last three to four decades. The first example deals with the notions of green politics and awareness of ecological problems. Looking back to the end of the 1960s, there was hardly any nation-state with a minister for ecology

in its government. There were perhaps the first seeds of green parties starting up. Ten years later the political parties are about to be there, and the issue of ecology is on the agenda via the Rome report and first undeniable and dramatic signs of changes in the state of nature. It is the beginning of an awakening that was definitely not there just some years before. Fast-forward another decade and these organizations are all established, ranging from governmental to non-governmental organizational bodies addressing the issue of environment. Then jump to the new millennium, and we see that the green political parties are in the middle of the middle of the established political power structures, taking part in governments and shaping policies. Just try to picture the difference: in less than four decades what was once impossible is now seen as central issue and something one could not govern without.

Another similar sea change, albeit less easy to pin down in actual numbers, is in the position and role of women in our societies. Here again, even if a lot of things are still waiting to be done and to get better, it is undeniable that some things have changed since the late 1960s in the horizon of possibilities for women, in study, work and self-definition. They have changed in terms of law and they have change in terms of social behavior, not least in what is consumed and how. How, where and what varies in great detail from one nation-state and one individual to another, but the main thrust of the development can't be denied. What was not on the agenda as clearly then is now potentially part of the choices for women on what to do, how and where. A long road has been traversed that took their routes away from the classical model of being captured between kids and the kitchen. One clear example is how the legislation in West Germany was changed in 1977 – due to the massive protests by women's organization. It was only as late as this that women were granted full equal rights in marriage, being able now to decide for themselves whether to work outside of the home, and that they were also given the liberty to file for a divorce without permission from their husband.

The third example is gay and lesbian rights and their visibility in the mainstream public sphere of newspapers and TV. It is an undeniable fact that in some countries homosexuality was still a criminal offense in the 1960s, while, in comparison, when we jump to the new millennium it is obvious that gay and lesbian rights have undergone a paradigmatic change from something forbidden to something celebrated. Today, gay and lesbian life and living is visible both in such mundane forms as daytime soap operas that have gay characters in

them, and in political life were, to recall a well-known German example, the *Bürgermeister* in Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, and *Bürgermeister* in Hamburg, Ole von Beust, are as open about their sexual preferences as they are about their political preferences (which in this case differ between the former and the latter).

To point out these changes is not to claim that everything is fine and dandy, or that due to these changes the content of politics, for example, has become better. Visibility in itself is not the answer to the structural problems and limitations of what is called the glass ceiling dilemma, of there being invisible but real barriers in, for example, job opportunities for women in higher positions in companies. The main point is to describe these changes in the social imaginary as productive events. Something has happened that has had a wide-spread effect on our ways of comprehending our daily life, its potentialities and its limitations.

But, as a brief interruption, for the sake of comparison let us recall how the whole complex issue is articulated and dealt with in the field of contemporary art. In terms familiar from the discussion of art in public places, we are talking about becoming a place – as in the ways a neutral white cube is constructed into a specific site for that given work of an artist, or how an intervention into a public site alters our perception of it. What this means is that the production of both the work of art, and the tacit knowledge produced in and through the practice, is characteristically a process that is closely linked to the contextualization of a theme and an issue. Or to put it yet another way: it is about situating and contextualizing the works so that they are no longer just dead objects left behind. This is where the litany of questions leading to yet more questions begins to unravel: what is your audience, are you really sure you want to torture people with your works in the public domain, how to negotiate your way from the objectified to process-driven practice, how to investigate in which ways can you actually accentuate and contextualize your work and, ultimately, what are you doing when you are doing what you are doing?

What combines and brings together different takes and approaches on the issue of how to perform a space to become a place is the topic of the necessity to situate oneself in the theme and in the task of shaping a contextualized interpretation. In brief, following Gadamer <sup>(1976)</sup>, this very aim, and indeed a practice of situating oneself is closely attached to the idea of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* (principle of history of effect). That is a long German word which refers to the whole back-and-forth

process of where ‘it’ (whatever we are dealing with) comes from and what ‘it’ wishes to be, and to the vital and extremely important interconnection between past, present and the future. It is a process during which we change, as do the versions of all these time aspects. All the partners in crime are in motion (and aware of it!), but at the same time they are in great need of temporary interpretations that stop in order to move on again. Quoting Gadamer: *“The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us.”* (2004, 303)

Our ability to situate and localize ourselves into the processes of the history of effect relies on a willingness and ability to understand the inherent complexity of every context and the need to take part in forming it. The implication is that these acts are not random or ambivalent. On the contrary, they are of necessity embedded and situated. The following consequence is that we accept and cherish the fact that as agents we are not innocent, not outsiders; we are participants with very varied scales of attention and access. This again requires an ability to take distance and to return, to be able to push and pull, leaving and returning to the site, to the site of the crime, as in the crucial act already mentioned above of – not now or never, but now and forever – thinking through what do you do when you do what you do.

But then the question remains: how? And what sort of tools for thinking can we use in these never-ceasing situated negotiations and navigations? I would suggest that the helping hand, or the guiding light, is available through two interlinked propositions that both underline the necessity for serious contextualizing that is acutely aware of its own Wirkungsgeschichte. They in themselves are not answers, but they are tools to think with and to walk with. They are tools we must know well enough, where they come from and what they impose, but the important point is not to get stuck on wondering at the essence of these tools. They are here articulated as ways to do something, not to stop the activity within a practice.

First, starting with Hegel and then continuing with Vattimo, these strategies are about how we both imagine and construct these crucial relationships of roots that we define and quarrel with, and routes that we take and that also take us along with them. What we can learn from Hegel (1970) and take with us for this task is the concept of *Aufhebung*. This is a concept that we will distance from the original source, not only

as a tool for thinking, but indeed as a concept which, unlike in Hegel's use, does not aim at any type of metaphysical relevance. It is a concept that is repeated, but re-thought and slightly twisted to become its own present actuality. Therefore, instead of achingly striving for one word as a translation (the common English word used is sublation), it is better to frame the concept through the following descriptions.

With the concept of *Aufhebung*, and with a nod to the core idea of dialectical process which Hegel had in mind, the wish and aim is to try to go further, to go beyond but at the same time preserve something from the past, taking something with us. This happens in terms of the relationships of how we comprehend where we come from, where we are and where we might want to move. It is the constant revisiting and negotiation of how to be part, but then again how to gain distance, how to continue with a tradition or a habit of the heart but at the same time transform and actualize it. Something is changing, something is happening, but nothing is happening without the interrelatedness of all the participants and elements in the process. It is about how to place one's finger where it causes reactions, both unease and awareness, and then to keep pushing. It is that site of apparent contradiction where two forces are at play: preserving and changing, canceling and keeping on, a push and a pull that is very much about responding and acting upon. There is a juxtaposition that is no longer a contradiction, once it is acknowledged that both sides absolutely need and depend on each other.

In terms of identity politics, we are talking about the idea of the changing same, an idea that is then conceptualized in hermeneutics as the interconnectedness of *ipse* and *idem* identities (see Ricoeur 1992), where something stays the same and something changes – or, just for comparison, it is conceptualized by post-colonial studies as the relationship where the way we understand who we are is taking place in the combat and in the combination of negotiating between our roots and routes (see Gilroy 1993).

A similar aim, but with a bit different take on the problem, is provided by Vattimo (2003, 160, 172) and the concept of *Verwindung* – something he takes openly from Heidegger, but instead of just mimicking it, he does something with it. The potential act and deed of *Verwindung* is about the process of departing, but also returning. As a version of translations, it points towards words such as distorting, acceptance, resignation and convalescence. It is the tight connection to where one comes from – but a connection that, through a set of repetitions, is not

reproducing itself as it was but changing its meaning. It is wrenching and distorting, twisting and turning the relationships and connotations. This refers straightforwardly to the critical process-based and open-ended relationship that we have with our past, present and the future, a process and relationship that we cannot overcome. We can only work in and through it – leaving it in order to get back to it again, while both who gets back and what we get back to is slightly altered.

In Vattimo's case it is about how we relate to and understand the concept of modernity. Rather than treating it in a either/or fashion as something to get rid off, as a kind of a sickness that has to be cured, the critical reflective task is to admit that it is part of our habits of thought, and that it is definitely something we must deal with, not deny, not demonize, not cajole, not glorify, but confront productively. It is something that follows you, whether you want it or not, something you have to take with you, but also to alter with time and with care. There is nothing authentic in itself that we can return to. All we have is the process of relating to and reflecting on it. It is the actuality of a resistance to metaphysical truths and the responsibility to articulate situated and committed interpretations of values and contents of concepts.

There is an example of social imaginary and also social imagination that is directly linked to Vattimo's personal history <sup>(1999)</sup>, a beautifully told story that he deals with in the autobiographical book that addresses his relationship with Catholicism. A version of that religion still clearly shapes a part of Vattimo's personal life: not only his political views as a anti-conservative left-wing thinker but also his sexual preferences. Vattimo faces the dilemma of how to negotiate his wish and need to be attached to a religious belief that negates such important parts of his personal choices and beliefs. His strategy is a fine and credible example of social imagination. There is no pretense of hiding the hurt, or illusion of easily getting rid of the dilemma. Instead, the dilemma is embraced – and worked through, in a process not of weeks or months but of years and years, during which Vattimo is able to convince himself that he can and must relate to his religious belief in such a way that it makes sense in relation to his own social and political beliefs and values. This means that he takes something, and leaves a lot of other stuff from Catholic church politics and sentiments behind. What he leaves behind is something he labels not the prejudice which it is, but the superstition it is. He works through the superstition, leaves the vast prejudices aside, and takes with him two central principles: the principles of love and non-violence.

Thus, to sum up, the idea of public sphere, public space and contemporary art in and through them is not of something that is anything an sich, but becomes and materializes as something else through its specific actualization. The theoretical starting point is to realize and cherish how the content of concepts is defined through certain values, wants, wishes, interests and fears. This is a setup I would like to conceptualize as the idea of seeing the world in terms of 6 C's: constructed, conflictual, contested, contextual, confused, and hopefully also compassionate. I will fully address this list and its content in the next chapter.

But already here it is important to state that what this means is that (while the doves cry and the item bought in late '80s finally gets stuck on the cd player for ever and ever) we have a great need and necessity to participate in the making and shaping of the content of concepts, not somewhere in abstract associations, but right here, right now, both physically and discursively. It also points to the processes of communication in which what goes on in any situation (regardless whether it is happening with text or images) is a double act of both/and. This is to be aware of the double act of how any image, concept or symbol both acts to describe and to define, how it comments on but at the same time affects reality. We can address this by making the distinction between factuality and facticity (as has already been done above), or we can point to the distinction between the truth value and the face value of an image.

However we decide to label it, the process is not about what the content of concepts is, but about how they are both defined and used, as a productive process that is open for use and abuse. It is from this that the strong wish to change the focus from conceptual imaginary to conceptual imagination arises, to alter the focus from a stable and static take to something like social and spatial imagination, toward what seems possible, potential or impossible. In this never-ending process, as Hoy (2004, 232) so well reminds us, and as the task we have set for ourselves articulates, while learning to use and then to share acts and tools of critical resistance we must constantly be aware of the temptation to fall into either anything-goes nihilism or nothing-matters cynicism. The choice entices from both sides with its simplicity and overwhelming moralism, but in the end just provides false relief, like the act of pissing in your pants. Yes, that is a vulgar example – but so very direct in the experience of what is at first warm and cozy rapidly turning into something very different and disgusting. Therefore, instead of looking for instant release and satisfaction of any kind, what we must keep on

doing is creating and generating, and then allow the acts to grow, acts that by their nature do not come out of nowhere, but are always both limited and situated, acts that must grow, extend and evolve slowly, but always with pleasure.

To touch on one final point, following the writings of Judith Butler (2005), one should add that playing with and breaking these expectations and norms is the very political act of making things become possible. This is what happens, for example in the lives of sexual and gender minorities, when something that used to be seen and experienced as impossible, unviable and unlivable, turns into something that is possible: it is most certainly both political and a political achievement – something that in a hands-on manner very clearly demonstrates the alteration of a given social imaginary.

The task is to make that still too stale version of a social imaginary turn into an act of social imagination that is open-ended and flexible, elastic in its pleasure of thinking-with and empathizing. In this task we will need all the help we can get, buy, borrow or steal. But then, it is a process during which something can actually change from being impossible to being seen as potential and even probable. It is a process that is without guarantees and without any prepaid codes for doing or achieving the right thing.

However, with the truck load of luck that we depend on in these give-and-take processes of meetings and negotiations, here and now, we do have a tentative, often far too abstract yet hopeful and constructively critical strategy for survival when we are able and willing to give credible and challenging content to the sub-title that has been effectively hidden but present through the whole chapter. The title is stolen and given back from an old pop song that still manages, at least for me, to stir those motions of emotions of social imaginary: what's so funny about peace, love and understanding? It is a title that ought to give us the liberty to laugh at ourselves and with ourselves, and the chance to use that imagination to be proud to be naive, and proud to believe that things can indeed change for the better – and that is better (more meaningful, nuanced and a caring response), as in the ways of figuring out who we are, where we are and how we are with ourselves and our surroundings.

III  
**ETHICS OF LISTENING**

**"OUR PROBLEM IS THAT WE  
ARE FASCINATINGLY GOOD AT  
PRODUCING MORE TALK, TALK, TALK,  
WHILE WE ARE AMAZINGLY BAD  
AND AMAZINGLY OUT OF GRACE  
AT BEING ABLE TO LISTEN - TO  
LISTEN TO OURSELVES AND OUR  
SURROUNDINGS."**

We have a problem. We have a huge problem. Anywhere you care to look, we have an extravagantly cruel kind of problem. Moscow, Houston, Tel Aviv, Bergen, Turku, Taipei, Tokyo, Istanbul, Sydney, Munich, Manchester, Dublin, Lyon, Linz – the list goes on and on. This is not a list of possible or potential contemporary art biennial sites – although that thought in itself already points to a different problem that is big enough, the problem of a one-size-fits-all event culture. But what I have in mind here is much more crucial and demanding, a problem that is shared by all of us, and that uncannily unites all of us.

Our problem is a modern problem, not a pre-, post- or prosit-modern one. It is an everyday problem, right here, right now, and it's not going to be gone tomorrow. It stays, it sticks – and it hurts. It is a soundtrack of our lives that whines and whistles the old tune of *“when blond and beautiful are multiple, they become so dull and dutiful”*, and then it abruptly but so finely segues into *“If there is a hell below, we're all gonna go”*.

Our problem is that we are so extremely busy talking about other people's problems that we've become fabulously efficient at avoiding dealing with our own mess, miseries and mental hiccups. We are not only hypocrites, but also severely damaged goods. We gaze far away and let absolutely nothing that we see bounce back at us, while what we ought to be doing is looking to our situated selves and allowing what we see to have an effect on us.

Our problem is that we are fascinatingly good at producing more talk, talk, talk, while we are amazingly bad and amazingly out of grace at being able to listen – to listen to ourselves and our surroundings. What's more, we are totally preoccupied with doing more of anything and everything time after time, while our only credible chance for sustainable production of knowledge about who we are, where we are, how we are and what we could possibly do about it, is based on how we manage to link into things and events that we experience next to each other – in a crash and collision of give-and-take, push-and-pull.

Our modern problem, one that is shaped and made in our continuous and simultaneous existence in terms of and interaction with past, present and future, is a problem that is based on the enormous white lie that tells us with a dedicatedly soothing voice that we can be detached, neutral and objective. That is a sad misunderstanding that breeds irresponsibility and stupidity. It is a dilemma that affords no chance whatsoever for critical yet constructive action, until it is able

to admit, recognize and cherish the fact that we are never completely outsiders or insiders. We are in the mess; there is nothing outside of this mess that can help save us: no truth, no theory, no nothing – not even a fridge full of freezing vodka.

We do not need to know more or to know better. We know enough already but we do not act on it. We are an integral part of the problem. We are part of the structures, because, following Anthony Giddens (1979, 70), “*structure is not to be conceptualized as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production.*” What’s more, more than just being a structural fact, it is a personal relation. It is our problem. It is the problem between the elegance of articulation and the under-performance of acting upon the knowledge we produce and distribute non-stop. And we should stop shifting the problem somewhere else. We should be brave enough to stop moving our own problem to other people’s garages and ping pong tables.

There is no one else who can help us or who we can put the blame on – no matter how raging our agony and how seemingly honest our attempts. You can keep pointing a finger at the current fashion of bad people, whether they come dressed up in brand-name fashion such as hyper-capitalist, globalized neo-liberal, with the win-win lie of fail-free politics, or lazily disguised as vulgar neo-colonialists. We are doing it to ourselves. We have given up and we are letting our lives be colonialized by turning everything and anything into a buy, play and throw-away product. We are truly the world, and we are even more truly the problem. And there is no one but ourselves who can do something about it.

So what is there to do if we want to stop just making noise by talking loudly, and instead start to make some waves? Yes, waves – which are particular and localized, never general or common. But localized waves never stop, but always keep on keeping on. The waves I have in mind can be described with the conceptual tools of the idea of the world according to the 6 c’s. These six concepts are a means of relating to and reflecting upon who we are through the process of being always and ever constructed, contextual, contested, conflictual, confused, and in the end, the last one, hopefully also compassionate. The main point in the mix and mixture of hearts and minds is obvious: it is not what we are but how we are currently and constantly surviving within the mess of defining and debating the content of the 6 c’s.

However, before we are able to face the demands of these 6 C's, we have to clarify an ability to comprehend those sites and situations in which we are struggling to articulate C, C, C, C, C and C. A site and situation is never out there, but exactly here, sitting on your lap, stinking and stinging at your home (studio, ranch or bar), where everything begins and to which everything always returns. It is, in one concept, the understanding of how the current site and situation is shaped and made in its history of being present. Or to use other terms, it's about how to reflect and relate to the conduct of our conduct.

It is the very act of being aware that whatever we do, we are not innocent. What we see depends on what we are looking for, and how you view the other depends on how you see yourself. There must be an awareness of the fact that whatever we say and articulate, whatever we produce, be they concepts and/or symbols, as in communication and descriptions of the reality we find ourselves in, we are constantly doing two interlinked things. We are describing our reality, but while doing that, we are also shaping it. We have an effect, but we are constantly being affected. We can be as lonely as hell, but we are never alone. We are in a mess, but it is a collective mess – a mess in which it is our responsibility to invent, produce and maintain these collectivities that are always both physical and discursive.

### Aims, or Stop Stop Making Sense

*"You are everything and everything is you"* goes that classic soul song. But before this 'you' is anything at all, it must be localized, particularized, embedded and grounded. It must speak from, and talk with – not about, or of. This is a setup that gets labeled as the anthropology of the near, which decides upon the focus of attention, and does not go for the all-encompassing solution. Concentrating on our everyday lives, what we do and don't do, and where we go shopping for the latest style of air balloon and with whom, is not about glorification of the mundane. Instead, it is an invitation to question and play with the prejudices and expectations that are materialized and are materializing the common habits of our hearths. It is an invitation to serious play that takes itself seriously enough, as in a long-term commitment, to be able and willing to laugh at itself – a laugh that is there to create space to breathe – to breathe in and out, in and out.

It is a version of how all of us exist in the world only as interconnected persons in plural and confusing relationships. These are relations, as in emotions of the motions – or the conditions of our conditions.

These are relationships that do not start from somewhere out there, but are always based on and structured by the consequences of how you are able to negotiate the relationship between you and yourself in each and every context. That is a starting point which then moves on to the next level of relating yourself to your immediate surroundings, and then, if you are still able to continue, the process finally reaches the level of relating yourself and your current comprehension of yourself to the other.

It is crucial to comprehend what is at stake in this series of constantly evolving relationships. We must be aware of the presuppositions behind procedural and never-ending narratives of both the sources of our selves and our self-understanding of ourselves. This is a background with a background track that lays down the groove for a person who is never detached, but is always attached to his/her past, present and future. It is the future's past while we spin and go around and around like a record, baby. It is a version of a process of making and shaping an identity that can be what it tries to be if – and only if – it is able to be and act in these various relationships, so that it allows itself to be affected, to be moved while mowing the mental lawn, to feel for and with.

The ethics of any type of relationship start and return non-stop to this make-it-break-it point. If the confrontation with the world at large or with the conflicting parts of your own personality happens in a Teflon-like fashion, where a lot things happen but bounce off each other and nothing sticks and nothing changes, it is a one-way street with no return address. Then it is not an ethical relationship; that comes only when what takes place becomes something in that particularly sited interaction that you cannot leave behind or escape. What I am referring to has strong connections to the discussion of the ethical relationship of how we treat each other. In an ethical relationship, neither of the parties in the game of emotional and physical 'burning and looting' are treating themselves or the other as a means. Both persons are recognized as, and cherished as ends unto themselves. To state this essential issue of ethics in a another way, the difference is between understanding the relationship as a never-ending process that you must participate in - or as its opposite, of turning everything into an instrumentalized version that is very much like any kind of product you can pick and choose from the shelves with no strings attached, but during which you turn yourself into an objectified and passive commodity too.

In these circumstances, where the relationship cannot be reduced to either position and it cannot be fixed into neatly and nicely boxed identities, a relationship is a process that must be maintained and cared for, a process in which you do not assume a solid, unchanging identity and in which you do not go into a relationship with the aim of defending what you think you are by any means available. Instead, it creates a third space; a space that is temporal, as it must be, but also very effectively present in its particular ‘thisness’. It is a process into which you throw yourself – an act that has a certain kind of strong care-free attitude that does not give too much consideration to what will happen. You are consciously taking a risk. But it is not a stupid risk. You jump out of the window because that is what it’s about: going in directions and towards relations that are not yet there, but potentially might happen.

Thus, in order for people to be able to get ready, and for this process of give-and-take and push-and-pull to have a chance to take off and keep going, we must be aware of the requirements for this special interaction. If the aim is to let the other and what he/she says and does (not in your terms or rhetoric, but in their own vocabulary, idioms and dialects) get under your skin, to disturb you and challenge you but also to comfort you, then this implies very heavily that there need to be sites and situations where this encounter and a potential third space can be generated and created.

The term or the act that I have chosen to describe this event of clashes and collisions, as experiments in getting closer and staying close, is the ethics of listening. Obviously enough, I am not at all that interested in the technical parts of what it means to listen, like in having an audio experience. Turn up the volume or shout at the top of your lungs, if you want. I don’t care – but what I do care about is what you shout and scream, whisper and whistle in the dark. The ethics of listening is a term that was introduced by the sociologist Les Back <sup>(2007)</sup>, focusing on our need to engage with everyday life phenomena and experiences. Back is not only talking about how to make ourselves be heard, or about how to increase our ability to hear others. What he suggests is *“a form of active listening that challenges the listener’s preconceptions and positions while at the same time it engages critically with content of what is being said and heard. It also means entering into difficult and challenging critical dialogue with one’s enemies as well as one’s allies.”*

(p. 23)

What the ethics of listening refers to is the crucial and consequential understanding of the presupposition of the particular site and situation of meeting with both yourself and the other – again, and always, not in a vacuum of a neutral space, but in a very demanding, tacky and sticky place that hopefully both hurts and heals. It is ethics, because it is about letting go and moving towards these meetings where you never have any guarantees of success or of not being hurt. You face choices that are new and weird, propositions and views that are hard to deal with. It is a process within which what's seen as private and what's seen as public emerge into relationships where each side affects the other. It is about telling and listening to stories, and about the conditions in which these can be more or less potential and plausible. It is about narration-in-life as participation in and through your everyday life-acts and inactions, not constructing, let's say, a fictional story, like in a play or a novel. (Narration-in-life is a central concept to this whole enterprise, to which we will return later on in this chapter, and also continue to deal with in the next one). Narration-in-life focuses, on one hand, on how alternative stories should be produced and heard and how these ought to have an effect on the ways a majority in a given site sees and defines itself. At the same time, even more crucial is how these processes can make the alternatives interact, luring in marginal and marginalized narratives and their groups; it is about listening to other side-lined stories.

It is about listening, because here listening becomes the evident and missing counter-point in contradiction of producing more talk, more works, more actions. Instead of more of the same blah-blah-but-just-delivered-at-higher-speed, it is about slowing down, stopping for a moment, and yes, listening. Listening to what's been said and to what what's been said tells you about your life. From there on, it is about following that original catch-and-boom bang effect, thinking through what you hear and how it then relates to your immediate surroundings, and finally how what you heard allows you to, and makes you think again, and think in a slightly different way about the person who just said what he/she said. It is about the relationships of relationships, awareness of interrelatedness and the acute urgency of its reciprocity.

The point of the ethics of listening is that it is never complete, but only meaningful as a particular moment in an ongoing process. But that must be a moment which is connected to other moments both vertically and horizontally, both personally and collectively. It is the connection between the micro and macro levels of experiences and actions. It is the link between what is a space and what is potentially

becoming a place. It is the interrelatedness and the aim of activating this connectedness between how each side affects the other. It is a strategy for moving towards something that you will never arrive at – a process in the unattainability of our values and aims, which are nevertheless worthwhile due to this, and become even more valuable for our striving for and continuing to reach for them. And again, it is a process during which these relationships and the values, aims, interests and fears embedded in them are both being defined and described.

Strangely enough, as a strategy for survival the ethics of listening has two inherent characteristics that do not necessarily meet the eye. What I am referring to is how these two characteristics are contrary to our common expectations. First of all, the ethics of listening does not suffer from the syndrome I would here dub the Good People Dilemma, of endless and seamless altruism. Second, the ethics of listening is not easy listening. What both of these characteristics militate against at full speed, are the strange expectations of ethics as being somehow altruistic and even (in the old biblical sense) Samaritan acts and events. In fact, the ethics of listening is all about the well-motivated and articulated self-interest of a person as a part of his/her being-in-the-world.

The reason we should want to shape and make sites and situations in which it is meaningful and possible for us to engage and really listen to what's being said and to let that have an effect on our previously managed balance of views and opinions, attitudes and attachments, is not because we regard ourselves as good people, in the sense of persons who are there only for others and have no self-driven interests whatsoever. We create and generate these meetings as constant negotiations of relationships because it is in our deepest and most meaningful self-interest. It is in our self-interest if and when the relationship is about who we are, or how we want to try to live together with ourselves, our partner, family, friends, various collectives, the society, the ecosystem, etc.

The vital point here is that the same is true – and even has a heavy-duty currency – when the focus is on your professional life. It is again about the most important self-interest upon which you act when trying to keep the faith and follow up this type of ethics of listening. Regardless of what you try to do when you wake up every morning, and what you set out to do, whatever it is you do when you do what you do, you cannot maintain an interest and a momentum in your work unless that work is communicated to others working in the same or a similar area, or if your work is not set into an interaction and challenged by others' works.

You can try to write the best novel of the century in your attic, try to be the world's most famous garage band, or strive to become the world's most brilliant bird house builder in your cellar, but none of this makes any sense, and none if it has any chance to survive as a life-long committed process, unless it is directly and fruitfully done in connection with the context within which it tries to become what it wants to become. Again, it is about interlinked, conflicting and even cacophonous actions that both describe and shape that very particular context.

Second, perhaps the most hilarious point of the ethics of listening is that it is so bloody difficult and demanding. In one word, it is very boring. It is so boring and so energy and time consuming to try to place yourself in a site and situation in which you truly and seriously allow the other to speak to you in their words and terms. It is so demanding, and often enough so very boring too, to let their versions affect your version, and not just to use their version in support of your previous interpretation of the site and situation, so that unless you are passionately committed and unless you really understand that it is in your deepest self-interest to do this, you are not going to do it. You may start with fresh make-up and a hungry heart, but you give up sooner than you can say and ask 'oops, I did it again, where is the toilet'. That is a cruel, dull but so true-blue scenario that we all recognize far too well, and have to admit that we are very good at play-pretend acting. We pretend to listen, pretend to care for, pretend to invest time in, when we are busy finding the short cut or the emergency exit to get far, far away, fast and furiously.

The ethics of listening is about comprehending our limitations – limitations in terms of how much information we can take in, and how much emotional hooliganism (in ourselves and others) we can confront on a daily basis. It is about how to find ways of learning your own limits and potentialities, through trial and error. If and when you must take risks and you must experiment, you can only keep on doing so if you learn how to fall in a way that allows you to get up and try again.

Because there is no way that we are going to be able to stop falling down, this is one of the most beautiful if yet disturbing facts of the ethics of listening. The very act of listening, listening carefully, listening again and again, is so tacky, so boring and so against our common nature. It contrasts so sharply with the attitude of believing in the illusion of being able to do things faster, and not only that, but do things everywhere and anywhere all at once, that it serves as a safety-valve against superficiality and stupidity. It hits home, close to your heartburn, and

it hurts while you are trying to conceive a comprehensible version of a home when you are desperately crawling towards that vision of it. It is no longer a matter of asking or pleading, it is making you part of the problem, part of the mess – and the following act of cleaning the mess up, where the only hope and chance we have is to get deep and down and dirty, into the process, into the groove. It is, of course, a mission impossible, but a mission like our daily life and our practice of whatever it is that we do, when we do what we do, during and within which we get closer and stay close to the content and the substance, moving away from cheap tricks and fashionable bellyaches.

In one clear sense, the aim of the ethics of listening is as simple as it gets. It is about how to shift attention from what we are all extremely good at, towards what we are all extremely bad at. It is the seismic shift from producing and doing more, to instead doing less but doing it better. It is the shift from the act of talk, talk, talk, to the setting of a site and situation in which you listen, listen, listen, and then act and talk – not as though nothing happened, but because of the effects that this act of listening caused. Following it, chasing it. Loving it and hating it. Now.

However, even if the first aim of the principle of the ethics of listening is clear and evident, it is important to articulate two concluding aims that work on two parallel but tightly connected levels. We have, not so surprisingly, the entities of a singular person and a collectivity. We have an individual and a society, where in this relationship it is again as important to relate and reflect on how they are what they want to be, but also to reflect and relate how they shape and affect each other.

On the level of a single individual person, what the ethics of listening strives towards is something that can be defined as both being aware of one's situatedness in everyday structures, but at the same time being aware of your chance to change and alter them, not from the outside, but only from inside-in, and not in one magnificent shot but in millions of small interconnected gestures. This is terribly close to saying 'love your limitations', but its consequences are nastier and less tacky. We are talking about our embeddedness, and how no matter what we do, we are part of the mess in which we find ourselves. There is no remote control, no fast forward button, just that slower-than-slow, darker-than-the-darkest-night type of a tiny chance for reasons to be cheerful.

We ought not cherish an illusion of changing it all and leaving this mess we are part of behind. Instead, we must find ways of shaping and making more room for alternative ways of being and existing that are close at hand, not going beyond but staying and moving with, as when walking side by side. What we must aim to do is to find ways to maintain a critical yet constructive attitude and strategy which allows us to make things possible and thus turn things into questions and challenges, to turn them into political issues. Following Butler (2005, 80), in terms of a personal narrative, it's about being aware of our power to self-narrate as a potentiality that is only powerful once it's aware of its limitations. It is about both accepting that we are self-limited in accessibility and power, but also at the same time about being generous towards other's limitations.

Turning to the collective level, it comes back to the need and necessity to take responsibility in our own hands and hearts. What this means is that instead of wasting time and energy blaming those who are up there or down here, it is about shaping and making a collective long-term committed setup that makes and shapes a context, a platform and a place to return to and to leave, again and again, that functions as a point of encounter, a place of sharing and giving. Again, this is done not because we are hallucinating with a Mother Theresa complex, but because it is in our own deepest self-interest.

Through collective action and interaction what we do becomes more worthwhile, more pleasant, and its content much better. This is an aim that MacIntyre (2006, 155) has defined as participatory practice-based community. What he has in mind is a thematic and content-driven community that includes, not excludes – a community, that is to say a group of people, who come together, stay together, and share their views and visions – arguing, discussing and debating, not holding hands but shaking hands and working out conflicts through resourceful and sustainable reasonable disagreements. Such community is the practice of the care of the self that is both an individual and a collective act, an act of becoming a place, in public discourse that shapes a common ground for fragmented and segmented individuals and their views. Thus, the question becomes how to construct and keep up these critical yet constructive sites for sustainable conditions of knowledge production – a loving conflict of a public place that is particular and singular.

In the end, what's it about? Well, let's put the music on full, and throw that awful *Muzak* away. Let's get it on, let's ask what's going on, and

let's shake our booty in a way in which any claim and idea is nothing unless it is situated and unless it is able to laugh at itself and its internal contradictions. Let's get physical, let's truly get down on the groove and stay with it – the rhythms of a chance of a general space becoming a singularity of a place. Let's cherish contradictions that must not become a burden, but instead open up and make things really happen. And yes, while we dance that dance that we keep re-creating during our dance, please remember that perhaps the lovely slogan of Stop Making Sense was always meant to be read, understood and acted upon as Stop Stop Making Sense Sense.

### **Ethics of Narration-in-Life**

But still, the honest dilemma remains. It is to ask in practical terms: how? This is an awfully nasty question that is not supposed to halt our process of thinking-with, but to make us constantly aware of the requirements and difficulties of keeping up this process. It is a process of give and take, in which in order for us to be able to articulate who we are we must have an ability to listen to others doing the same. It is about relationships, and it is about letting things like views and values get close to you. It is about the continuous negotiation between proximity and distance, allowing others to express themselves, but then to think it through: what does it say and mean to you right here, right there and then. It is about how to shape these interactions that both allow stories to evolve so that they can be told differently, but also to generate a situation in which we are not just witnesses to another loud monologue that is followed first by a long silence and then by still another loud monologue.

What we are faced with is something that is to be described both as a question of vocabulary and also as a question of how to participate in the construction and interpretation of content of concepts – and here concepts is the umbrella term for all communication, whether verbal, image based or physical. To be sure, what the basic conjecture of the idea of ethics of listening and the consequential idea of ethics of narration-in-life entail is neither the wish or need to come up with new words, but rather a deeper and more critical focus on how the content of concepts is made and shaped, and especially what values, wants, aims and fears have to be there to motivate the process and for it to proceed. Thus, it is about what versions and content of concepts, images, acts and symbols are created, supported or argued against, or even denied any relevance.

What we are talking about then is how to conceive and understand what a meaningful version of a speech act is. The background conditions can be defined as the aim of reciprocal recognition and mutual respect that in turn requires a site where the condition of non-violence can be fully expected and trusted. This can be described as the relationship between me and the other – a relationship that for Ian Angus, strongly influenced by Levinas, is the very starting point and origin of all ethics. It is “*in the moment when one meets another at a door and steps back to say, After You.*” This is then philosophy as the act of “*accounting for oneself that opens the door for another*”. (2000, 22)

Thus, instead of duties and responsibilities, we have to reach further into the reserves of our ability to be-with and to think-with. Ours is to be an act of utterance, a speech act that constructs, conducts and commits itself to its own end. It is “*a speech that prepares to stop in order to invite the other to begin*” (Ibid. 19). And yes, this is what is demanded, and it is the aim of the simultaneous presence of talking and listening – that is, listening in order to be able to talk and vice versa. Its setting perfectly well underlines the essential priority of this willingness and ability that does not lead to some version of altruism, but is always motivated and grounded on one’s self-interest and ability to generate participatory communities in order to survive and keep on keeping on.

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Or to state it from a different angle, it is about writing and reading, experiencing and acting. This is a starting point which Salman Rushdie articulated with elegance and clarity. For Rushdie (1991, 13), writing not at all that long after the fatwa on his life and destiny was lifted, using language as a way to describe who, how and where we are is itself a political act. Rushdie sees that writing a novel is about being aware of how languages and descriptions of reality quarrel, and pushing that to the fore. It is also about the responsibility of trying to describe yourself and provide alternative versions, reclaiming language from the establishment and the oppressors. It is the power and ability to re-describe, and tell differently. This is then defined as a statement: “*I am a writer, I will try to change my condition.*” (Ibid. 414)

That is a statement which, in connection to his novel *Satanic Verses*, and especially to the reactions it caused, becomes a vivid example of the whole unsettling process of talking and listening. Interestingly enough, in a document dating to a very early stage of the tragedy, Rushdie says that his aim in the book was to produce a migrant’s view of the world, celebrating its hybridity, transformations and impurity. It is an aim which he tragically and miserably did not achieve – a point

brought home by 2009 being the 20th anniversary of the politically motivated but religiously articulated condemnation. (For Rushdie's own commentary on the 10th anniversary, for his self-proclaimed and even deeper commitment to the cause of writing and literature, and his disappointment at the absence of opposition to the fatwa on the part of the world's democratic leaders, *see* Rushdie 2002)

Looking back at these years, instead of a celebration of difference and of so many of us living and loving in a combination of here and there, as we very well know Rushdie's book caused an open and violent fight internationally, death threats and actual killings in the name of not tolerating irony or the re-telling of historical and religious stories. This was not necessarily at all due to what he wrote, but it was because of the clash and collision his words had with the social imaginations of countries and cultures which were confronted by it and related to it. As this particular example so vehemently underlines, such confrontation is a process of no guarantees, with no remote control at hand. As an example of what the writer wished for and what actually happened, this must be close to the world record in discrepancy.

This, however, does not detract an iota from the importance of the aim. On the contrary, it gives us a chance to both respect the power of re-descriptions, but also to admit the situatedness and limitedness of these speech acts. These are acts that must be local, but they are local in an inevitable plurality of versions. And yes, these are versions that can not only support each other, but can completely deny the other's existence. That is a notion that allows us to link the idea of shaping and making the content of concepts to the understanding of our being-in-the-world as absurd. This is then Albert Camus's (1975) version of absurdity that is not nihilism and not affirmative neglect. It is absurdity as revolt, freedom and passion. There is no appeal, no guarantees, but an overwhelming trust in putting everything at stake, offering resistance and commitment. There is a consciousness of absurdity that is empowering, not annihilating, present here, and with a great urgency. The absurd man is a person who is experiencing and describing, rather than explaining and solving – someone who takes part in taking part. (p. 87)

All of this comes together in a concept that allows all these different aspects of talking, listening and taking care of oneself and one's surroundings to interact, to interact individually, but always in touch and in interplay with the other elements and aspects in question. What this all is about is the process of narration-in-life, a concept that is

obviously about how we understand the question of identity, and to which we will return in detail in the next chapter. But already here it is important to underline the basic tenets of this idea that will carry on through the whole book.

Narration-in-life emphasizes the procedural character of our self-understanding. Narration-in-life is not about a life style, and it is not a working method for telling stories. It is what its name suggests: it is about how we shape and make, construct and conceive, negotiate and navigate our daily life as it is felt, seen and heard – in a word, experienced in and through our day-to-day sites and situations. Narration-in-life is about what it means, requires and implies to participate in conducting the content of concepts that are directly part of your fabric of life.

It is about talking and listening – as it is about love, hate, fear and hope. It is the process that joins the dots among past, present and the future, not solidly but temporarily. It is the act of re-telling, re-visiting and re-describing. It is the process of participation, and very much so; it is about differences of scale and intensity of ability, and success in taking part and being included in, or excluded from taking part. It is – again – about becoming, about potentiality. It is about construction of an identity as a narration-in-life that happens both through the way we comprehend time, but also happens alongside it. The story is evolving and changing, demanding and challenging, and it is a story that is productive in its truest sense: there are no guarantees of it being true, blue, nice or neat. It rises through crises and conflicts, and it emerges through complex sets of desires and wishes that can't be squared into a lamentable one-dimensionality of right or wrong. These are stories to be told and shared, stories that, as Richard Kearney (1999, 27) so well put it, by no necessity at all are always on the side of the angels. They can be nostalgic, closed up and intolerant. The point is this: they are always stories, plural, competing for attention and acknowledgement.

Narration-in-life is not an instruction booklet or a stencil, it is not a how to formula. As an ethical principle, it is not a straight-forward task and it is not a commodity. It is not something we can directly achieve. It is a by-product of our daily life – the virtues and vanities of how we live and where we live. It is becoming what it can be through defaults, detours and accidental re-awakenings. You cannot proceed with a manual. There is no paved mental road, and no road map from A to B and back again. It is not about solving or settling arguments. To be sure, it is not about accomplishing a mission or achieving an

end, not about fulfilling one's duty or serving God or country. There is no price tag, and no set of rules on how to achieve this goal, since it is not a goal. It is an aim that shifts in colors and positions while you work through the search process for it, a contradiction in the rules and criteria that produces the terms within which it survives, keeps on going and evolves. It is about shaking the tail, chasing the shadow and catching the rays of sunlight with your bare hands.

Narration-in-life is not the whole story. It is the process during which we try to keep up a story that is coherent enough and meaningful enough to be able to go on. It is stories – anecdotes – and bits and pieces that sometime are, and sometimes are not so meaningful or uplifting. This uncertainty is a central characteristic of the process of moving slowly and carefully, testing the temperature, testing the strength of the newly frozen ice. It is about relating and reflecting, being and entering into interactions of give-and-take, which is a setup that requires the willingness to question oneself and being open to differences. It is to listen, and to listen carefully. Such a condition acknowledges the basic element of any kind of human interaction: inter-subjective vulnerability – a special vulnerability that both accepts and respects our being linked to each other, and the difficulties, the hurt and despair, but also hope that must be inclusive and on the front-line of all human interactions. (See Markell 2003, 14)

This process of narration-in-life is made of materials that are borrowed, stolen, invented or just repeated, but when repeated are never exactly the same, but always have a twist, a hiccup or distortion. These are stories that are told with imagination, imagination that is what it is through the elements of surprise it brings with it. It is embedded in wise advice, strongly suggesting that in case of a conflict of views or the absence of a full commitment to listening, either from your side or the other, instead of arguing head on and with faces so red it becomes a health issue, one is encouraged to take a walk, to leave the site of the collision, to get out of the room, to go outside and to walk, walk and walk, and while doing so count 124 steps in the wrong direction. Yes, that is a strategy of withdrawal, but one that seeks a way out of a dead-end, without the illusion that there is an easy way out – instead, there is an insistence on the various ways of opening up and challenging the ways of activating, trembling and rumbling with a site and situation of becoming. The act of walking away inherently includes the necessity of returning to the site of a conflict, but with less locked-up views and moralistic attitudes.

JACQUELINE DONACHIE  
**A LATERAL THINKER**

This case illustrates listening and paying attention as part of an artist's practice, involving work that does not take place in the white cube. It is a case of an artist who certainly does not shun working in galleries and museums, but who at the same time seeks possibilities for interaction outside the usual white-walled domain. She is Jacqueline Donachie, working and living in Glasgow.

It is also a case of her taking part in a long-term working process, acting as the lead artist in the design and construction process for a large-scale building for the research facilities of the Centre for Health Sciences in Inverness, Scotland. It is a case in point of performing the potentiality of becoming a specific place within the structures of a public space, which has a great deal of both experience and knowledge invested in it – not necessarily as straight-forward acts of design or works of art, but especially knowledge embedded in the acts happening in between the clearly choreographed lines of procedure, situated in the daily exchanges and encounters within the project. As such, it is this unique knowledge worked in and through a special project that is worth taking a closer look at and worth sharing.

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In a condensed form, it is about the artistic practice and deed of interaction, as expressed in the aim of staying put, staying close to the weary processes of negotiation and decision-making. It is also an example of a strategy that involves an outsider's role (an artist invited to participate in a typically non-artistic enterprise), on the part of an artist who is deliberately acting and maneuvering herself towards inside-in the process, not steering or staring from the outside, but getting involved and through that involvement making a difference – not as an architect, not as a builder, not as a social worker, but as an artist, defining her role as a lateral thinker.

Not without a certain degree of sentimentality, she sums up this crucial attitude and strategy in an interview after the completion and opening of the whole project: *"If you are crammed into rubbish buildings, whether as a patient or as an employee, you're not going to feel good. I feel really strongly that beautiful buildings shouldn't just be for people with beautiful jobs."* (Jeffrey 2009)

But let us get the basics of the project straightened out. It started in the fall of 2006 when six artists were invited to send proposals for the

whole new building project. Later three of the candidates were asked in for an interview, and finally Jacqueline Donachie was chosen. In her proposal she had planned to invite four other artists to join in producing artworks to this project. These commissioned artists are Christine Borland, Mary Redmond, Toby Paterson and Jane Dunn – all of whom planned, conducted and incorporated works made for this specific site.

The first part of the Centre for Health Science (as the name implies, not a hospital but a research center for education of professionals and for performing research) opened in the fall of 2008. The whole complex was finalized in early 2009. The budget for the art project was little over 250,000 pounds, financed by the NHS and local Highlands economic initiatives.

It is important to stress that Donachie was not invited just to do and place artworks in the building. She was invited to take part in the processes of design and decision-making, with a remit to incorporate artworks in the building. In a telling manner, this distinction is already visible in the description of her profile. She had the title of lead artist, establishing a profile, in her own words, that looks more like that of a manager.

As a whole, it was a task that had two clearly interconnected but also separate spheres of activity. Obviously enough there was the element of planning and conducting the works of art, both her own and those by the other artists included. But at the same time, another path emerged and gained more weight and relevance. This was her function as someone coming from the outside but integrating herself into the inside-in process, following the route from beginning to end. As such she took part in discussions and meetings that were not always directly linked to her obvious task of producing and placing works of art.

This duality of tasks can be articulated in the following way, from an answer to what was done and how it was done:

In terms of her own artistic production:

- 1 A large sculpture, a stone disc placed in the center of the yard, warmed with recycled energy
- 2 A series of light boxes with photos of historical medical instruments

In terms of becoming an involved and committed partner in the process of working inside-in:

- 1 Acting as an artist while being an ombudsman, lateral thinker, facilitating and generating interaction and encounters.

In relation to the first level of tasks, inevitably there were the works done, and these works then found their place – either permanent or temporary – through negotiations. There is the garden she helped to create, a site that holds her sculpture called *The Disc*, which is a large circular stone serving as a focal point, a heated seating area and a picnic spot in the middle of the central yard. It is a work that is deeply integrated into the whole body of the surrounding buildings, since it gains its warmth through using the waste heat that is collected from the research center.

In an interview, she described this part as follows: *“There is also the courtyard, which I have worked with a landscape architect to design, and in the centre of this courtyard there is a new version of The Disc that I made in 2001 in Bristol. I am remaking it there, and it seems very appropriate to the site as it is in the far north of Scotland, with cold winters. Again it has a heating system, but this time the process has been very different; I didn’t want it to be just plugged in, as I felt it was important to have it heated from a renewable or recycled energy source. This was a great aspect of doing something collaboratively since we worked very hard with the building engineers to find a solution. We looked at solar panels and wind turbines for the roof, but they weren’t possible in terms of the building design because the site is near where the hospital helicopters land. We finally came up with the plan of using a pump that takes all of the heat to be extracted from the refrigeration units in the research labs and recycles it to heat The Disc. The art budget has paid for the pump to take the heat out, and in return the engineers have designed my heating system for me.”* (Hannula 2008, 51)

At this stage of involvement, what Donachie gained as an experience of working in and through these circumstances was the confrontation in which the practice and politics of representation was both followed and respected. This became an issue when it was time to decide which instruments were, in fact, to be represented in the light boxes she made. Apparently quite quickly a discussion arose with the occupants of the building about how to include all the types of working tools that would cover what is taught and researched there. Here Donachie articulated her practice-based internal logic of placing artistic value

first, not wanting to, or even being able to please every group or profession in the health center.

To quote Donachie again: *“Long meetings, trying to make things that involve people, trying to develop art works that people who work there can engage with. Eventually you realize that in the end you have to make something that will function as a good art work. You can never make everyone happy, so compromises have to be carefully negotiated so that the quality of the work doesn’t suffer.”* (Ibid. 50)

So what she did was to have these rather strange objects photographed individually on a white background, making them look quite abstract. A selection of these light boxes (100 x 80 cm.) will be shown in one of the corridors. Following the internal logic of a potential work of art, she kept choosing things purely on visual criteria, following a logic that inherently goes hand in hand with the other logic involved in the process, of editing what is in and what is out.

*“I chose things that look interesting to me, purely on visual criteria as I have no medical training, but now all of the medical staff have started to become quite possessive about some of the images. There are 14 light boxes in all, and staff began to comment that there is nothing about dentistry say, or another of their own specific fields. There have been a lot of arguments, and sometimes I have felt like a referee between departments. One solution to this has been to make two sets of Duotrans for each panel, so that staff can change them about periodically, as they wish, when I am long gone!”* (Ibid. 50-51)

Moving on to her other role in the whole task, ombudsman and lateral thinker, the main results of it were:

- 1 an extra kitchen for the staff.
- 2 design of the cafeteria chairs and tables with local carpenters, getting the money from the arts budget, not the building budget.
- 3 bringing together the works of other artists.

In order to contextualize this part of the process, let us quote Donachie again: *“It was also important for me to distance my art work from the main discussions concerning the whole building. The idea for the work came early on and it has been separate from other aspects of the project. In the whole process, I have become a kind of conduit for everything, not only art, but many other things connected to the building.”* (Ibid. 51)

And yes, here is the difference that it made: not a difference between night and day, but a difference that takes place within a process of really choosing the details and nuances, the nuts and bolts of what is to be done and how. This is the result of being there and being able to participate in the negotiations, being able as a partial outsider to push forward a desire on the part of the normally under-represented staff for an extra kitchen facility. This is a banal but so very real example that is there to use, in practice every morning and every evening. It is the reality of what actually is in that site – and how that structure then structures, enables or diminishes, the ways we work at our professions. It is about actively shaping and making the difference between a general space taken for granted and the possibility of generating a specific singularity of a place. The difference was grounded on the ability to pay attention and to listen, and the willingness to do something with the knowledge gained through these processes.

Or when looking at the other results of this side of the task, it is the ability to think differently and to take that crucial lateral step – the step that allowed local carpenters to work and provide for the design of the furniture used at the cafeteria, the step that does not in itself change the structures of how these items for a governmental institution can be purchased as a whole, but an example that makes a small gesture, a dent in the Moloch of a nation-wide system, by allowing a local contextualization and, most important, a local actualization that follows the principle of producing the best results, not the logic of naive and nostalgic localism.

Donachie commented on this: *“I am like the lateral thinker. I won’t be working there, nor am I the architect or the one who builds it, neither am I its manager, but I am often the connector between different users. So I have spent a lot of time in meetings discussing how to change the layout of the building so that there is enough room for the staff to make a cup of tea in the morning, for example. This really has become one of the biggest things I have done in the project; I have been the one getting people connected, saying you should talk to him about this and so on. I guess I am the ombudsman of the project. I am an observer. So in the Centre for Health Science one of the main changes I have made is to have an extra staff kitchen included; a lot of my work is about places where people meet socially, and so a kitchen, where all the different users of the building interact, is like the perfect intervention for me, as an artist, to make.”* (Ibid. 51)

At the end of this chapter I wish to introduce a very different take on the topic of the ethics of listening in a content-driven connection to a process of a work of art. If the previous case of Jacqueline Donachie focused on the aspects of moving from the outside to the inner circles of decision-making in a construction and design project, and in this move the act of listening and transmitting the views of different interest groups to one another, the case of the work of Esther Shalev-Gerz, in particular the work called *Sound Machine*, done for and shown at the Norrköping Art Museum in spring of 2008, gives us a very different but beneficial angle.

In Shalev-Gerz's work the focus is also on generating a collaboration with a site and the people inhabiting that site. This time, however, the perspective that motivates participation and interaction is not what is about to be built, but the activity that was once at the site, but which is already almost forgotten. It is a project through which Shalev-Gerz was able to put her finger on the very acute and visible consequences of manufacturing industry moving away from the highly industrialized countries such as Sweden, to developing countries.

What she has done is to make the act of remembering what was there at the site before visible, to turn it into an event. This 'before' was an industrial landscape and the experienced soundscape of textile mills. Her work connects the dots between what was and what no longer is, and makes us aware of the interrelatedness of how the past is present, not only by visual means, but especially with the growth of the comprehension of the sounds which generate and shape us. It is a past that cannot be repeated, but which must be constructed, and thus begs the question: how, and for whom and with what intentions?

Quoting Shalev-Gerz from the text she wrote for the exhibition: "*Sound is presence. It enters not only in the ear, producing acoustic effects, but affects the entire body, makes it vibrate and feel the sound waves. Being exposed to strong noise influences both the physical and physical living. The sound's inscription in a body becomes a sort of an index: the source (the indicated element) disappears. A past sound is lost, can't be retransmitted. ... Sound is always an actual phenomenon. When the sound source stops, there is no trace left, apart from the effected body that keeps a memory of it. Unlike images that last by the permanency of their constitution, sounds depend on the actuality of their producer.*"

*The only possible memory of sound thus passes the people that were affected by it.”*

The work consists of two parts. There is the sound of the machines, the loud monotone clacking of the weaving looms, a pulsating, pounding noise that leaves its traces in the body – a body that needs to adjust and gain a threshold of accommodation to succeed in not being blown over by the aggression of the soundscape. And there is video footage of pairs of women listening to these noises. The noise and the footage are separated. Into the visual part, Shalev-Gerz has inserted a 3D reconstruction of the historical machines. This construction is based on old blueprints that were not complete, leaving her no other choice but to interpret them, by that fact and act underlining the move from what was to what is now created – a move that is the finger that pokes the sore spot, because it reminds us of the inherent complexities and honest dilemmas of what is real, how it is constructed and re-constructed.

As a visitor, you are confronted with the noise once you cross the old bridge connecting the town and the former factories, the bridge that takes you to the main entrance of the museum. Inside, at the exhibition site, there is no noise but from the video work by Shalev-Gerz. For this part of the work, with the help of the Norrköping City Museum she found five pairs of women who are connected by the fact that they are mother and daughter. Their other connection is to the spinning machines and the sound: the mothers in fact worked in these mills in the late 1960s and early '70s for uncountable days, months and even years, and they worked there while pregnant with the child who is there now with them, listening to the noise – noise that the child experienced while yet unborn, but which still affected them, and now re-activates memory, not in a concrete, but in its body-related forms.

It is a powerful and touching video installation, with two video loops next to one another, the loop of the film taking six minutes. What we see is something they hear but we don't. Shalev-Gerz has filmed the mother and daughter while they are listening to the sounds from the past. This past is the past of a worker and an unborn baby – connected there and then at the completely constructed re-visitation to the soundscape. The silence of the work is enormous. Once you make the connection between what the women in the film hear and what you heard outside, the connotations can no longer be stopped. They run and they truly do not hide. They run to stories of recent deindustrialization, the alteration of the society towards a post-industrial face,

the act of working with these monstrous machines day in, day out, and then the fact of these machines being sent somewhere else.

They are connotations of a culture of a work place, and jobs held especially by women, that were there one day and all of a sudden were no longer there. What remains is a memory that is not repeated, but re-activated. It is re-enacted and re-told in a way that leaves us grasping for something to hold on to, something that would allow us to make sense of the changes that constantly take place, but which seldom become so visible and so clear as in the interaction with the work of Esther Shalev-Gerz. *Sound Machine* is a work that points the finger but does not judge. Instead, it invites us to join in, to re-think and re-experience something that is gone but still imaginable, still within reach for bringing back in another form and format.

**QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY**

"THIS IS A VERSION OF IDENTITY  
 AS "THISNESS", A THISNESS  
 THAT BECOMES WHAT IT IS IN ITS  
 SINGULARITY OF RIGHT HERE AND  
 RIGHT NOW. IT IS SINGULARITY AS  
 PROCESS, IN A VERY HERE-AND-NOW  
 MOMENT, NOT AS A GLORIFIED AND  
 MAGNIFIED SPECTACLE BUT AS PART  
 OF ORDINARY LIFE - HOW IT IS LIVED  
 AND EXPERIENCED, NOT THROUGH  
 THE BIG BANG OR PEALING BELLS,  
 BUT IN AND THROUGH THE TACKY  
 AND SWEATY "STUCKNESS",  
 EVERYDAY MIRED-UP-TO-OUR-AXLE-  
 NESS OF OUR BEING-IN-THE-WORLD."

If and when the main focus in the journey this book takes becomes the interconnectedness of the three main concepts of politics, identity and public space, what we are talking about when we talk about them is that in each case (and especially in their relationship to one another) they are not anything *an sich*, but are a part of processes during which they are materialized in different variations of becoming a place. Thus, when facing this challenge, the complex frame of the questions reads: what are the tools of the trade that allow us to respect the never-ceasing process character of these concepts and both their interconnectedness and their interdependence, and, at the same time, give us a chance to locate a critical yet constructive view and position within this process, as a participant, not just as a detached passer-by?

Continuing the line of the whole argument here, what I will try to articulate in this chapter is a concept of narration-in-life intended to serve as a tool for productively confronting all these implications and needs. This is then the main contextualized content that is becoming a place in itself – a place made and shaped within the structures of the social and political space of a process of an identity. By its character identity is a strongly situated and a process-based concept, but just as strongly a concept with a distinguished past, constantly negotiating and reconstructing its connectedness to where it comes from, where and how it is located now, and where it wants to move to.

Quite evidently, identity, as a situated concept that is true to its form of being a process, will therefore be regarded here as a constantly moving and evolving process, a process that is possible and meaningful when it seeks to be and become situated, committed, critical yet constructive. The issue concerns the means, the how of participating in this process both on the micro and the macro levels, with both short-term and long-term perspectives.

This is a version of identity as ‘thisness’, a thisness that becomes what it is in its singularity of right here and right now. It is singularity as process, in a very here-and-now moment, not as a glorified and magnified spectacle but as part of ordinary life – how it is lived and experienced, not through the big bang or pealing bells, but in and through the tacky and sweaty ‘stuckness’, everyday mired-up-to-our-axle-ness of our being-in-the-world.

This identity is about becoming, slowly, so annoyingly slowly, but accompanied with a stubbornness and ruggedness of self-esteem that will not give up or give in. It is about what’s going on in that very site

and situation, a glimpse of an understanding of where you came from, where you are and where you want to move towards that shapes your becoming. It is not random, but neither is it completely predictable. It is both/and. It is a momentary side-step within a journey, a productive hiccup and a bounce that is searching for a balance that it will never achieve but hopefully never stops looking for. It is an anecdote and a punch line that are held up together by the main frame of the process: your life as it is lived, sensed and experienced, not as a fairy-tale of being the prince of darkness, or the singer previously called prince, or that bruised hero of the truck-pulling contest. It is a story as it exists in a narration-in-life. And that life is a life that helps and hurts, screams and heals, but the narration that is never the answer, but rather part of the problem, part of the process.

It is unique in its 'thisness', a 'thisness' that is what it is, as a part of a never-ending process, a 'thisness' that is not given, not alone, not in a vacuum, but is connected to other materializations of singularity that happen before and after it, and most important, alongside it. It can't be copied, repeated or substituted. It is what it is, in and through its process of becoming.

It is a specific singularity, not a general singularity. It is a singularity taking place in the process of narration-in-life. It is not to be mixed with another kind of singularity that gains its identity through its own logic of construction and constellation. This is a singularity in interaction, not in solitude, not detached, but strongly and hopelessly devoted and attached. It is not singularity as a final stage or as an end of itself.

The overall argument here seeks to convince that it is perhaps not that meaningful to insist on a version of singularity that is stable and solid. For one thing, this version is still overwhelmingly possessed by the idea and illusion of the unity of an identity – an identity that one seeks and searches for, and once it is captured, spends the rest of one's life and the rest of one's story and all one's energy maintaining and protecting it. What's more, insistence on the stability and solidity and authenticity of an identity diverts attention from the process-driven and situated elements that are in question. Finally, comprehending singularity in its temporality within an ongoing process is not a weakness. On the contrary, it forces us to be wide awake when confronting and constructing the temporary thisness of that singularity. It is the manufacturing and manifestation of an actuality of a place (as in the content of a concept, symbol, act or an image) that becomes and is becoming within the chances and limitations of the given space and

its structures. More than anything else, this holds our attention and forces us admit how tricky this momentary materialization is, how much is at stake, how often it does not happen, and how very fleeting that moment in itself is. But, yes, while that one moment is just what it is – that one moment – it is a moment in connection to the narration-in-life that frames these moments into a comprehensive process. It does not do so as a solid, linear progression, but as a frame that allows and keeps up and keeps going on those internal itches and semi-incomprehensions meaningfully enough.

It is specific to a particular time and space (that is about to become a place), that very site and situation of becoming. It is not a prisoner to this site and situation; it is not determined by it, but it obviously takes place in and through the site and situation, navigating and negotiating its coordinates and confusions. It shapes this very site and situation, participating in it while being itself formed and shaped by this participation.

The concept of narration-in-life is obviously not credible and sustainable without its own past and processes of trying to go somewhere. This past is linked both to the development of how to analyze and reflect upon the procedural nature of an identity, but it is also linked to the ways in which we are able to construct and tell stories. Here, in the latter case, a very interesting connection is formed with the concept of verkberättelse, first coined and used in Swedish by the artist Magnus Bårtås as a result of his practice-based artistic research project, and then turned into a version in English, narration-in-work. (We will focus a bit later on the connection between Bårtås's work and this concept in full). This is a tool that allows us to address both how a work of art is discussed and narrated in its medialized, transmitted existence of comments and gossips, but more crucially, it is a tool for focusing on how the actuality and thisness of a work and its presence is constructed and narrated, rather than parked on the illusion of being authentic or real.

However, let us now first tackle the theoretical implications of the past of this 'newly' coined concept of narration-in-life. It is a background that is shaped by interpretations of works by Alasdair MacIntyre, Paul Ricoeur and Paul Gilroy. All of them, in their own specific ways, are grounded on their different backgrounds, articulating a situated and procedural identity that the concept of narration-in-life is built upon. The building site, and the building process is very vividly attached to

its past, but at the same time claims to have something more to add to the ways of comprehending procedural and situated identity.

But now the background – the background from which I will then actively distance myself with an interpretation led by the content of social imagination. In brief, it is about how to perceive and reflect on identity as the process of the changing same. In terms used by Ricoeur (1992, 116), this is the give-and take process of an identity, in the combination of its parts of *idem* and *ipse*. This is *idem*, as in identity as sameness, and it is *ipse*, as in identity as selfhood. For Ricoeur, the combination of these two, and the constant confrontation between them, is attached to the question of how the story is kept together in the permanence of time. While *idem* refers to the constancies of our identity (your birth place, where you studied, who you married and where you work, etc.), *ipse* identity is about how we comprehend ourselves in relationship to where we come from, where we are and what we want to do. *Ipse* identity is about the changing processes of how we value, view and sense ourselves. In Ricoeur's words, "*it is not the sameness of my body that constitutes its selfhood but its belonging to someone capable of designating himself or herself as the one whose body it is.*" (Ibid. 129)

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With this structure of the never-ending balancing act of *idem* and *ipse* Ricoeur is able to draw our attention to identity as an act or as a potential act, not as a solid entity. Identity is an act that needs the frame of sameness, the attestation and assurance that make it both possible and worth while to keep on keeping on while struggling and suffering, failing and ailing – but not only that, but also enjoying and yes, laughing with and at life. For Ricoeur, the central point of narrating a life is closely connected to our ways of reading. It is reading (viewing and experiencing) in the double act of something being both foreseeable and unknown. To state this in another way: it is the combination of the strategies of seduction and suspicion. (Ibid. 159)

Though seen from a completely different angle and point of attachment to the idea of a constant double-act, the notion provided by Paul Gilroy is closely linked to this. For Gilroy (1993), the whole negotiation of who we are and how we are is the double act of our consciousness. Informed, initiated and very much infuriated by the post-colonial experience, what are important for him are the roots and routes that we take, try to take, or that we are taken to, whether with our consent or without it. Here the emphasis is on the processes of negotiating where we come from, how we perceive it, and how the society in which we try to survive and its structure does this, and how that interpretation then

profoundly affects the sort of choices (that is, routes) we are able to picture and try to follow up. The aim is to generate ways of getting out of the illusion of an essence – and moving towards ways of activating the politics of transfiguration. *“This politics exists on a lower frequency where it is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about, because words, even words stretched by melisma and supplemented or mutated by the screams which still index the conspicuous power of the slave sublime, will never be enough to communicate the unsayable claims to truth. The willfully damaged signs which betray the resolutely utopian politics of transfiguration therefore partially transcend modernity, constructing both an imaginary anti-modern past and a postmodern yet-to-come.”* (Ibid. 37)

This negotiation is not only about the distance between what was and what might be happening now, but in one distinct sense is about the increasing awareness of how that distance is growing and constantly re-produced. This is the moment where Gilroy searches for reasons why something positive that used to be around, activated in the social imagination, has almost completely disappeared. Gilroy<sup>(2000, 184)</sup> is sorrowfully looking for what happened to the vernacular of articulation through music by the American Black population. This music used to be defined by its aims and rhetoric of empowerment and community, by messages of social progress and collective hope, and then dramatically altered, from the end of the 1960s and early ‘70s toward the new millennium sliding into one uniform message of commodification. He mourns the disappearance of the aims and talk about freedom – replaced now by the vulgarity of glorifying product placement and a one-size-fits-all life style.

Moving from Gilroy to MacIntyre, procedural identity is about interpretations, not facts that are no longer possible to conceive as just being facts, but which are outed – thrown out to the wolves of the angry and energized – as constructions. This, then, is about interpretations in and through the background, the horizon of what, where, how and when. It is about narration-in-life that is lived and shared, told and passed forward. Here we have the third element we have chosen to highlight from the background: it is the out and out Aristotelian concept of seeing man as a social being, a being who is shaped and made in and through the stories he tells, the stories every one of us is attached to and hard-wired with.

For MacIntyre, this offers the chance to see man as a story-telling animal. As a never-ending process, it is about stories that we have an ability

to affect but equally stories that have strong effects on us, stories that have a direction, and stories which are open and where what happens in the next page, around the next corner is unknown, stories – as in the case of versions of Ricoeur and Gilroy briefly described above – that are both predictable and surprising. *“Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”* (1985, 216)

For MacIntyre, this search for the good life of a good man is held together through its internal values of intelligibility and accountability. It is about integrity and constancy in life, as told in a narrative of a life. It is a narrative that is not detached, but attached. It is inherited in its obvious limitations, but seen as a process of participation. For MacIntyre, this quest is a search for the unity of human life.

Here we are confronted by one of the main differences with the background of the concept of narration-in-life, and its current materialization, as articulated in this book. Stated clearly, what then are the distinctions between the notion of man as a story-telling animal, outlined above, and narration-in-life?

What follows is an argument, not against the background highlighted above and its achievements, but dedicated to sparring with them, doing so in an engagement inspired by and interconnected with the notions of narrative life provided by MacIntyre and Ricoeur, leaving aside the writings of Paul Gilroy for now. It is an act of re-enactment that is defined by its constant moves of distancing and returning again. It is worth underlining the very basic structural alteration of the previous version and new version to which we aspire.

Briefly, the main difference is embedded in the idea of what is expected of a narrative unity (MacIntyre) and permanence in time (Ricoeur) – and how we can make them more non-static and supportive of internal clashes and conflicts. The central claim is a proposition: as with the notion of a general and solid singularity, we are here dealing with a version of narrative life that is unnecessarily static and pre-determined. As advanced by both MacIntyre and Ricoeur (though not forgetting their comparative differences) it is a version that for some reason still remains attached to the hope and goal of a unified life. Sometimes this unity is very strict and very linear, but even if there are

moments when this is broken by crises, the aim is to regain the unity of human life again.

But why unity? Why not turn this wish around and allow the plurality, the messiness and the multiple stories to evolve and collide? It must be clearly stated that my version of narration-in-life is definitely not a story of no borders, no limits and no historical embeddedness. On the contrary: my version completely shares the need and necessity – and the current dangerous lack of it – to deeply acknowledge our situatedness. The question here again is not what it is, but how it is then narrated, experienced and maintained.

My claim is that narration-in-life is a non-linear story. The difference might not sound so great, but in this very context the implications are vast. The difference points to the impossibility of this type of non-linear story being contained and controlled. We are, as MacIntyre also notes, only, and nothing more than co-writers and co-editors of our stories. The shift from a linear to a non-linear understanding of story-telling, as in a narration-in-life, underlines the messiness and unpredictability of the latter form. This is the same as referring to that old saying that the difference between fiction and life is that fiction has to make sense. A linear story is compressed by its character and allows many fewer contradictions, hiccups and mental toothaches – all those conditions of our condition that are part of the horizon of daily life and daily experience. That is a presupposition that ought to be sufficiently convincing that we do not force parts and sub-plots of our narration-in-life into some kind of illusion of unity.

By its nature as the frame within which narration-in-life evolves, it is radical and disruptive. There are no guarantees of goodness. We are, whether we admit it or not, what we are, a constant mixture, a tug-of-war of aims, intentions, fears and wants that can only be boxed in with crude structural violence. We are emotional hooligans. We want more, and we are never satisfied. We are driven by our lack of balance, and our inability to slow down. We, as situated selves, are driven and motivated by searching for something we will never ever arrive at and accomplish. We are running and sliding towards the wall. Ours is a narration-in-life that is more defined by its collapses and failures rather than by its victories and pleasurable closures. And no, this is not to glorify failure or the tackiness of our everyday mess; it is to find focus on these moments of decisions that happen so smoothly, not at all in a spectacular way, but through the fabric of our everyday actions and inactions.

Here the worry of not being able to make clear distinctions of narration-of-life and narration-of-fiction is a proper pseudo-problem. Narration-in-life happens in and through both of them, but the frame, the process is kept meaningful enough and united enough in its internal struggle and non-linearity only through each of our lives – lives we move through without celebration – day-in-day-out-sleeping-eating-whining-and-weeping, so sickeningly dragging our feet and yet always too fast. It is a pseudo-problem because even if I can try, the narrative version of me, myself and I as, well, for example, the King of England or as the young Wayne Gretzky in the shirt of the Edmonton Oilers, is nothing but a bad version of a story. It lacks involvement, it lacks gravity, it lacks credibility. It screams for embeddedness and the smell of the individual take on and conditions of one's conditions.

This lands us facing a true-blue ethical dilemma, a dilemma in which we can not win, and should not even try. It is a proper and classical honest dilemma: the task of trying to move towards the unattainable wish to accept – and not only that, but cherish and make most of – the procedurality, the uncertainty and the unguaranteedness of our being-in-the-world. Our task is turning towards this road, rather than longing for or clinging to a version that provides metaphysical security, protection and solace. It is the choice to fight for something, rather than just struggle to maintain and defend something. It is to move – the move of a person who knows that, whatever it is that we wish to achieve, it is only through trying to do and do it again and again that we might be able to inch towards it and get to it.

### How

As we have now articulated a framework for the theoretical background and implications of the idea of narration-in-life, we can turn the focus to how an ongoing process of a storytelling like this, with one's own narrative and those intertwined with it, takes form as in an open-ended, reflective process, and sometimes even achieves its aim of becoming a place.

What follows, curiously enough, will not be a self-help manual for leading a good, happy life. Instead, what this notion of how indicates is a much rougher kind of roller coaster ride. To paraphrase that much envied (for good reason) title of an exhibition by Martin Kippenberg, there is a great deal of sand in this jar of Vaseline. It is, in short, again a rather abstract idea of thinking-with and thinking-through, of who you are, where, how and when – and how can you participate in the

processes of narration-in-life, the processes of giving content to the definition of concepts, symbols or images. It is the process of relating and reflecting the core, the hearth, the sounds emerging from the depths of the bass line, of being-in-the-world of narration-in-life.

In connection to the comparative point of departure for MacIntyre and Ricoeur, narration-in-life here deliberately leans on the (let's say) more sinister flavors and colors of everyday life. These are elements of surprise that cannot be laminated into one-dimensional and preordained feelings or sensations. These elements of surprise cannot be controlled or guaranteed. They bite and push, they wear you down and will not let you be. They bother you, nag at you, disturb you. They never break even neatly, but slop over or are left unsettled and leaking away.

What I am talking about are not major dramatic events. Rather than obvious visible conflicts, what I am after are the much more annoying and much harder to bear sorts of nagging annoyance and semi-hidden conflicts. You know the stories: the heated disagreements about who cleans the toilet bowl, how to dispose of the trash so its properly separated, who is again using my personal cup at the office canteen (against my explicit instructions!) and yes, please tell me, who stole my sun? It is the everyday 'stuckness' of our being, the typical sort of mental congestion in which you slip and slide and spin your wheels and nothing seems to make much sense. Those moments when you have no energy left and have to admit that you have failed – that you are again basically reproducing the mistakes you did before and that you can even trace back to your parents, but amazingly enough you no longer wish to blame them or the overall bogey of the presumed Zeitgeist, but only you and your cheating heart for it.

Narration-in-life is about navigating and negotiating through the mundane daily cruelty and stupidity, the ways of trying to learn how to lose, how to come to terms with one's mistakes, shattered dreams and lack of energy – and one's inability to change oneself and one's surroundings. You are stuck, schmuck. Stuck – like with a mental toothache that grows nastier and nastier with every bite, with every breath. Stuck – like in static, stagnant, bogged down, mired, mentally blocked, suffering from writer's block, stuck in a rut. This is about being and feeling about being fixed in one place, caught in a cruel blue groove, getting stale, sinking into an emotional swamp, trapped in a routine, feeling hemmed in on all sides, institutionalized. This is what getting stuck means – with all the available colors, with all the possible

and potential insults and injuries, with all the agony and annoyance you can gather and bear.

With this notion of 'stuckness' there is a temptation to bring in Heidegger's concept of 'Thrownness' into the discussion. Admittedly, this temptation is seductive – and also, there are some similarities – but while Heidegger is and remains on the ontological and even meta-ontological levels, my aim here is to steal the spotlight for the nuances and details of the everyday delays, stops and hiccups that so often are brushed aside and seen as meaningless. This is not intended to over-emphasize the sour and dour of the chances of us making a difference. The point is this: it is only in and through this very 'being stuck' and feeling lost that we begin to have an ability to fathom our chances for survival and for changing the ways we comprehend ourselves and our surroundings.

It is that deep and wide yawn, that semi-hopeless sigh of uh-uh and then another uh-uh on top of that. That sense of falling asleep when you know you ought to be fresh and dandy, intelligent and agile, but you are dead meat sinking further into the oblivion of the dustiness of your living room. This is the moment when you realize that it is not about you needing to know more or being unsure what to do. You do know enough, but you still don't act. This is the moment when you are strongly advised to sit down and take it slowly, a moment not of truth but of comprehension of the difference between thinking thoughts and doing something with those thoughts. It's a point that must not be degraded into the moralistic blah blah of a blame-game. This is not about feeling bad or sad because of lacking the nerve and courage to act, this is about understanding the complications of our acts. This is to comprehend how everything affects everything and how certainly lost you must feel in front of these complications.

This is the life we live, a life so ordinary it's almost too boring and non-descript to mention. And yes, again, it's precisely this vagueness and ordinariness that is of interest and of substance. It is the focus and chance of narration-in-life, explicitly distancing it from the versions by MacIntyre and Ricoeur. It is life so ordinary that can not be glorified, but has to be taken and addressed seriously, life so full with anticipation but with so little of realization of it. This seriousness requires facing the task with common sense, a notion that is easily misunderstood or sadly neglected. Here it does not stink of the conservative attitude of stepping on the brakes, but neither does it pretend to be constantly looking for the latest newest-of-the-new. Instead, it is common sense,

as in the ability to deal with the burning and healing issues of each given site as they come and as they demand to be confronted – not ad hoc, and not with prepaid formulas or categories, but with respect and comprehension for their internal logic and inherent rhythms. But a life of ordinary acts is in itself nothing. The task is to be able to distinguish between simply boring details and boring details that are important, and gain importance and weight through potentially becoming a place. This is a decision about interpretation that is never possible in general terms, but only available to us when being seriously located and anchored: when staying with, staying put and hunkering down and sort of really enjoying the fact of being stuck and not knowing how and where to move on.

But then again, all of this talk of the tackiness and difficulty of participating in the processes of narration-in-life, it does make us ask: why? What for? Why should we participate?

The answer is a tricky one. It is in our most diligent and direct self-interest, nothing more and nothing less. The ordinary life that we live, in contrast to big decisions and huge spectacular dramas, is the life of small gestures, or to put it more precisely, it is the life of the politics of small gestures (see Hannula 2006). It is our life, our experiences – the shortness or wideness of their horizon, where they move from one hurdle to the next, and how they get always stuck. It is a life which is lived only through the here and now, not somewhere out there, a life that cannot be sustained with the false pretense of acting on behalf of a mighty aim or an idea. We survive because of our self-interest. However, it is precisely here where the whole question gets awfully complicated. It is about how we, on each occasion and within the whole narration-in-life, are able to and can define both what this procedural self is and what its interests might be – never generally or generic, but always specifically in a continuum of that very process.

And for that, in order to vehemently underscore once, twice and three times the crucial point of our acting on self-interest, it is necessary to articulate the structures of this act of being-in-the-world. The process, its demands, chances and limitations that form a hierarchical and linear order of proceedings, moves from:

- 1 me - me
- 2 me – my immediate surroundings
- 3 me – you

To break this down, it is important to start by defining the scope of 'me'. As it has been stated all along, when our beingness is negotiated as situated and procedural, and when it is about relationships and interconnectedness, this 'me' is not a solid vacuum-packed entity. Already in the notion of 'me' there are the forces of the others at play. Thus, 'me' is not a solid box but an elastic and flexible construction to which the surroundings where you are and the people you are living, loving and hating with have, and must have access, and they will have an effect on it. The issue here is about the different scales and levels of how permeable this 'me' is. In fact it looks very much like a permanently revolving door which generates its specific rhythm in each site and situation, the pauses and the up-tempo parts, as well as the ways of moving against the predictable logic of the system.

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This idea of an identity is not a zero-sum game. It is something that is closer to concordant controversy and a harmonious quarrel, which is not to say it is basically harmless in its nature, but to underline its constant process of boiling over and undercooling. It is a both/and version that must be about the never-ending balancing act of strategies for survival within the constant cultivation of confusion. This 'me' is then what it can be and what it wants to be only when it acknowledges and cherishes its dependence on its surroundings. It comes down to the most complex web of interrelatedness and interdependency. It is a version of the I that is credible and sustainable only when facing the demands and chances from others, from the other I's that are sharing the same site of an issue and dilemma, or similar sites.

The second level of this being-in-the-world makes this interconnect-edness more accurate and more pressing. This is where the choice is made on daily basis about what the immediate surroundings are. This is the choice of with whom you share your daily life – who is included, who is excluded, and how you try to manage in and through these choices that are never final, but always have consequences of allowing something and strongly limiting something else. This level is about these pressing choices that must be made, choices for which one must feel responsible, and be held responsible.

On the third level we move finally to the notions that are often – and in my view mistakenly – seen as the very starting point. Here is where the connection and comparison of ‘me’ and one’s immediate surroundings to the other takes place, where thinking through the needs, interests, wants and fears of the first two levels when they are confronted and forced to relate to the overall life and structures within which they have to exist finally happens. This is where the mess gets really complicated. This is where your ability to affect and to have control of what, where and how disappears into the rich texture of interpersonal misunderstandings and confusions. This is where you are truly stuck, out of breath, out of your depth.

And yes, precisely because this level of me-you (you, as in the other, in all of its possible forms and foundations) is so demanding and so intimidating, it is never possible to even dream of surviving here unless you have been thinking through and generating enough experience-based knowledge and comprehension in the previous steps, 1) and 2). Because it is only those who already have a firm enough understanding of their wants and needs who are able to relate those needs to other people’s needs and wants, that collide and clash with their own. That’s a cruel, true-blue truth that one very often wants to forget because it hits home so effectively. But the point is: narration-in-life is without chances if it is not built on the beneficial and elastic version of self-understanding of one’s interests that are interlinked and intertwined through and through with the narratives and interests of the other participants.

Within these somewhat troubling degrees of discomfort and difficulty, it is perhaps not too wise to add more hurdles into the process. But they are inevitable, adding as it were the surcharge of sufficiency to a particular circumstance that before just qualified as being necessary. These are restrictions that are as substantial as they are imperative. They are the limitations of our ability to participate in the processes of narration-in-life that, in the end, after the cold shadow and the deeply felt shadow play, are there to make these narrations possible and empower them and give them the potentially of becoming a place.

In order to be able to do this, it is time now to turn to the writing of Judith Butler and her version of the notion of narration-of-life and narration-of-identity. To be exact, here Butler faces the dilemma from the position of what is not possible – that is to say, from the inherent and inevitable problems and vexations of giving a narrative account of oneself.

*“There is (1) a non-narrativizable exposure that establishes my singularity, and there are (2) primary relations, irrecoverable, that form lasting and recurrent impressions in the history of my life, and so (3) a history that establishes my partial opacity to myself. Lastly, there are (4) norms that facilitate my telling about myself but that I do not author and that render me substitutable at the very moment that I seek to establish the history of my singularity. This last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded by (5) the structure of address in which it takes place.” (2005, 39)*

Despite this remarkably demanding litany of no-go’s, I am convinced that all these problems and short-comings are not hindrances, but actually serve as guiding lights for dealing with them – not providing solutions, but rather affording contextual and situated ways of dealing with the issues, sorting them out here and now, and then moving on, moving along and facing yet another dilemma. That the process of narration-in-life is limited and compromised from the very beginning is the very credibility that its chances for making a difference completely depend upon.

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But let us view the characteristics of this process from another angle. How can this process of narration-in-life be good and meaningful? This question, semi-silly or even aggressive in its naivety, allows us to recollect the classical criteria for any utterance’s validity. Point by point, this list is what one expects narration-in-life not to be, but to strive for:

- 1 Coherence and dissonance
- 2 Truthfulness
- 3 Ethical and existential commitment
- 4 Open and creative strategy
- 5 Authenticity

But before we move to these aims and requirements, it is a high time to make yet another distinction of what, in my view, narration-in-life is not about. As with Heidegger’s notion of ‘Thrownness’, when addressing the process of narration-in-life it is fairly obvious that, on the face of it, it is connected to the writing of the later Foucault, especially the introduction of the idea of the technologies of the self and the aim of creating ourselves as a work of art (Foucault 1987, 122, Moss 1998).

In this case, strangely enough, the reason not to include Foucault is because the concepts he operates with in this specific part of identity politics are either too narrow or too romantic. They imply too much of a chance to straight-forwardly solve the dilemmas that are to be enjoyed and cherished, not treated as curable problems of a dualistic sort. The romanticism is especially blatant in the embedded view of the role of the artist as someone not typically, but absolutely exceptionally able to create him/herself. It is a wishing well that Foucault has been caught staring into, that bears no relevance to reality whatsoever. How truly strange, the idea that art and artists could save us! But even more important, the problem with Foucault concerns the domain of both the processes of participation, and the responsibility to take part in the creation of contents of concepts and their content to become a place. Narration-in-life is not limited to this or that sphere of our society. More important, there is absolutely and positively nothing in the field of art or artists' professional profiles, or their combined cultural-political DNA, that makes them more able to or capable of participating in the processes of narration-in-life.

But if not a technique, and not a romantic notion of creativity, what then? As expected, doggedly following my logic of cherishing the complications and difficulties, narration-in-life is a conceptual move from a narrow version of identity into the domain of comprehending the processes of the enlarged and complexified field of identity politics as embedded and contextual. For example, to drive the point towards a core issue, for the processes of narration-in-life, the idea of autonomy is anything but helpful. Thus, taking the lead from Maeve Cooke (1999, 258-268), instead of autonomy, what we need to focus on is an alternative provided by the concept of self-authorship. Self-authorship stands for the following capacities: responsibility, accountability, independence, purposive rationality and strong evaluation.

*"Identity as a being located in a plurality of (frequently shifting and conflicting) systems of meaning. We are also reminded that the self is an embodied being, with bodily needs, desires and an affective-emotional constitution that is intimately bound up with its capacities for rational reflection and action."* (Ibid. 264)

Let us continue with Cooke and the inherent implications of self-authorship: *"I want to suggest that the metaphor of self-authorship conjures up a picture of the self as responsible and accountable for its actions, judgments and self-interpretations, as independent (that is, objective in its critical assessments of others, the world, society, its own*

*past and present self, and so on), as purposive-rational (that is, capable of setting and pursuing goals), and as a strong evaluator (that is, capable of selecting goals from diverse options on the basis of strongly evaluative criteria)” (Ibid. 266).*

Thus, on top of the previous list of (1) coherence and dissonance, (2) truthfulness, (3) ethical and existential commitment, (4) open and creative strategy and (5) authenticity, following Cooke we will add now the aims of the narrator being (6) responsible and accountable, (7) independent, (8) purposive-rational, and finally (9) a strong evaluator.

All this is enough to make any one of us dizzy. These are requirements that clearly nobody can fulfill, which any of us can only hope to have a slight chance to approach – and hope that something gets transmitted and pushed forward. This approaching is something that can be called the competence of realizing the limitations of the act of narration-in-life. Another way to state this, here following Joel Anderson (2001, 193-196), is to label this a need-interpretive competence. This is a proposition that refers to the capacity to perceive and express one’s own needs, desires, interest, feelings and concerns. This then happens while acting in sites and situations of the semi- or full absence of the vital building blocks of our make-believe rational and analytical thinking: full information, adequate time, ability to perceive and express one’s needs (Ibid 196).

For a hypothesis of need-interpretive competence, let us quote Anderson: *“the ability to provide interpretations of one’s needs, desires, interests, feelings, and concerns that are complete, non-illusory, articulate, and intelligible (And this is to leave to one side the crucially important interpersonal capacities that are also necessary forgive-and-take about one’s need-interpretations).” (Ibid. 196-197)*

Thus, we have a mighty list of nine requirements, and we have the requirement of being able to conduct a properly done need-interpretive activity when facing the daily routines and habits of our hearts. Here we return, in fact, to the difference of the background for understanding life as a story and our chances of participating in it, and the version of narration-in-life that I wish to put forward – a version that in this connection is materialized through a set of deep-seated quarrels and questions that I must both raise and face. These are:

My question, part 1: how can any of these aims be complete in their ‘nature’?

My question, part 2: why are agony, fear and loathing (both self-loathing and loathing towards others) left out of the whole constellation?

My question, part 3: why are all of these versions of narrative self-understanding and self-authorship (Cooke and Anderson, but also MacIntyre and Ricoeur) so static?

My task: how to address all these things that are absent and not included into the agenda, and how to bring in some motions and emotions that shake the bag, turn and twist those collisions and conflicts in a productive and even pleasurable way. Again, it is not to glorify confusion or clashes, but to relate to the plurality of views and ways of being in a reciprocal fashion that give us both means and energy to learn not to take ourselves too one-sidedly, and ultimately, to learn how to laugh both at and with ourselves.

In order to structure the argument as well and rigidly as possible, and also allow myself to laugh at my pseudo-pedagogical effort, I will pursue the questions articulated above one by one.

Answer 1: Since we are talking about processes, and since we are talking, as a whole, about both social and spatial imaginaries and imaginations, it is imperative to realize that the word 'complete' is not to be viewed as a wish to finish something and to bring something to its very final end. In the case of any the concepts we use, for them to have any credibility and chance of being in process, they are something that is under construction and in the shuffle. This is about aims, ideas and wants to move toward, while acknowledging that a) it is impossible and not even desirable to fulfill the aim in the sense of finishing the task or mission, and b) the content of the aim keeps changing and shifting all along as we move towards it. We are aiming at a moving target in a process where the very act of process and moving is necessary to keep the process going on.

But why then is that strongly misleading word 'complete' at all used? Why not choose another word that would make the exercise of re-defining this concept (complete) superfluous? Well, this is precisely about the question of how complete or incomplete, how permeable and changing the process can be, or wants to be.

And to be sure, herein lies one of the central differences. It is a difference that is as simple as it is telling. It is a strange and unnecessary hang-up from the side of most writers, to first admit that what we

mean by complete is an aim, but nevertheless then to insist on fantasizing for it to happen anyway. Perhaps it is just a psychological device to maintain some needed equilibrium while facing the confusion and complexities of choices, but even then it is not a helpful tool since it inevitably steals away our attention and keeps wasting our limited ability to concentrate.

But how can we create and generate a platform for accepting the loss of this illusion and allowing us to focus on the issues from a different angle? How can we grow both detached and attached in a manner that on a completely different occasion and in a different paradigm is called secularism? In other words, how to gain distance, not in order to completely free ourselves, but to purposefully stray from the overwhelming dominant models of metaphysical either/or beliefs? Thus: how do we shape and shape up in a contemporary strategy that is not a nostalgic remedy that serves the function of a warm blanket for the cold, cold November rain?

Obviously enough, there is no all-around answer. There are, if anything, just very specific ways of getting lost, but still being able to find the way back – to go on running in deep winter through a large field in waist-high snow and not worrying about getting wet or falling down, but enjoying the effort. You evidently will get through, but only if you are persistent enough and determined to take pleasure in the getting through, not just in the arrival. Instead of security, this requires an ability to cherish the procedural character of the activity. It is about first being aware of the dilemma, and then structurally generating ways of shifting the focus to the incompleteness of the aims, which nevertheless are meaningful enough for a frame, yet are elastic, permeable and altering.

Answer 2: My intuition here is to link the answer to the psychological tendencies at play. The question is why, when confronting and analyzing being-in-the-world, theorists so very often skip or neglect that part of everyday life that, no matter how much you deny it, is still very much there. Why keep looking away from pain, agony and stupidity? Perhaps it is as simple as that it takes much more in the way of guts to deliberately face those seemingly negative traits while focusing on conceptualizing the good life and its qualities, that it is more pleasant, or at least less vexing, to take account of the pleasurable traits of everyday life. But not only that: it is also no secret how much skill and ability you have to possess and perform in order to be able to deal with cruel and sad parts of life without without your performance

becoming kitschy melodrama. One recent point of reference, a case involving this stamina and credibility, is the epic apocalyptic story called *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, a story of a father and a son trying to survive in a long-lost world that is gone, walking the road that takes them nowhere in barbaric dimensions. It is a story so brutal and so unbearably sad, but told with such a gripping sense of redemption and hope even in the most pitiless and worst case scenarios, hope that it is not only possible to make it through, that it grows into much more than just the accumulated horrors and shocking details of a life that no longer is livable.

To criticize this trait of one-dimensional focus on the more pleasant and acceptable versions of stories, it is not enough to point out that bad things happen and are among us all the time. That is more than self-evident. The benefit of agony and pain is that you do not need to chase after them, they will come knocking forcefully enough at your door anyway. Therefore, why not face them more actively in terms of identity and narrativity? Why this theater of pretension and deliberative neglect?

I think that this trait becomes the more amazing the more one becomes fully aware of the magnificent demands that the process of narration-in-life asks from each of us. When going through the tasks and aims, it is impossible to picture anyone being up to that kind of monster task. How are we to know, amidst the heat of the moment of decision-making, that our view is non-illusory? How are we to measure and comprehend what makes our utterance fully articulated while constantly knowing that we lack the words, struggle with the ongoing frustration of not being able to say what we want to say and say it the way we want to – not to mention the frustration of not being understood as we feel that we ought to be understood?

Therefore, as with the previous task of allowing us to see the incompleteness of the aim of achieving completeness, it is the highest priority to focus on the inherent and necessary problems of our being-in-the-world. This requires a focus in and through the daily actions that make it less probable that we will glorify these problems or turn them into spectacles. They are common as muck, ordinary events and aspects of who we are and how we try to be, wherever we are currently waking up and going to sleep. They are nothing else but the numerous and repetitive moments of indecision with yourself, the moments of clashes between the unarticulated wishes of both your and your son,

or you and your mother, or practically any constellation that we are part of and that is part of us.

These moments are not, and cannot be only about agony and fear of losing or failing. They are the very sites and situations in and through which these tensions and emotions get out and are materialized. Again, the point is not so much to go looking for the obvious breaking points of crises and dramatic conflicts, but to find ways to stay closer to and stay put with the details of those small gestures within the daily life. This is where you shout when you know you ought to keep calm, where you turn away and leave even if you know you should take the time and allow the conflict to sink in without forcing a solution to it, and yes, this is where you find some other tasks to do to – like cleaning up, going through your record collection or checking your e-mails for the 22nd time that morning – rather than really facing the dilemma you have in your current work, no matter what that work and its practice with inherent values is.

Answer 3: Why so static? Not just: why are the versions of narrativity in life from the field of social science and political philosophy I am arguing with here so static, but why are we all so static and so curiously lame with our potential powers of imagination and telling stories in alternative ways? Once again, this argument must be seen as addressing everyone of us. This implies that there are no heroes of creativity whom we can call in to will make everything just burst with intellectual sunshine and superb mental massages. This is not, as already pointed in connection to Foucault, about a technology or about creating oneself as a work of art. This is, yes, about something else.

That something else becomes more approachable when we start by framing the process through its controversies. This is to say, that which is the opposite of static – and therefore at least moving towards what's missing and lacking. It is not about an either/or state where the one option is to be on the move and the other is to be dead stuck and paralyzed – or in words borrowed from that early '80s song: just because you are going forwards, does not mean I am going backwards. It is about both/and. To deliberately state this from another angle: to address the problem of there being too much talk and not enough listening, the strategy is not to literally talk less or to fall into complete silence. The best strategy is to be aware of the interrelatedness of talking and listening, and how to achieve sites and situations in which this interdependency and interaction becomes something more than just

a sum of its parts. This is the realm of the ethics of the third space, something we will shortly take up again.

To kick the ball even further into the center of attention, let's work through another example. When aware of the dangers of doing too many things too fast, the way to confront this is not to stop doing them or to slow everything down. The task is to coax and force the ways of working fast and slow into an interaction within your own practice. This is to emphasize the necessity of defining the content of these aims and concepts in and through your daily experiences and the practice of what do you do when you do what you do. It is to ask about and to define the internal values and inherent logic of a practice. No meaningful interaction happens in a vacuum, no speed without its counterpart in the crime of action, slowness.

Thus, turning back to the ever-recurring question of why so static? It is – if anything – a modern dilemma of specification and of compartmentalization. There is a road that goes in the direction of specificity, but it is a road that often aggressively neglects the ways in which it is connected to its environment. Compartmentalization disrupts and cuts of the flow of information, responses and reaction. It generates extreme specificity that is unfortunately dislocated and disconnected. This problem accelerates the logic of boxed-in categorizations, disqualifying the ways each and every relevant concept or image (and its content) is interlinked and by necessity reciprocal. The problem of not being able to see and cherish the interconnectedness of anything is the very task I am trying to push forward with the idea of becoming a place. But this is not just about things not having a chance to productively collide with one another. It is even more about internal complexities and clashes – and the awareness of this necessary movement and process. This is then yet another way of asking what, exactly, do you narrate when you try to participate in the narration-in-life?

This is the third space – the gray area of where things can become a place. The third space is a site for participation, a site where you can produce effects but are also acted upon. It is a space for the collision of meetings in the truest sense, meetings that demand and seek the desires that begin to flow through meetings. It is the site for the both/and acts of talking and listening, slowing down and speeding up, cooling off and heating up again.

Third space is therefore made and shared as a point of confrontation. It calls for and moves toward interaction. It is a space where you know

that someone is waiting for you, not by any means always with open arms, but with a promise of paying careful attention to what you say, who you are and what you want. It is a space for a process of negotiation that focuses on what you want, what the other(s) want(s), and what the particular site and situation allows and provides for. There is movement there, toward and back again, push and pull – someone is waiting, with a challenge and with an argument for being-with, and staying with. You are not alone, but in the process of talking and thinking with or how, you are in a relationship.

The process there is an act of call and response, not of catch-and-take-home-for-keeps, not even of catch and release. We do not want to go out fishing, we want to go out singing, singing loud and proud. It is an act of calling out, leaning forward and waiting for, then getting a reaction. And this happens, or is supposed to happen, the other way around too, like in a gospel choir, or like they used to do in doo-wop groups. Or like in a proper conversation, where claims, heart-felt insults and comments fly cross the commonly-generated speech floor. Or examples that turn up the heat because, even if the emphasis is on the movement and on the motion of meeting, none of this happens automatically or without a long committed effort – an effort that is learned only in and through countless exercises, numerous repeated try-outs and practices. This is where we have to face the repetition of the same act or acts thousands and thousands of times. This is what you have to do to practice that fast and furious slap shot; this is what you have to do when you work through the scales on your piano; and this is what you have to do to learn the ways to use and abuse your photoshop technology. In the last analysis, what it is about is an effort that one must go through, the very typical phase of working through the technique of something, mastering the tools and then getting into the task and having a chance of using them in accordance to your specific needs and interests.

Let me hear you say amen! Responding and calling back – relying on the knowledge that none of this makes sense and none of this will get actualized unless there is the reciprocal commitment at stake. Both participants are aware that their call for and claim on something is meaningless until there is a response to it – and that there will be no process and no continuity unless both keep the responses coming in and going out, calling out and answering, pushing and pulling in a rhythm that is generated in and through that very process, trusting those emotions and revelations that go to the core during it.

MAGNUS BÄRTÅS  
THE METHOD MAN

As far as the storyline goes, the ongoing series of *Who Is...?* by Magnus Bärtås is as simple as it gets. There is a clearly shaped structure and well-articulated and achieved aim. In a period of about ten minutes he tells us the story of a very normal human being. Not a superstar, not even a Schlagerstar, but someone Bärtås has learned to know and has learned to appreciate to such degree that he wants to tell us this person's life story, not as a whole, but in and through specificities, anecdotes and seemingly random hiccups of everyday life. He uses the strategy of getting closer, and staying close, to strive for a nearer vision and to tackle the physical experiences, sites and objects, not abstract notions of them.

And as far as the strategies of telling this story go, they are as straightforward as they can be. In fact, what unites all of these *Who Is...?* films (so far, there are three of them in this series of video biographies, in order of sequence, *Who is Zdenko Buzek?*, 2002, *Who is Eva Quintas?*, 2003 and *Who is Dimitris Houliarakis?*, 2005) is the strict method Bärtås has developed and uses. What he wants to do is address the topic of biography, but to do it from a not so usual angle. It should be an articulation of a life lived that is neither spectacular nor insignificant, without heroic undertones or a glorification of its miseries. It should have an in-betweenness that he chooses to relate to, articulated by means that emphasize how memory is constructed, how it serves us and how conscious reflection on it affects the ways it is narrated.

What we witness in these video essays is his laconic style, both in terms of the camera handling and in how the spoken narrative is conducted. The camera follows the protagonist without placing any strong visual accents, and the words are delivered by a lucid girl's voice in a manner in which the whole life story is packed into less than three A4 pages. That is the conceptual framework of how to generate a different type of a biography, and at the same time it is a conscious imitation of the rules of how a story is to be made. (This strategy he chooses for narrating a person's story has a point of comparison. Another strategy of stripping narrative down and reducing it to a minimum, pointed out and cherished if not used by Bärtås, is to recall the act of using nicknames of famous persons, such as criminals or actors, which in themselves are in fact perhaps the shortest possible type of autobiography.)

The tight rules of the game govern all aspects of the production. The music Bärtås uses is always the same, as is the no-frills cutting and pasting together of the visual storytelling. These are rules and regulations that also have a distinct past. Regarding the music, Bärtås openly borrows a method that he found in a composition by Meredith Monk. It is the act we all recognize as hitting a glass with a knife or a spoon in order to call for silence when a speaker is about to begin. Here the point is not only that we be aware of the social function of this act, but also of the sound of the act of metal knocking on a glass. It is an act that both underlines the narrative element, but also insists on the recognition of a sound as a meaningful aspect of the whole.

So what we see is a conceptual tool (and one that is aware of its historical connections) that allows a variation on a theme, producing just more of the same? Well, not quite. Frankly, we see much more than repetition. In the practice of constructing of a video biography we are confronted by the theoretical principle of identity as the constant interplay in the notion of the changing same. We see a good-as-gold method at work – and it truly looks and feels brilliant and convincing. We see and feel the same as different, and the different as same, and we acknowledge all the great shades of red, black and gray that take place in the relationship between an identity as the same and an identity as a process of becoming something else. Yes, what we see and what we have is Magnus Bärtås as the Method Man.

In the case of the work *Who is Dimitris Houliarakis?*, the camera follows the daily movements of a journalist living in Athens, Greece, in what seems to be an erratic manner. We get the picture of where this man, now 42 years old, is from, where he studied and why, what he does professionally, and what he does not want to do any more. And the girl, yes, it is a girl's young, detached voice that tells us how the world according to Mr. Houliarakis is shaped and maintained. We get funny one-liners about his dream of setting up a restaurant that only serves lamb, and that will be thus called the silence of the lambs. As a literal sound bite, here is an example of the method in action.

*“He drives an Alfa Romeo with fast acceleration and quick brakes. He continually adjusts the volume on his radio.*

*He shares a house with his mother. She lives on the top floor, he on the lower one. They have a garden with pomegranate, orange and lemon trees, a chestnut tree, and vines.*

*He usually wears well-ironed shirts. He has a pair of Converse All Stars gym shoes.*

*One of his poetry collections is based on the tragic story of an airplane crash that wiped out an entire football team. He has a photograph in his study of the team—Torino—with the players lined up in the classic two rows.*

*He reads anything on Admiral Nelson that he comes across. There's a portrait of Nelson hanging in his bedroom."*

But we also sense a certain melancholy, a feeling of non-spoken heaviness of both heart and mind. We see him driving, checking his garden and waiting for a tram. A sensation and sensitivity of time enters the frame of thinking-with. It is an aspect of time that is not on the rhythm of what we expect, but either goes a bit too slow or too fast. It is like being out of time, while anticipating the future. We see him doing things that we all do, but no, this is not you, this is him, the one and only him. This is a movie dedicated to him, only him, presented as deceptively innocent and simple baggage that makes us wonder what exactly is going on.

Before going into the conceptual and methodological details of how a person's life story is told while maximizing the minimum amount of changing elements (the number of words and sentences, camera movements, the choreography of the sound, etc.) and also the singular amount of each section or variation, let us backtrack a bit. Why this extremely simplified and condensed method?

The answer does not fall out of the thin air, it's right there in front of us, in the reference to his background. Bärtås comes from literature studies, and was not educated as an artist, not to mention having access to the know-how of film and cinema studies and their technicalities. In short, before creating this specific method for himself, there were things he both did and did not know. But he wanted to make films, and he wanted to tell stories by the means of moving images. At the same time, he was acutely aware of his own limitations and shortcomings. Instead of trying to fake it in the trade, he constructed the above rules and regulations for himself in order to be able to – yes, make films. Not just any kind of films, devoting himself to experimental films done on shoestring budgets and with an essayistic mode and sensibility.

Confronted with the results as works of arts, funnily enough, we have to acknowledge that this method works. The structure is there to give that needed helping hand in order to keep the story going while the components of the story are chronically eccentric. It is the very simplicity of the way of story telling that allows a remarkable hint of mystery to be wrapped around it. It helps Bärtås to figure out which anecdote goes in and where it goes and what is left out, edited aside. It also helps the viewer to relate to and think with, due to its framing and the conviction that it generates for the body of the work, smoothly and so successfully caressing our attention into expectations of surprises – yes, the word is surprises – that do not materialize. We sense a promise, but there is no delivery. We are left wondering, waiting, and wanting. Not necessarily wanting and waiting for closure or an ultimate solution, but certainly for any kinds of hints about what will follow, of how the life story, for example of our Greek journalist living in Athens, will develop further, forward. We are left hanging, dangling about, not with nausea, but rather with a vivid sense of pleasure.

But please, please let us pay attention to the nuances and details of this film – nuances and details that tell the white lie of the simplicity of a person's struggle at the task of living and loving, hating the heat of the moment, and then keeping busy by raking the leaves in your mental garden in the middle of the middle of the mess of being-in-the-world. The movies are made so that you could come away with the assumption that these activities are conducted with very little effort and just a slight rise in the heartbeat. There seems to be no sweat, no conflicts and very low level of struggle. However, this elegance is misleading. Such being-in-the-world is achieved and worked through, not just a lucky break. It is sufficient to consider the numbers to be disabused of that idea. In the case of Mr. Houliarakis, we learn from the text at the end of the film that this narrative of not much more than 20 sentences is based on his and Magnus' meetings and correspondence through long years between 1994 and 1999. It is material from a correspondence that first existed as a script which then, practically, was acted on and followed up when producing the video essay.

Setting the period of time involved in a biography produced out of the connections of a friendship into a 10-minute film would require the extremely difficult and demanding task of looking for the right focus if it was not for the method, the method that saves the day and makes the night go away. This is not about creating a great arch of a narrative, but about editing in and editing out, about finding the specific focus that makes sense in this given site. Again and again: what is important is

the inherent logic and internal values of a practice – never as given entities, but as made and shaped interpretations and materializations.

It is a method that allows us to get away from the illusion of covering everything. We have a life, a life of a man in Athens. Bårtås strives for simplification to the most extreme degree, but the point is that he manages to be minimal without being boring or merely descriptive.

This is where another tool must be created. It is the concept of a narration-in-work that we briefly reflected on earlier in this chapter. This is a tool that is born out of an annoyance, and the necessity to do something about it. In the background there is that still existent (even if currently more hidden) idea of a work of art that is what it is all by itself, a reference to the ideal of a work of art necessarily being something that speaks for itself. There is no need for comment, no need for words, because words can't possibly grasp the depth and complexity of it. Art is silent and as we know, silence is golden. Thus, with his narratological perspective Bårtås is trying to work on a way out of the misery of getting stuck on the illusion that a work is something completely an sich and that cliché about how an image is worth a thousand words – or is it a hundred thousand of words?

Quoting Bårtås: *“The work is a more or less clearly composed sequence of actions, which takes the shape of, or results in, either a more or less solid physical object, or a time based work (video or film) or an event which is documented. This sequence of actions is fundamental to the understanding of the work – often this is the conceptual strategy – and it can be reproduced, or retold. Within the art world, works of art are often mediated as stories and receive a place in a circulation and a reception first and foremost as a story of a series of actions.”*

*“The fact that world of art to a large extent is a place for tales points to the folkloristic aspect of the art world. In other words, the art world is a place for transmission: Someone has seen or heard of someone who has done something. The story is told and retold. As in any other oral culture there are misunderstandings, details, displacements and falsifications. This dependence on ‘what is on everyone’s tongue’ is of course both good and bad. Works that are difficult to talk about run the risk of being neglected and disappearing.”* (Bårtås 2008, 11)

This background logic is tightly anchored in his own interests as an artist. Coming from literature studies, he was strongly drawn towards the conceptual strategies of conceptual art. It is no secret that for Bårtås

the task of constructing a concept of narration-in-work as a working tool runs along the same track as a train of thought that comes from Fluxus and takes him to artists like George Macuinias, Vito Acconci and the musician Meredith Monk, mentioned above. This is the idea of seeing a work of art as instructions. And yes, in practical terms it is meant to be understood, and also delivered, as a set of instructions about how to do the work, and in what order and sequence to do it. Or when articulated in terms borrowed from music, it is a work of art as in a musical score. All of this means that there is a claim embedded in the work of art, a claim to function as an open call for anyone to use the instructions and to do the work of art – even if that openness is never completely actualized, and even if it is unclear whether it is really based on a willingness to provide a 100% version of accessibility.

But much more important than the provocation and intimidation of the invitation, to come and do it yourself, do it now, and do it well, these strategies are conceptual rules that frame, but also make diverse variations possible within the seemingly tight model. These are then works that do not deify objects, but are often events and happenings, comprised of non-material means that in themselves underline the chance to, and also the necessity of talking about them. Thus, we have an inherent connection between the Fluxus principles and their being kept alive and evolving, not that much through conversation based on the objects, but in and through a socially and collectively generated participatory oral practice – telling stories, sharing them and passing them on, always in a slightly altered manner and mood. It is an idea of repetition that is closely linked to the comprehension of identity and process. It is about the changing same, and how things and actions are repeated, but how each time, precisely through these acts of repeating, something changes and gets another beat and beauty attached to them – a repetition that even if it is based on a conceptual framework is, by its activity, a physical one with inevitable ramifications for our bodily experiences and their evolution.

From the perspective of figuring out ways how to continue to work as an artist, Bärtås' motivation to construct a conceptual tool called narration-in-work is queried and challenged by the experiences of how words play a role and how speech acts form and formulate the content of the work of art – regardless whether that is denied or not. This is then the reality of being able to concentrate not on the ideal of what something is, but how it is constructed, presented and represented. It is also based on the simple realization that a work of art of any kind is never just an object or an image. It is always a non-zero-sum game of

everything that is connected to it, starting from the sites where it exists and including the discourses in and with it. A work as a physical object might be of, and possess a rather limited range, but as an image of it, and as a talk about it, it knows almost no borders or physical hurdles. This is a realization that again allows us to distance ourselves from the metaphysical claim of an art work that it exists in its own right, and lets us to explore how any work of art is part of a complex net of meanings and non-sense, a carousel of localization and contextualization that happens within the usual hard pressures of both the quality and the quantity of participation.

Most concretely, Bårtås is interested in the inherent connection and interplay between the two main (and in themselves complex) aspects of A how the actual work is done and constructed as a post-construction within the ongoing narrative process of and with it, and then B how a work of art is set on the scene with discursive means, how it is communicated, distributed and spread around as stories. His work is about how these interconnected relationships between levels of A and B are formed and negotiated, and how both sides affect each other, and how neither side is innocent or detached.

Here the emphasis is deliberately on the questions addressed in a), which take the driver's seat, and from which the second layers of activities and questions in level b) evolve. Level a) is obviously where the primary action is, and where the subject is the artist and his/her strategies and choices. Consequently, level b) is the sphere of telling stories – talks on, about, with and off the work, that started it but from which the discourses very quickly gained a momentum and life of their own. It is the commentary track, the sideways stories and plots that are no longer just extra additions but have become something of their own. However, neither level can exist without the other. Therefore it is crucial to pay attention to how a) and b) affect one another, emerging and developing in a call-and-response manner – being closely intertwined, but at the same time following their own internal logic and qualities.

A narration-in-work is a constructive and reflexive process that allows us to relate to the complexities of a work of art and its (hopefully) constantly evolving trajectories of narratives. It is to be aware of the need and chance for constant research in and through the work that is happening. It is, then, two processes, of how a work is actualized in different settings or installations, no matter what the medium of the work is, and consequently, of how the discussions connected to the work take form and develop, whether these are by the artist or

other participants in the discourse within the fields. Thus narration-in-work makes it possible to recognize how a work is never completely ready, and how the comprehension of the ways it is articulated and discussed serve the purpose of keeping the life-line of the work vital and moving on.

As has already been stressed several times, there is no full, all-encompassing story, but rather numerous stations and stops that are linked together and affecting each other. That is to say, there are choices that lead towards the next sites of deliberate choices, which each and every time include some things and exclude some other options, aims, values and wants. As in narration-in-life, the frame of a narration-in-work provides the activity a certain conscious direction, but it underlines the unpredictability of the content and the nuances of the next step, the next upcoming situated materialization of the work. It is not a set of directions that guarantees success, but due to its open-ended character and uncertain trajectories, instead of unity it includes agony, anxiety and the landscape of failures, ranging in versions from extra small all the way to XXL.

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Narration-in-work as developed by Bärtås is a conceptual tool that does a double act: it both describes and defines. It is aware of not being innocent, but being part of the game, part of the problem. But what the reflective attitude allows and cherishes is the ability – even during the process of making the work – to step aside and create a version that comments on the making of the work. This is a technique that we recognize in contemporary versions of DVD's that are sold and sealed with a commentary track on the actual work. In the same breath, we recognize a whole genre of films (especially documentaries) that incorporate the working method of being constantly aware of what is going on, and also constantly, semi-transparently comment on it. Perhaps the best-known body of work that consciously constructs and plays with the act of self-reflection and meta-commentary are the films made by the German director Werner Herzog (for example, *Grizzly Man*), who uses this as a tactic to bring himself and his voice (often enough in English with a cruel German color) into the main frame, into the story and into the whole web of images and plots which then make the whole. Thus, it is a strategy of mixing of voices that is already partly embedded into the internal logic of the medium of the video essay which Bärtås himself wants to settle into, research and take further.

Narration-in-work is a tool that also shapes the content of the outcome, not only neutrally instructing but also informing the process

in and through an active participation. Here it is about paying attention to how a narration is constructed, and how the shifting balance of what comes in and what goes in, and all the endless possibilities of side-stories and sub-plots emerge and even run amok in their jungle of anecdotes and connotations. It is especially about being aware of how the construction of a story is not so much about what is in it but what is left out of it – thus, as already mentioned before, about the crucial weight of editing – an act the role and importance of which is unfortunately too often neglected or misunderstood. But a deed like editing is exactly the ‘post’ of the process of post-construction, where the details that shape the whole are decided, giving or failing to give it the bounce, the umph and the sweet flavor of empathy.

And yes, it is once again about being aware of how that narrative deed happens, after or along with, being constructed both at present, and then later, in the post-construction phase. It is narration-in-work as the chosen way of making the structural limitations work for one’s vision, not against one’s aims, as a conceptual strategy that seeks to make more out of less, but also a strategy that is less, as in the elements of the work only as the final result of it – made possible through the result of working on the narrative, editing out, out, out the stuff that is not absolutely necessary to be there and then.

Quoting Bärtås <sup>(2008, 13)</sup> again: *“There are many aspects of the art world’s oral tradition, and they are all intimately connected to methodology. In the same way as the narrator is completely dependent on stories, my methodology is intertwined with the research domain (the subject matter). The subject matter and the method are almost impossible to tell apart.*

*One of these aspects lies in the ontology of the narratives. The story takes place afterwards, after the events that are retold. It is a reconstruction, or rather post-construction. According to my narratological approach the post-construction is an artistic method and a natural part of artistic practice. In other words, post-construction is nothing to be ashamed of (which many artists are) but should be regarded as belonging to the domain of afterthought and as a fundamental part of the self-observation and reflection on one’s own practice. It is a process that also includes self alienation, a capacity to see oneself as someone else. In everyday life, such reconstructions are considered a form of prudence; an ability to draw conclusions of, and find a way in one’s own life, thus giving it an ethical dimension.”*

Herein lies the beauty of the method of making these biographical films as video essays, and the stories told in the continuous frame of a narration-in-work. Both methods and tools are doing the framing in order to win the maximum concentration and complexity for what happens inside them, never as given entities, but as always evolving and interacting articulations of the changing same. The end result are films that are both so simple and so unbelievably focused that they, in themselves, are hardly the end-results. They function as the starting point, a film as a trampoline. We are offered carefully chosen and mastered images and words that we, as the viewers and the audience, need to take with us, and do something with them. We need to follow up the story, fill in the gaps that Bärtås so finely stages, and to re-open doors as connotations that are situated around us.

These are, yes, films as manipulators and activators that lure us to think, not so much about who actually is Dimitris Houliarakis, but who we are, where we come from, where we are right now, where we want to move toward, and how we relate to ourselves and to our surroundings, all parts of the negotiations that take shape in between the balancing acts of the more stable structures of social imaginary and the contrasting but fully intertwined position of the potential act of social imagination.

### Speaking From

Now we will move from a particular case back into the mode of reflective thinking with a theoretical framework of narration-in-work, in contrast and comparison with narration-in-life. The connection is made in the title of this section: Speaking From. It alludes to speaking from some place or practice, with the aim of creating and generating a position of a situated and committed procedural identity.

The idea is that of a situated and committed self that can only speak and be addressed from a specific localized position, a sort of cross-roads, filled to the brim with confusing demands and choices to be made. But it is a site that you are anchored to – and in which you must stay. Admittedly, you are truly confused and also a bit lonely, but who cares. It is your mess, a mess in which you must stay put, confronting its demands and challenges. You do this not because you cannot move, but because it is your choice. You will stay at this particular site, a site that is neither neutral, nor simply a given, is neither bestowed by some authority, nor stable in its consistency. It is a site that constantly has to be re-thought, re-written and re-visited. It is a construction site under

construction. The point is a very obvious one: who is it that makes and shapes those given choices, and how can one take part in the production of knowledge and alternatives in this site at the crossroads you choose to hold on to, refusing the predetermined choice given?

What is the condition of this site you choose? It is, to speak with a simile and a repletion and a refrain, a bloody mess. It is a mess, but, like it or not, it is our mess. It does not confront us from outside, from somewhere beyond. We are definitely not outsiders in relation to it. We are part of it, and thus, if it is a mess, we are part of the problem. We are not innocent. What we must do now, just in order to save the last bit of grace and honesty left in for us to hold on, is to face this site, and to dig deeper into its premises, promises and brutalities in order to do something about it.

But hold on – situated and committed self? What does that mean, what are its implications? This concept that I have had in heavy usage stems from the development of my own critical inquiries which have landed me at the doorstep of the question: What is there to be done when there is no universal truth, no over-arching narrative, or the security of an insular cultural tradition, to save us from our own responsibility? What is left for us to do if and when we realize that not everything we do, see and hear is of the same or equal worth and importance? How is it that we can confront radical insecurities without hugging the arrested development of self-denial provided by nihilistic relativism? Or to add another twist, but not to shout: How do I even speak of a ‘we’, if there is no clear reference to this ‘we’ that shows up as both object and subject in my questions?

Are questions, endlessly regenerating questions, all that is left? Do they lead to any place beyond referencing endlessly back to themselves? The part of how to is at the very core of the task of constantly situating oneself in and into the localities in which one lives, loves and learns. It is a question of a practice, of praxis. Because whatever it is that one does and that one says, it cannot be legitimized or authorized by someone else, by any figure placed above the situation itself. All the things we do and say, and do not do and do not say, are only comprehensible and credible through the premises that we speak and act from. There is always a site where we come from, act from, and which pushes us in a certain direction, but it is a site which is not given, natural or stable, but rather a site which we shape and generate by our ways of acting and being-with.

I am perfectly aware that for some intellectual heroes taking part in the overall debate about the merits of identity politics, this instruction to get back to the basics of the site that one is speaking and acting from is a form of tautological insularity. Still, I want to assure them that the process I am describing characteristically needs to contain within it the danger of autistic or narcissistic enclosure, i.e. of producing self-referential tautologies. This risk is true, and it is there, even though what I am talking about is a process, which is what it wants to be if and only if it tries by all means available to it to articulate itself vis-à-vis itself and its immediate surroundings. This is an articulation that affirms this process as a self-critical, self-reflective, tolerant and open-ended enterprise that seeks and even learns to enjoy collisions and crashes of realities and opinions. To borrow from Karl Jaspers (1970, 213), it is a loving conflict, which is a struggle with and within, not against something or someone.

But what does this really mean? What are the direct implications for the aim of situating oneself and speaking from? No matter how much we hope to deny it, we all come from somewhere, we are currently stuck on a certain kind of a groove, and we are all trying to figure out what direction we are about to stumble in and struggle towards. This is something what can be labeled as self-evident. However, what follows from this is not the claim that the place from which anyone of us comes – in terms of our personal history, professional integrity or, for example, sexual preferences – is unchangeable or poured in concrete. As the beloved saying in my old home town goes, we all certainly come from somewhere, but just as certainly we do not have to stay there. To put it in other words, the context and the content of who you are and what you want is constantly altered, challenged and, yes, let us not forget, caressed. What's more, it is not just a physical site, but very much defined by the wide variety of discursive sites and situations that one wants to or needs to get closer to and participate in. In short, it is about a mind-set which connects the imaginary and the real homecomings, belongings, fears, frustrations and anxieties.

The task is to participate in these various elements of the process, through your situated and committed self, which is thus constituted through these activities. You mix into the sites and situations by which you are constantly affected and on which you yourself simultaneously can have an effect. In anything we do, we are not alone. As it happens, sometimes we are not with the ones we would like to be and act together with. But we are always strongly embedded in sites and situations that both form and structure us, and they are sites and situations that

we can have an effect on. And yes, having this effect on the situation that produces a subject is only possible, as Judith Butler has so vividly and convincingly argued, if we are aware of the ways we are situated and if we have acquired ways of situating ourselves – not as truths, but as social imaginaries that can be turned into social imaginations. Only then do we have any chance of actually producing something different, turning something around, and becoming something that we are not yet.

Judith Butler writes: *“In this sense, identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitation; they unsettle the ‘I’, they are the sedimentation of the ‘we’ in the constitution of any ‘I’, the structuring presence of alterity in the very formulation of the ‘I’. Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested, and, on occasion, compelled to give away.”* (1993, 105)

Whatever the content and shape of what it is we try to struggle and live with, it remains true, however, that we have to continue to adjust to the demands of both our discursive and physical situatedness. It is a situatedness that is never defined by one, but always by plural entities bouncing off one another. However, each situatedness is argued and lived from a specific position, which can be occupied at once only from one site alone. Each self speaks and watches and feels—falls in love, fears for the safety of one’s family and gets disgusted at the results of the polls – and does so always from one point, in one instance, from one position.

To quote Merleau-Ponty: *“We have no way of knowing what a picture or a thing is other than by looking at them, and their significance is revealed only if we look at them from a certain point of view, from a certain distance and in a certain direction, in short, only if we place, at the service of the spectacle, our collusion with the world.”* (2004, 499)

What is that position? Characteristically and by necessity, it is on the move, a process-based and driven, continuously actualized positioning. It is made, and remade, as the site of the act in each case. To quote Merleau-Ponty once again, *“If the object is an invariable structure, it is not one in spite of the changes of the perspective, but in that change or through it.”* (2004, 103)

RODERICK BUCHANAN  
**MIXED MARRIAGE**

We are back to a case, to a work of art, and to a particular artist. As usual, let us start with the facts, which are by their nature indisputable. There was an exhibition by an artist named Roderick Buchanan. It was called *Histrionics*, and it was seen in Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art between 5 April and 28 October, 2007. It was a major part of an overall program called *Blind Faith: contemporary art and human rights*, undertitled as: *sectarianism, identity, nation, territorialism*. That was a framework which fitted Buchanan's work more than poignantly, allowing the artist to address and articulate his work in the context where it comes from, what it deals with and where he wants to participate in and with. His is a body of work that has been both coherent and situated through the years. He has had a life-long commitment to the topics of identity, locality and the pleasures and pains of daily life, often related to and worked through the various experiences and manifestations of sports activities, which are then transformed and translated into works of art.

To stay with facts for a bit longer, in the brochure accompanying the event a short description stated: *"In a massive red triangular theater within Gallery 1, two films of flute bands performing are projected. On the outside walls of the theater are displays ranging from photographs of football players to information on historical figures such as Thomas Muir. The artist's and his wife's family trees are also investigated, in a project exploring the experience of their own 'mixed marriage'. Buchanan doesn't propose solutions to problems of sectarian division, but considers and reflects on certain aspects of identity in Scotland that relate to this difficult topic."*

In the same brochure, distributed free to visitors, the organizers quote Buchanan on the issue of sectarianism. *"...sectarianism is largely an issue of the heart, I don't think the head has much to do with it ..."*. On one of the large-scale exhibition walls we glean some other significant data, for instance that their so-called "mixed marriage" between a Protestant and Catholic is, in fact, based on a mixed past. Their family tree shows how there are 13% Protestants and 21% Catholics in their respective families. That was a fact which nevertheless intrigued a person working in the maintenance of the building enough to stop Buchanan and comment, *"Are you really married to a Catholic? Me and my husband are Protestant, we do not agree with mixed marriages."*

Thus, what do we have? We have a series of works, the largest, and perhaps also the most expressive of which is the film projected on the split screen in the box, showing two marching bands practicing their repertoire – one obviously Catholic, the other Protestant. These are both versions of the famous phenomena of marching bands in this part of the world. These bands take to the streets to celebrate their cultural, religious and political legacies – or to protect them. Each band was filmed separately, since they refused to practice on the same stage; but then, in the construction of the work and the space where it is presented, they are placed next to one another.

We see and hear them practice in a call-and-response manner, first the one, and when that screen fades away we concentrate on the other band doing their routine of moves and turns, reminding us of military activities of celebration and commemoration. We witness a comparison that says it all so clearly and eloquently. We are confronted with similarities, and then differences. These differences are not so much in the overall acts of the bands, but the nuances of how they move and practice. It is an example of identity, as in the processes of the changing same, where we again are able to realize and recognize how the crucial moment is what is going on within each constructed collective and its inherent internal negations and navigations. This realization and recognition does not help us with the task of judging what is so different between them. It does exactly the opposite: it underlines what is shared between them, even if, through the contextualization of the work, we know how each side vehemently denies that shared common ground.

But what else do we have? We have that picture of the artist and his wife, also an artist and a figure in this particular book, Jacqueline Donachie, in chapter III. They look into the lens of the camera, not really smiling but kind of semi-awkwardly witnessing themselves being witnessed in the act of making their assumed mixedness visible. This visibility is underlined by the texts on their t-shirts that say mixed on the one, and marriage on the other.

But what do we really see, feel and relate to? I don't see, feel or relate to a confession, or to the facts. I see, feel and relate to the construction of an identity that is and has to be cherished as a demanding process, a process in which we can use and abuse all kinds of knowledge and information. We can even call them historical facts, but they are not much help with a situation in which, even in current times, a sectarian divide and problems it causes are at work in the city of Glasgow.

Mixed marriage is an issue. What school the kids can or should go to is an issue of their religious background. And yes, then there is that thing called football. All kinds of everyday decisions force one to choose sides. There is violence, both blatantly open and physical, but also mental, of the type that enforces borders and refuses bridges that would bring these views together, so that their ability to deny the nearness of each other would at least diminish a bit. There is a powerful fabrication of social imaginary at work, functioning in its extreme juxtaposition, feeding off each side's frenzied prejudices. These are imaginaries that never move side-ways, but keep digging in deeper, into the ground of vehemently refusing to acknowledge the existence of the other side.

What I see, feel and relate to is an issue strongly embedded in the idea of how to shape and take part in shaping the social imaginary in a given site. And thus it is a process that must use social imagination to be able to address this divide, this whole bag of history, and to open it up – even if just slightly. This is about hearts and minds. Not one or the other, but both of them. It is about what they do to one another, in correlation, in connection and in mutually shared and made confusion of an inherent complexity. This is a task that cannot point out who is right, who is wrong. It is a task that must not get fixated on some kind of silly idea of detached, don't-worry-be-happy, friends-forever, living and loving oh so wonderfully under the same rainbow of whatever and whenever.

It is an issue that hurts. No way to get around it or over it. You have to face it. But to be able to face it, you need help. You need to be within a collective framework that includes instead of excludes. More than anything else, you need laughter – laughter that invites us to laugh at the so-called facts that are always constructed and always much more complex and yes, mixed, truly mixed, than they are allowed to be presented and recognized as being.

For this, we do not need theories of identity. We need ways of inviting us to feel for and feel with – in and through our daily fabric of experiences, experiences that give us a face, that show us the sweat and tears of the other who can no longer simply be boxed in and whose existence can no longer be denied. We are stuck, but at least we are not trying to look away. It is this stuckness that is the only way to get over the trouble and divide. We'll not get over it alone, and not singing in harmony, but rather with the aid of gestures, of learning the ways of negotiating those reasonable disagreements that allow a certain type

of togetherness to grow, slowly, so slowly, but so very convincingly. You pass the ball (not the football, but the aim and task of seeking ways of co-existence) and you pass it on to others in order to get it back – and the way it gets back to you depends fully on how you passed it to them in the first place.

Thus, in the end, for me it comes back to that exhibition wall. There is that one picture, a picture on a wall. A picture that is not left behind, but comes along with you – is carried with you. One man and one woman. A shared smile, a combination of shy and sly, saying, here we are, and here we go. Again and again, facing the facts, facing the music, and yes, doing something, not about, but with it. Making it visible, making it become visible. It is daily life, daily news, daily circus and daily troubles. It is daily love, stressing that word love, not hate. It is choices and hopes, mixed and measured, entangled and released and then caught and held back, just to be let all loose again.

### Take Care

But once again, how can we do it? Or in fact, why should we try to do it? Isn't it simply too difficult, too vexing and time-consuming? Yes, it certainly is. The strategy of taking care I want to present here is one example of many available and yet not fully acknowledged means. The strategy contains two elements, two parts quite obviously connecting the individual and the collective aspects. First, I will focus on the individual implications of the strategy of taking care – and yes, this is the part still absolutely relevant, even if the notion of the technologies of the self go fully into the areas of brutto romantic hunting grounds. To make this differentiation, I want to focus on the idea within the frame of care of the self, not on the sub-plot of it when it turns into the not so very reasonable or at all preferable wish to create ourselves as a work of art (see Allen 1998, 192).

Following the train of thought in later writings of Michel Foucault, what did he have in mind when he turned in a seemingly abrupt manner from the analyses of power and power structures to focusing on the ways in which an individual ought to take care of him/herself? Funnily enough, with the help of hindsight, this development in Foucault is anything but weird. There is a clear and coherent continuity of thought developing from the analyses of power-structures to the discursive means of shaping life, such as normativity, and finally leading towards the issue of what it could mean to try to live a good life (see Smart 1988) Care of the self is a synonym for a life-politics or – flipped

the other way around – a politics of life. The idea itself stretches back as far as the historical eye can see and beyond. It is the art of living, which calls for the care of one's self as a whole. It is not at all so much about personal success and triumphs, but about all those things that make our lives worth living.

Thus, it is not about opportunistic gains, or financial welfare, but about the embedded ways of combining freedom and responsibility. We need, in the words of Michel Foucault, *“to think in terms of a crisis of the subject, or rather a crisis of subjectivation – that is, in terms of a difficulty in the manner in which the individual could form himself as the ethical subject of his actions, and efforts to find in devotion to self that which could enable him to submit to rules and give a purpose to his existence.”* (1988, 95)

The task of taking care of oneself continues throughout our life, and there are no final answers. It involves the body as well and the soul, it unites mental exercise with medicine. In one sense, it denotes self-reflection, self-discipline, self-control, but in all cases it is about control only in a relative sense. Care of the self is not just yet another means or technology of control by force or a will with the aim of achieving perfect controllability. It is a social process of give and take, and it is never possible to separate it from the shaping influence of the localities it takes place in. It is part of a certain historical continuity, and it is partly about fate. It is about living with uncertainties.

But let's stop for a moment. Can I be sure that this jargon is not just stolen, borrowed or even high-jacked from a common self-help manual on how to be beautiful, courageous or great in bed – all achieved without sweat and tears and just in 22 minutes, if one only pays the proper fees? What is the difference between Foucault's version of life politics and the huge contemporary industry of personal management of feelings and sensations?

The difference is as simple as it gets. Foucault's ethics suggest an attitude of awareness about how we are all constantly affected and can also just as constantly have an effect on the situation that shapes the self. Thus it is a relationship of give and take, departure and returning, bruised but glued together with bubblegum. The self-care industry designs, packages and sells a product, making sure no area or domain of human conduct is left out, resulting in amazing developments in the specificity of the cosmetics industry and the novelties of service sector jobs, like wardrobe consultants. The difference is that while

Foucault certainly stands for something and argues for something, he does not promise anything. The Foucault of ethical aspiration of care for the self sells nothing. He merely points out the necessity of being responsible for ourselves in the struggle to find a space beside the demands and construction of subjectivity and submission. It is a direct form of critical activity that steals back the notion and the momentum of being able to create ourselves as situated selves, to regain a sense of who we are and what we do by actually doing it—and by keeping on doing it. It is about power, and also about the limitations of power.

This power of self-definition rarely comes by way of directly asserting that you are this and not something else. It is a process of self-description that must follow the routes that are unexpected and uncontrolled. That is to say, these are ways of dealing with oneself, one's short-comings and daily crumbs and stains of honey on the table that do not authenticate a way of life, but construct it into a story that is told in a particular, a singular way. It is potential thisness shaped in and through the extremely difficult circumstances while negotiating one's way between metaphysical essentialism and full-blown commodification of our life-worlds. It is a process of failings and short-comings that one must learn to shape into a meaningful continuity, where the process base and process drive by itself helps to carry on with the task on keep on keeping on.

Moving on to the other dimension, I will now connect the individual act of taking care with the collective level, where this act always appears and where it attains its meaning. It is the act of taking something, but doing that only in order to give it back. It is necessarily a care of the self that cannot formulate its own event of becoming a place in terms of egoistical motives, narcissistic babble or hedonistic hype. The main point being again: we are all located and situated in certain contexts. The central dilemma is how exactly we are located and situated, and what can we do about it. In its deep complexity the whole issue bounces back to what is understood with this so-called self.

Let us return briefly to Foucault once again, and quote him on this. *"Care of self is ethical in itself, but implies complex relations with others, in the measure where this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others ... Ethos implies also a relation with others to the extent that care of the self renders one competent to occupy a place in the city, in the community, or in interindividual relationships."* (1988, 55)

Thus, the element of collectivity and the perspective of a self which always already points beyond itself is included in the description of the self's immediate life and thus embedded into the whole idea of what it means to try to care for oneself. The idea of only caring about oneself and no others is incomprehensible, a brutal self-contradiction. Taking care is only meaningful and achievable when done within the context of a group of people, in a collective. As a task it includes not just choosing those collectives that you want to participate in, but – once chosen – also the participation in the constant process of re-forming what this particular collective is and stands for.

We have to pay extra attention here, really stop and think with and through the nuances. Taking care on the collective level is not based on a delusion of how nice, beautiful and oh so empathetic we all are. The collective activity of doing things together is based on the cruel but true fact that it is in the purest self-interest of an individual to pursue his/her aims and goals in a joint exercise with others who have similar aspirations and needs. Primarily, we do not share because we like or adore the others next to us. We ought to more openly admit that more often than not we really couldn't care less about the others outside our closest circle. We do not possess the time or energy. And then there is the face, the very physical presence of the other that demands a reaction and that does not leave us any choice but to stay put and to react.

But here is the trick, not a trick of the light but of a heartfelt burn that left a trace: we share, because it is the only way we can survive as human beings, as professionals in any field, and as members of a collective. Without sharing we would never gain or have the knowledge, the financial capital or social capital, nor the ways of articulating them, to do whatever it is that we strive to do. We need company to argue with, to agree with. We need company to fight with and to love with. We do not need company to feel a perfect harmony with, but we do need the collisions and conflicts in order to be able to think through critically and productively what to do, where, how and why. Thus, at the heart of a collective is the necessity to strive for productive disagreement, towards demanding, even traumatic encounter with others.

A collective like that is never automatically there. True to the image, we are thrown into a site of a collective, but how we try, fail and try again to confront the challenge of collective activity is not won or lost. It is open, and meant to stay so too. In one word: it is a carousel. This type of a collective must always be generated and created. It is a loose setup in constant need of being re-activated and maintained. A collective

emphasizes the need to make that choice and work for your personal and collective care. It is 'we', both plural and chaotic, in never-ending negotiations and compromises. It does not come for free, and it does not come about by desperately hunting for it. It becomes what it is only through the daily practice of trying to face the complex anxieties of being and working together, while not assimilating into one, but remaining singular and specific agents alongside one another, not melting into one another.

### Sentimental Season

Sharing is caring, right? And caring makes us into better people. You know, into shiny happy people, almost too good to be true. It's the sentimental season and we are, yes we are, we are the world. Around me I hear the not so silent symphony of a vast collection of reasons to be cheerful. Everything is good, period. To be sure: I am talking here about 'good' as it is used referring to in the quality of life, not about the higher entity of a metaphysical good.

Or am I? Is everything truly supernaturally fantastic? You know, intra-planetary extraordinary elastic? Well, yes and no, because the peculiar fact of taking care of ourselves in both the individual and collective senses has a cruel turn to it. The moment you think it is solved and that you can return to care for your roses in that imaginary garden called everyday life, there comes the sound of 'Boom! Bang!' and a crash, a crash that drops you directly in the middle of a crime scene. Your sudden descent leaves you baffled and bruised, confused and afraid. You have no idea at all what is going on, but you kind of guess that whatever it is, it is not going to be pleasant and yes, you sense that you are part of it. Undeniably a part of it.

The crime scene turns out to be the very scene where you have thrown yourself into the sites and situations in which you try to care. You try to be there, sticking with the problems, and going through the emotions. You try to give – and get. You allow yourself to be effected and influenced. You trust yourself enough to be able to be knocked off your previously so important balance. You care – for yourself and for others, just by being there, taking in the blows and sitting through the hours. And yes, you realize: this hurts.

Caring is sharing and all that lovely whatever, but at the same time, the principle of mutual respect and reciprocal recognition proves to be a nuisance, it is not sufficient. It takes so much time and so much

energy, and what do you get for it?: just more and more of the troubling facts of life. It is a process within which, sooner rather than later, you start to feel overwhelmed. It is just too much. Too many demands, too many problems and too many inconvenient matters that you no longer can just push away and separate from your own little world. By caring, you have allowed these things and people to become close to you. Uncontrollable uncertainties have touched you, daily tragedies that can't be shaken or washed away. You are stuck, and it makes you feel sad, it makes you feel sick.

This is the moment, the moment of bare naked anxiety. Albert Camus (2006) faced this moment through his experiences during World War II and its direct aftermath, in the act he then described as facing the challenges of absurdity. This is absurdity, as defined in the act of distancing oneself from metaphysical essentialism and all types of one-size-fits-all grand-scale narratives. The question is what is it that you do when you come face to face with absurdity, which does much more than politely giggle at you, with a sophisticated, ironic smile. No, this wall laughs at you with brutal force and horrible volume. Now you are in a sentimental season which no longer lives up to its promise of emotional candy and security, a setup which repeatedly kicks you in the head and violently pokes a finger into your ribs. The situation is absurd because there is no way out of it. No matter what you do, no matter how much money, effort or whatever you have there to invest and to use, there is no way you can win in this game of mutual recognition. And the simple fact of finitudem is excruciatingly hard to accept: There is no way you can solve it all.

Thus, what is it that you do? What is it that you think when you find yourself stuck at this painful crossroads called absurdity? Following Camus, we revolt. First of all, we say no. No. And then we say it again: No! NO! NO! And after that, we stubbornly stay put. We are at the crime scene, but we seemingly are not doing anything. But the trick is hidden in this little word: seemingly. Because we have to move carefully, and cleverly, we need to disguise our actions and our moves. We must revolt, but not as they expect us to revolt, not blindly going against the structures, but using the detours of working inside-in, and making use of the brilliant possibilities of the aikido strategy: not denying the structural limitations but using the strength fetched from there to do something else, something different and powerful. Because there is no use in just shouting, no use in just throwing stones, no use in just crying. What we need are alternatives, other ways of being and acting that do something unexpected, something that breaks the spell of

commodified expectations, which are common to both the culture of consumerism, just as much as to the culture of nostalgic whining, blaming everything on anybody but yourself.

We are at the beginning of a beginning. And that beginning is a tragedy. We must have an understanding that not everything and anything can be turned into commodified objects, and that not everything can be settled in the framework of a consensus without inexplicable structural and conceptual violence. According to Chantal Mouffe (2000), this understanding is based on agonism, but not antagonism. It is about adversaries, not enemies. Adversaries can still manage to share enough of a common field, but vehemently disagree about what, how and why to do something within that field. The difference is that antagonistic enemies point blank refuse to accept and recognize the existence of other's versions. An understanding informed by agonism comprehends and commits itself to the messy and complicated site and situation we are at. It is an attitude which, instead of denying the realization of tragedy, sees risk, loss, agony and vulnerability as constitutive and essential elements of our politicized lives – just as much as love, care or caressing.

In short, these are the elements of crime that are necessary in shaping and making the platform for something we call a civil society. I know, I really do know, this is a great conceptual and imaginary leap forward, but come on, why not, let's just go with it, let's just open the window and jump. To quote Patchen Markell: *"It could mean defining democratic citizenship not as the self-control of the people, but as a matter of taking part in the activity of politics, where taking part can refer not only to participation in authoritative deliberative and decision-making bodies, but also to a range of unofficial activities, both quotidian and extraordinary, through which authoritative acts are subjected to the unpredictable responses of those whose lives they touch."* (2003, 188)

What I am talking about here are the ways of doing the seemingly impossible, and the ways of using the act and attitude of revolt for us, not against us. We face absurdity, but instead of crashing head-on against it, let's be smart. Let's use this impossibility to make something beautiful and positive. Let's think of everything we know we should not try to do and then do it. We can call it the most radical gesture, or we can call it situating ourselves, or we can call it the act of performing alternatives. But most important, let's steal the stolen slogan back, and just do it. Just do it: a critical yet constructive re-enactment that distorts and disturbs, transforms and transmits.

It is an act that takes place at the crossroads, an act that knows it cannot and will not submit or surrender, an act that does not like what it sees and feels, but will not give up. You are willingly exposing yourself to impulses and effects that you cannot control, and which you know that following them is not just going to be fun, fun, and more fun. But you do not flinch, you do not look for the emergency exit – or you do actually look for it, but you decide not to use that easy opt-out option. You are susceptible to different versions and views of the same or similar themes and events, but you will not jeopardize your whole position. You will certainly be challenged, but you must keep it together in order not to disintegrate. You take a risk, but not a hot-blooded or idiotic risk. It is a calculated leap, a leap that you know you must take on your own terms, not terms dictated by someone else.

This leap generates the framework within which you are becoming something unique, something that it is not possible to copy or repeat, something that however bruised or used it might turn out to be will never ever be taken away from you. That something is called a specific singularity. Not singularity in the sense of Agamben's<sup>(1996)</sup> 'whatever', which refuses to acknowledge the embeddedness of our being-in-the-world as situated, localized selves – an anchoring without which this kind of 'whatever' lacks the necessary gravitas, the daily boredom and insecurities, the sweat and smells of our singular thisness. Our thisness is only born and maintained in and through contradictions and collisions that generate a loving conflict.

Our localized singularity is a situated and committed self which knows this sensation of absurdity is not going to be passing away. It is within you as much and as vitally as you are stuck on that point of trying to create alternative ways of co-existence, alternative ways of negotiating reasonable disagreements. The point is to actively participate in it, and make that small corner of it yours – yours to compare and share with others, shaking it, shaping it, in an act of potentially becoming a place in a contextualized and structured space. That act so often feels like running full steam straight against the wall, hitting it hard, and hitting it, well, hitting it head-on. The question is: are you ready for it? Are you really ready to play the part and not just be satisfied with the make-believe task of dressing up for the action? In terms of social imagination, are you ready to be heartbroken?

V

**PERFORMING PUBLIC SPACE**

**"PERFORMING THE PUBLIC SPACE INTO A PARTICULAR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PLACE IS ABOUT TRANSITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS, AND IT IS ABOUT TRANSFIGURATIONS. AND IT IS ALWAYS ABOUT PROCESSES THAT ARE EMBEDDED AND SITUATED, LIMITED BUT DECISIVE IN THEIR EFFORT TO THINK DIFFERENTLY AND TO SHAPE THAT PRECISE SITE BY ALTERING ITS PARAMETERS AND THE MENTAL COORDINATES ON WHICH IT BALANCES."**

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Public space becomes that unique and temporal public place in and through intervention and interaction. There is a road and a process from an overall general space to a specific place, a conceptual framework that is shaped and defended here. It ought to be said at the beginning that this is a constellation that is contrary to the influential version of De Certeau, who makes the opposite distinction of place and space. In De Certeau's version, space represents a practised site that stands for alteration, while place on the other hand manifests the established order (1984, 117). However, in what follows I hope to provide cogent arguments for conceptualizing space in common and generic terms, as somewhere within which the chance of a singularity of place can be actualized and become what it wants to become. But it must be remembered that neither side of the interaction is given or granted: both the overall frame of a space and the potential becoming of a place are time and context-bound, value-laden, biased, and never, ever innocent.

Therefore, precisely when talking about the interrelatedness and reciprocity between space and place, it is crucial to recognize that the established order in a given space does not come out of nowhere. It has its distinct past, present and future. The histories of a site and its situations co-determine how they are sensed and experienced, perceived and defined in any given take of an actualization. Even more important, the context where and within which the current manifestations of all three of these time dimensions and the ways they affect one another is made and shaped is happening in a constant process. As a structure, we must take for granted that it is a reflective one, allowing room for elasticity and thinking differently. Thus space is an anchored site that must include the chance and potentiality of change – that something can in fact become something else in and through it, a something which by its character and momentum is temporary, but despite its temporariness has an effect on how that very space is defined, imagined and arranged in the long run.

That is what we are dealing with here. That is what it is about. We are talking about both the theoretical presuppositions of a structured space, and closely connected to this, about the artistic practices that seek to perform the public space into a particular social and political place. It is about transitions and translations, and it is about transfigurations. And it is always about processes that are embedded and situated, limited but decisive in their effort to think differently and to shape that precise site by altering its parameters and the mental coordinates on which it balances.

We are dealing with the act of performing, not in the sense of performing the roles which we take on when we are at work, or how we as human beings behave at home or at sport events, or performing gender roles, repeating sectarian divisions with gusto, or even doing performances for the camera as a work of art or as a photo shoot for a fashion magazine. This is performing, not as a one-off this-or-that separated entity. It is seeing performance as one central means of making and shaking our daily contexts and the sites where we act. Performance and performing are here located in the public arena, in a public, generally accessible site that is then and there both described and defined in and through these performative interventions and acts.

We are asking for participation – not only in the acts but in the ways of thinking with and about that specific site and the performance happening there. It is not a performance for a set of viewers, but a social and political act that carries weight beyond its actual physical event. Thus we are talking about how to talk about, and especially talk with these events and interventions. It is the politics of story-telling, and it is the politics of representation. We are dealing with stories, ways to push them forward, and ways to generate sites where they are shared. It is the act of creating that classical hermeneutical circle within which stories bounce off one another, hit the wall and fall on the floor, but then get up again. Something is moving with the carousel, something is going on in that process of caring about the nuances and caring about the chances of each of these stories being taken seriously and their having an effect on one another. It is a productive process that happens without guarantees and without mental insurance.

But what is produced, and how? And how come it is about being produced? This is a term, very closely linked to the idea of performing utterances and performing interventions within any kind of a space, that was introduced to the discourse by Henri Lefebvre in the French context of the post-structuralist debates at the end of the 1960s and early '70s. To say it was introduced is somewhat misleading, since at that time, despite what Lefebvre himself wanted to believe, the question of site and place was gaining more and more attention in all fields of social and political discussion. Production was, so to speak, already on the agenda of day-to-day social imagination.

It is a concept on long-term loan from Lefebvre – one we really like to hold on to – of production of space that in contemporary conditions reads and sounds like common sense. Not that common sense that brings into mind that caricature of a schoolmaster, rocking on his

rubber heels, hands locked firmly behind his back, lecturing the poor sods of students on the facts of life, of how to do as I say, not as I do. Instead, the common sense referred to here is closely connected to the horizons of experiences within a given time and context-bound social imaginary. It is common sense because of what it claims and how it connects the dots, implications and anticipations, because it is credible and helps us to figure out what's going on and why. But let's face the opening that comes through the time and space- boundedness of social imaginary – what's seen as meaningful, sensible and given? What has changed within the social imaginary of social space in the last four decades? Or should we ask: is what it means and implies really so self-evident?

It is important to move slowly and carefully. What the notion of production of a place indicates is the main element of thinking from general and detached space towards a particular and specific place. It begins with a public space that potentially covers anything and everything. The aim is to be conceptually inclusive, not exclusive, since it is only when things 'take place' that their meaningfulness and substance can be related to and situated with. It is a public place: made and shaped on that exact site and situation. What is needed is not only the history of a place but the history of the representations of a place. And what's more, it is a study of not only what exactly is materialized here or there, but how in Lefebvre's terms and ideas space and its spatiality is an anticipated and desired state, rather than one actually achieved. In short, it is a process where the aim is to get away from binary logic and move into the relationship of space and place always being an interplay between real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical.

It is a discussion that hopefully is not getting any closer to being terminated, a discussion of not what something is, but how it is made, shaped and maintained. In short, it is about how something becomes. To quote Edward S. Soja: *"All social relations become real and concrete, a part of our lived social existence, only when they are spatially 'inscribed' – that is, concretely represented – in the social production of social space. Social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing 'in' space, it is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialized social reality. There are no aspatial social processes. Even in the realm of pure abstraction, ideology, and representation, there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension."* (1996, 46)

Thus, whether we admit it or not, or whether we choose to pay attention to it or not, at every site and in every situation there is that process going on. A space – especially here with our specific focus on a place – is constantly being produced and reproduced. This is a reminder that claiming or longing for authentic and real space is not a plausible aim. It is an illusion that can have all the consequences from innocent comedy to tragic and dangerous essentialism. But once again, how does this production materialize? Following the lead given by Lefebvre, space is shaped by its being perceived, conceived and lived. The social space that is a social product consists of at least three interrelated ways and notions. There is ongoing spatial practice, there are also ongoing representations of that space, and then, finally, there are representational spaces <sup>(1991, 33)</sup>.

To reflect on this from another angle, public space can be defined at three levels:

- 1 As a spatial concept denoting the social sites or levels where meanings are manufactured, distributed, and exchanged.
- 2 As the substance that is processed and produced within these sites
- 3 As a general horizon of social experience

What is most crucial here is to see how these definitions are carefully catered toward a specific site and situation. It is never about public space being, for example, fully and completely accessible. It is about the variations and grades that are manufactured and manifested – and also materialized. In other words, when focusing on the acts and interventions of something becoming a place through the performing of content of concepts (images, acts, symbols), through performing gender, or via performing a place, it must be understood that the act or deed is not good or bad in itself, it is just productive, plain and simple. Something happens, something is altered, just like breathing in and breathing out. It can extend from something accessible and socially emphatic to something totally closed and totalitarian in spirit. It can be dull and dutiful, dreamy and delirious – or not. It can be basically anything, but not anywhere. While both the quality and the intensity of the effort can certainly swing from here to oblivion, the context-boundedness of an act does not diminish or fluctuate.

Examples of not-so-pleasant types of public performances are not that difficult to come up with. We can think of military parades, those physical demonstrations of power and established order.

These military parades reach deeper into the construction of public space than meets the eye, referring to the well-known and well attested fact of how both the imaginary and actuality of city spaces are in some cases constructed in order to serve for either military parades (such as the Alexanderplatz area in the former DDR, <sup>see Reichensperger 2005</sup>) or to enable unhindered access and mobility for military movements (such as in Haussmann's version of Paris; <sup>see, for example, Rabinow 1989</sup>).

One easily-spotted example is the widespread practice of commemorating war heroes with a figurative visualization of these fabulous men riding high upon their horses. These statues are very typical examples of the nationalistic manufacturing of social imaginary, functioning as a vehicle for commemorating past events and also accentuating the desired version of how the memory is lived through and for. Statues of this sort are also a productive point of focus due to their inherent time frame. They were immensely popular at one conjuncture, but for good reasons it is quite difficult come across recently mounted examples of this species.

Thus, we are once again facing that same question: what has happened in the social imagination when a statue that was once seen as a proud symbol of a nation-state's power and integrity in contemporary eyes turns into a silly exaggeration of a macho pride and a demonstration of a story-telling that deliberately cleans up all the horrors of war and the experienced traces of pain and misery that war has left on the collective and individual psyche? And why, if they have now fallen out of a grace, do they still have a late but lasting effect on how memory is structured in a public space?

Let us take two examples. One is the mighty block of a sculpture in the heart of Tiergarten, a vast and celebrated park in middle of Berlin. It is a statue of no less a figure than the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), known from history books as the person who for the first time constructed (read: forced together) a united Germany in the early 1870s, beginning an era of Prussian culture, organization and style of government. What we see at the site, located beside the large traffic circle that centres the famous skyline statue of the Angel of Berlin in Siegessaule, is a bombastic version of commemoration practice. It is a sculpture that invites plural views and visions, combining many figurative elements and the sheer size and setting in a scenography. It is, indeed, in contemporary language more of an installation, because it is made of four different parts. At the centre and top there is certainly the big man himself, looking wisely to the right, at the troops or the

newly built German nation state and its burgers. In front of him, on a significantly lower level, there are three different sculptures with individual motifs. From left to right, the first is a female figure, but with a covered head, resting in a Sphinx pose, reading a book – connoting the ideal of law and order. Next to her is the famous symbol of a male figure holding the whole world on his shoulders – the weight of the Atlas, the weight of enormous responsibility. The last one again depicts a female figure, but not as a wisdom, but as a conqueror, one foot on the head of a wild animal that looks like a lioness. Here we have it: civilization ruling over barbaric nature.

But why is this sculpture that was made in 1901 so funny? Or is it funny at all? Well, personally, I do find it impossible to look at it and not to burst out laughing. My laughter is caused by two factors: its time frame, and the consequential connotations time produces. The statue is a perfect reminder of a time when the greatness of a human being – that is to say, a man – was shown and represented through volume and weight. It is a sign of the times of the industrial age, of manufacturing innovations, of raw materials and first conquering and consequently mastering nature. It is a past time that has gone by – and waves back at us with all the consequences of nationalism, colonialism and ecological catastrophes.

But what if we cherish this work of commemoration practice in its proper, due perspective? What if we look at it as an example of its own period, by those standards of social imaginary and aesthetics of that time? We are looking at a symbol that was inaugurated not that long after Bismarck's death. We do see a ruler of the masses who really does that: he rules. With a iron fist, and a firm understanding of how the world is to be run. There is the knowledge that he has mastered, and conscious reflection on the burden of the responsibility, when the whole world depends on him and his decisions, and finally, there is that ability to dominate nature. All three things are in one bag, and someone governing over them and thus, also over us – ruling and caring, making sure that things go as they are supposed to go. It is a proposition of omnipotence that might have had some relevant grounds for belief when it was made, but which has lost, completely lost the battle against time. The statue now looks so lost – and not likely to be found in the near future. If anything, the statue causes a flow of crocodile tears that commemorate the lost illusion of that all-powerful act that would take care of anything and everything.

Secondly, it is the very site and setting that makes me laugh. It is a site that through the 1990s became the scene of the world's largest rave party, the Love Parade, bringing over a million people to this place during a summer weekend – people dancing, drinking and smoking in the street, for a party that was inspired by the openly hedonistic and commercially performed sexualization of house music, actualizing it in the Tiergarten park and in the streets through which the parade moved, through a surreal combination of extremely loud music and a whole craziness of practically nude, pierced and tattooed bodies and chemically entranced minds. (It is not an urban legend: it really became a 'cool' thing to shoot amateur porno video acts during the event). This multitude of confusing scenes makes one immediately wonder what old Bismarck would have thought of it. What would he make of the name of the 'production company' of the cheap skin flicks: In Flagranti? And what would he think if he knew that it is not only acid house ravers who took to this part of the city, but also other parades such as the annual Gay Parade, and that it's the gay community which uses that very symbol of that site where he is now located, the Siegerssaule, as their symbol? Poor Bismarck, I would think. But well, one never knows for sure, right?

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The other case, the other performative and performing monument of a statue of a war hero riding high on a horse is a slightly more recent case, of Marshal Mannerheim in Finland. The debate concerns the subject of the statue, Marshal C. G. E. Mannerheim (1867–1951), who is without doubt an essential figure in the history of Finland. He led the Finnish army in two wars that shaped and then restored the sovereignty of the young nation. (For the full story, see Hannula 1997)

Mannerheim's biography is fascinating. He received his military training in Russia, and before moving back to Finland he served for many years in the Tsar's army in Russia. In the First World War he served as a brigade commander in Poland and then in Romania. Mannerheim returned to Finland in late 1917, after having been abroad for more than two decades. During Mannerheim's homecoming, the situation in the country which had just announced and gained its independence (6 December, 1917) was tense and confused. A civil war began in Finland between two groups that were labelled 'the whites' and 'the reds'. Mannerheim became the head of the 'white' army, which he led to victory in the spring of 1918.

After the civil war Mannerheim served for a short time as the Regent of the country. He then lost the presidential election and decided to

withdraw from active politics. He did not take part in domestic politics between the two world wars. However, with the potential for a new war at the end of the 1930s he was again chosen as the head of the Finnish army. In this role he led the army through first the Winter war (1939–1940) against the Soviet Union and then through the harsh Continuation war (1941–1944). At the end of the war, he served as the president of Finland from 1944 to 1946. After this term he resigned and later moved to live out his life in Switzerland.

It is claimed that Mannerheim, who spoke Swedish as his mother tongue and never did fully master the Finnish language, is a unifying symbol for the independence of the country, as he was able to unite the Finnish nation in the battle against the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, because he was the general on the winning 'white' side during the civil war, he is sometimes also referred to in less positive tones. It must be noted that this civil war was, until the conflicts inside the former Yugoslavia, perhaps the most brutal civil war seen in Europe in the 20th century, and deeply divided the country. These divisions are still easily seen in the structures of social imaginary in Finland.

As for the history of the statue itself, it was designed by the sculptor Aimo Tukiainen and it was presented in June, 1960. It is claimed that over 50,000 people followed this event. The money for the statue came from personal donations by the Finnish people. The building of the monument and its placement were highly disputed in the 1950s. Not only who should design it and how it should be built was debated, but the whole idea was controversial because the Communist party, which was in those times a major force in domestic politics, was against the whole project. The place chosen for the statue has huge symbolic resonance. It is placed on the site where the White Army entered Helsinki in May, 1918, after having conquered the Reds. The lake behind the statue is claimed to represent the pure nature of Finland. It is also said that the site serves as a symbolic port for foreigners and visitors to this beautiful land of forests and a thousand lakes.

But yes, the statue has a very contemporary and performative character. This takes us to the years of dramatic economic recession in Finland during the early and mid-1990s. That was the time when a long-debated new museum of contemporary art was to be built. A site was chosen next to the statue of Mannerheim, and the American architect Steven Hall won the international design competition. What happened, in short, was a remarkable clash of social imaginations. A huge uproar arose, that started to work against the idea of the new museum.

What the vast masses of protesters were against was first the fact that something new and unexpected was to come next to the holy statue, and that new next to it was something weird and modern, completely unacceptable to the site as a museum of art, and finally, that it was designed by a foreigner. Not to dwell too long in the details, what happened was that the protest wave got so strong that it almost stopped the building of the museum.

However, in a true social democratic spirit a compromise was forged, the original plan of the building slightly truncated, and the museum got built, leaving the old and the new, the statue and the museum standing proudly next to one another. The most remarkable result, looking back some ten years after the opening of the museum, and contrary to the fears of the nationalist rhetoric and their propaganda machinery, is that the statue itself looks splendid. It looks better than ever, gaining from the backdrop that the wall of the museum gives to it, providing it with a perfect façade and place in the limelight of that busy intersection in the heart of the city of Helsinki. All of a sudden the statue got a fantastic facelift. It no longer looks lost and lonely, but serves the purpose it was built for. It reminds us of a past that is present. The best thing, of course, is that so far, even with the museum contradicting the aura of the symbol of the independence, this small nation-state in fact remains independent.

When thinking of other performances of the public power, history reminds of public executions or public humiliations. Not to put too brave face on it, we can pick out the recent phenomena of smoking in public areas, and think of how, especially in Nordic countries, smoking is already completely banned from inside offices and also even from restaurants and bars. The consequence is that people are forced to go outside for their habit, which sometimes causes rather peculiar scenes. Just imagine the scenes in the dead of winter when it is minus 20 degrees outside and the serious smokers are huddled together puffing away. Or remember witnessing the scenes at airports where smokers (I am especially thinking of Helsinki airport here) flock into these see-through boxes that remind us of huge scale aquariums – boxes that in fact serve as an open call for the passers-by to point at and ridicule these poor losers who still can't kick their smoking habit, thus becoming a site for performing a social stigma.

But whether the performance of a public space turns into nasty celebration of nationalism, or accidentally produces unintentional comedy of a kind, or promotes tolerance and solidarity, in all cases it

is about both how that particular site is constructed to perform for and about a narrative, and consequently what kind of production of space is materialized in and through it.

With the idea and aim of performing the space into becoming a place, the task is not, again contrary to, for example, De Certeau, to altering the site through walking and talking<sup>(1984, 117)</sup>. Instead of putting weight on the act of altering as in changing the construction of a site, the task is at the same time more modest but also relevant in it's aim to challenge and push the taken-for-granted parameters and habits of the heart.

Rather than aiming directly at and immediately changing a space and its genealogy of structuration, in order to be able to alter something the task is to pay attention to two interrelated aspects: the ways we imagine and experience that place within a space, and, subsequently, what are the means we can use to shape and produce this imagination. It is about imagination as the priority that enables us to address and attain constructive yet critical changes in structures and everyday life constructions. The crucial point here being an active reminder of our central notion: without the part of altering the imagination and, yes, playing with fires (plural: content of concepts, images, acts and symbols), a process of any sort is bound to become stuck and degenerate into just repeating itself. In its classic form, it goes like this: before the city is built, it has to be imagined.

It must be admitted that here the 'lorry of love' that serves us in the process of shifting from an all too static social imaginary towards an activated, self-critical, open-ended and challenging social imagination is almost overloaded with high hopes. But again, these are hopes not for immediate change but for the power and potentiality of stories – for ways to imagine and move with the emotions. These are then stories, told and shared stories, that might be able to bridge the gap between particularities and generalizations, between individuals and collectives, between singular acts and the structures where they are seeking to evolve – and to emerge, to become a place. It is the task – to refer to Miwon Kwon in connection to site-specific art – of locating the terrain between mobilization and specificity<sup>(2002)</sup>. That is an important idea which serves here as a bridge between abstract discursive levels and the specific case studies with the works of art that I want to talk with, walk with, and invite you to think with.

I will walk and talk with five cases of performative works that deal with the issue of altering a space into a place. These cases are not taken up as to illustrate a point. Nor are they the top five most important acts of performing a content of a concept, and finally, neither is their selection random. These works, starting with Igor Grubic, continuing with Elin Wikström and Anna Brag, then moving on to Ulf Rollof, and after a short break for reflection, following up with Santiago Sierra and finishing this chapter with Irene Kopelman, are here because of both my personal conviction and also my personal experiences in and through them. These experiences are not necessarily from being there myself, but always come through the access of relating to the stories told of them by the artists themselves. These five cases of the construction of social imagination are here to provide a broad view into the range of how performing a space into a place is always an act that involves a both-and strategy. It is a physical effort, and it is a discursive deed. The point is the interaction between these two sides of the same act and intervention. That is a setup that hopefully invites pleasant and creative comparisons among these cases.

IGOR GRUBIC  
**DANCING IN THE STREETS**

With this still ongoing long-term project by the Croatian artist Igor Grubic, there is clearly a time during and a time after. There are events that happened; events of very problematic dimensions and also consequences, and then there is the act of re-enacting, not only simply re-constructing or mimicking these events. Thus, logically, there is then a post-construction phase where the work is done, narrated into an installation with moving images.

The starting point for the project, entitled *East Side Story* and first shown at the end of 2008 at the Salon of the Contemporary Art Museum of Belgrade, is the Gay Pride demonstrations in both Zagreb (his home town) and Belgrade in the years 2001 and 2002. In connection with these dramatic and traumatic events of post-Yugoslav social imaginary, Grubic has used and produced two types of footage. There is the rather straight-forward edited material of the demonstrations (blending together scenes from both cities), and then there is the re-enactment of these scenes as performed by professional dancers at the same sites.

The result is a combination of documentary and fictional story-telling and construction of a narrative, combined next to each other, not intertwined onto the same screen. We have original documentary footage of the demonstration and then a commentary track to it. Together, we have a very accurate and clear example of performing the public space, a performance as the example of violence by the bigots, and a re-enacted performance by the dancers. The latter performance was done in the summer of 2007, consisting of an intense three month period of try-outs and practice and then the actual performing at the sites for a camera. The literal point being that these re-enactments took place at the sites and spots of the 2002 violence in Zagreb, underlining the open and even radical shift from social and spatial imaginary to social and spatial imagination. In the actuality of its burning-not-at-all-healing terms, it draws the distinction between what one is used to seeing and acknowledging in the streets of Zagreb, and what then happened on the streets during the Gay Parade.

It is a difference based on the normal invisibility of homosexuals in the public domain. And yes, in contrast, on the act of coming out, taking to the streets and then unfortunately, on the chain of events that took off. These are events that are not easy to watch. There are the

demonstrators, and then there is the vast public attendance, people on the sidelines watching them. There are the forces that openly and very aggressively act and abuse in their reaction against this event. There is open violence; people are attacked, kicked and pummelled with sticks and fists while the police and people simply watch. What was intended to be an uplifting experience of demonstrating Gay pride in the streets of Zagreb and Belgrade, turns into a homophobic scene of violence and intolerance.

So, what does Grubic do with this powerful documentary material? What can he possibly add to these scenes of naked archaic violence against people, due to their sexual preferences? Does it make any sense at all to try to add something to it or to do something with the material?

As a matter of fact, before coming up with the strategy of connecting the two types of visual materials by placing them next to each other, Grubic did start with a different plan. At first, in 2006, he tried many ways of doing a straightforward documentary work, with the idea of combining the original footage with theories of identity and nationalism, and connecting these with interviews of people who participated in the parade. But after struggling long enough with the sense of being stuck, he realized he had to try something else. And that something else lead him to the discussions with the dancers and the thought of performing and reflecting the violence.

The important difference is that Grubic is not after re-enacting the scenes. Instead, he transforms and translates the violent scenes into acts of contemporary dance. This is done in collaboration with four professional dancers who perform at and on the scenes of the demonstration – dancers who are well known in their own field, working under the name of Bad Company.

The work is shown as a two-channel projection, placing the footage in corners next to one another, slightly apart but at close range, both visually and audibly. Both parts of the film are about 13 minutes long. There is the cruel and disturbing violence, and those frightening scenes of how the police stand by passively and do nothing until the morons begin to attack the policemen too. One important point of stirring the social imagination is that what we see is violence with which we all have some type of experienced relationship. We too have seen and felt this kind of violence. It is not just information that has floated in and through the white noise of media. This is concrete and

personal – sticks that break bones, kicks that destroy a person's nose and blood that you can't wash off your t-shirt. This is violence that we can't deny. We know it physically, not only conceptually. Luckily, not all of us necessarily know it through open aggression, but via by incidents of falling down or getting into a raw physical contact, for example in various types of sport activity.

Then there is the act of contemporary dance, the visible and available, undoubtedly recognizable body movements of the dancers on those sites of crime, hurt and sadness. This is the other extreme, a marginal medium of expression in contemporary societies, but a medium that is here used to bridge the gap between entities that are often seen as fundamentally separated. There is that loud, bloody violence, and then as a contrast, a delicate yet aggressive movement of intimacy and actuality. The intimacy of the dancers' movements, taking place both individually and in a group, is set side by side with the ugliness of the neo-Nazis and the football hooligans, sporting verbal and physical violence, chanting their stupid crazy slogans of Sieg Heil and variations of 'let's kill all the faggots'. Their slogans turn into unintentional comedy when we see a group of bare-chested angry young men jumping up and down near some fountain, chanting loudly while jumping: those who don't jump are faggots.

In the dance there is distance, but still the very visible connection to what it comes from. There is the original act that is not copied or mimicked. What we have as a work of art is the double play and double take of two video projections next to one another, the one showing the actual demonstrations, and the other the scenes acted upon and commented on by professional dancers at these sites. They are public spaces that are made into a singularity of place.

You sense the traces of the past, the acts of hatred and shame, and you sense the wish to do something with it, to act it again, but in a different manner. It is an act that is not after vengeance. It does not seek to repeat the violence. The act of either a solo dancer, or especially the interplay with a group of dancers challenging and sparring with each other, moves from a very specific act into an abstraction that is nevertheless very unique. The act is strongly situated and embedded, but at the same time able to take distance and also allow us to go the distance – to see, feel and experience a public space in a different manner. It is an alternative that does not repeat the mistakes and stupidity of what it bounces off of. This is not amnesia, this is activism – performing a place.

The memory of the loss and hurt is not swept away, but it is carried along and transformed. The sense and sensibility of the whole of the events and what to do about them starts to move in unforeseen directions. It goes somewhere else, but it does not get there unless we are willing to follow it. It is a performance of a place in a specific space with its current history that achieves the singularity of a movement. It is a temporality of a becoming of a singularity of a place. It is an emotional appearance and disappearance that can only be experienced, felt for and felt with – and then taken further with us. In one word: there is hope embedded into these acts of dancers, hope of transition and translation, empowerment with the body, with our experiences that are opened up, not closed down.

ELIN WIKSTRÖM AND ANNA BRAG  
**MOVING BACKWARDS FORWARDS**

This is a work of art that takes us back over a decade. It is also a case that has its focus on an activity and a site that was already there, and then was taken as the substance for performing it differently, as something else. This project by the Swedish artists Elin Wikström and Anna Brag was realized during the Münster sculpture project in the summer of 1997. It is a work of art that is so elegantly accessible that it makes you almost want to cry, a work of art that deals with the fabric of our daily life but does this by slightly altering the coordinates of how that reality is constructed and conceived. It is a minor chance – as in a small gesture – that has both a short-term and a long-term tremendous effect.

The site of this act is the park in a city centre. The park, which has been the site of the project since its beginning, accommodates some of the permanent works done through the years of the event, which started in 1977. It is a park that is beloved and in constant use by the residents of the city. Thus, the site is not an awkward construction but a site that is there anyhow – now being made available for a new type of an intervention, an intervention that – like the site – is not invented out of context, but is created from the possibilities of use on that site.

What Wikström and Brag did was to pay attention to the popular pastime activity of cycling tours in the park. Here it is helpful to say that even if the park does reach almost into the city centre, it is a vast piece of land that extends along the riverside, making it easy to access not only by walking but especially with bikes. Thus, we have the explanation for the existing activity of guided and organized tours and also collective clubs for people riding bikes together.

Now, what did the artists do? Did they paint the bicycles pink? Did they make them out of soap? Did they plan routes that took the bike riders to unaccustomed and strange parts of the park? No, they performed none of these very obvious interventions. What they did was, in fact, something with the structure of the bike. These bikes were then made available for users as being part of the work of art.

Not wanting to get too technical, what the artists discovered and then realized was a detail that is small in size but has enormous consequences. It is the detail in a bike that functions in between you pedalling and the effect of the chain moving the actual wheel in a certain direction. This device, let's call it an 'attachment', for lack of a better

word or technical knowledge, is the mechanical part that makes the wheel turn forward. It is a device – and now we are about to reveal the alteration – that the artists wanted to turn upside down and have it do the reverse.

After some detailed consultation with experts, it became clear that the desired effect was possible, and it was possible to do it without too much extra cost. It was the act of changing that device we're calling an 'attachment' so that it made the wheel turn, not forward as it normally does, but now backwards. Simple and effective – and very funny. The consequence is that the act of riding this bike is just like riding any bike – almost. You pedal like you are used to, but the effect of pedalling forward is that the bike moves backwards. And yes, here, what we are talking about is a change from what we are used to, and how that small gesture makes that activity into something else.

Just try to picture it. In your imagination go through sitting on the bike, starting to pedal – and wow, after a moment of hesitation, it moves – and it goes backwards! Imagine the effect of altering how you sense, feel and experience that motion which comes so naturally and which, we all know, once you learn it, you will never forget it. The physical memory of riding a bike is reawakened and vitalized with a kind of invitation to do something silly, and then, through the same old but now differently transformed practice, it is shaken, twisted and turned. Not abused, but certainly thrown off balance. You are doing something that you are very used to doing, and good at doing, but now it's all very very different.

In order to make this reverse act more accessible in its physicality, the artists customized the bikes that ran backwards with extra equipment that gave a helping hand. They attached extra wide mirrors, so that while you face forwards and pedal normally, via the mirrors you are able to see where you are actually going. Then they added a pair of 'training wheels' to the back wheel – the accessories that we are used to seeing on children's first bikes, so that they learn how to cycle without constantly falling over. With these contextualized improvements, the bikes themselves were ready. And steady. They were ready for the users and the tours.

What happened then? Well, this is the part that becomes a fairy tale, a story that is as sweet as it is true. Did the potential bike users like them? No, they loved them! They loved them to the max. They liked them so much that it did not take long before the afterlife of the

project was secured. These were bikes that people felt for – and felt like taking responsibility for. With no beating around the bush, there was a new cycling organization established. These were cyclists who used these works of art in their hobby of taking and organizing cycle tours in the park, on bikes that look exactly like any other normal bike but do something a little bit different.

As the beautiful story continues, to this day these bikes are in use, making and shaping that public space into a singularity of a place that occurs and reoccurs again and again, whenever some people cycle forwards while others keep on going on backwards. Some of them move slowly, some of them cycle with more advanced moves and grooves. But all of them pedal and they move – backwards forwards.

ULF ROLLOF  
**FROM A CHAIR WITH A VIEW**

This is an example that takes us to the border between Texas and Mexico. The border is known locally and internationally as a social, political and geographic imaginary field defined by the traffic of illegal immigrants, and consequently the harsh controls on the border, and the construction of border walls. This is a work of art that was meant to be temporary, but which gained such popularity that there were calls for a more permanent stay, but which, in the end, was not allowed to remain at its site.

This is the work by the Swedish artist Ulf Rollof, which he realized as a part of the Santa Fe Biennial in 1994, an event called *In-Site*, which took place on both sides of the border. Rollof's work was located on the Mexican side, becoming a site-specific installation in the area called Colonia Libertad, in the city of Tijuana, Mexico. Rollof's work was inspired by and through the idea of giving the site and the viewers something special, and something that was a gift from where he himself came from. When thinking of what this could be, Rollof made the mental breakthrough while driving through the vast forests of Sweden, seeing trees and then more trees and more trees pass by.

Thus, his idea of using spruce trees as a material, and as bearer of the weight of a Nordic symbol. It was a materiality that he had also used in numerous installations previously. Combined with this idea of a tree, Rollof wanted to alter the site so that people living and visiting on that side of border would – for this period of time – view it in a way that was a little bit different. To set this in scene, Rollof insisted on choosing a site for his work that was very close to the border wall built and guarded from the US side. In other words: a site of open and visible conflicts and contradictions. This meant that what were available for temporary use were sites that were neglected and away from the normal policing and business use. What he settled on was a space next to a trailer park, and particularly a space that was serving as a very typical trash dump.

As a start, there was the need for a proper clean-up operation. After managing to move enough of the trash – broken chairs and discarded tyres – he obtained an area about 30 meters on each side. For this empty lot Rollof designed a hybrid device that reminded one of the merry-go-rounds on children's playgrounds. What the construction looked like was a full circle made of rails. The rails made the movement of a

chair possible; a cheap, found red plastic chair that was placed into the very centre of the circle, connecting that chair to the main frame with a steel barrel. There was a motor that operated the construction, slowly but surely moving the chair along a rail around the whole panorama of 360 degrees. This rail was very close to the wall, surrounding by the remains of the dilapidated area and its not-so-superb-looking trailers.

As the final touch in the construction, Rollof added the trees. Not trees from Sweden, because that would have cost too much, but trees imported from north of the north, from the country called Canada. These five beautiful green spruce trees were placed directly in front of the view from the chair, making the distance between where you sat and the trees you kept seeing in front of you about 15 meters. The point was this: while sitting in the red chair, and while moving around the circle at a crawl, you kept seeing the trees and adjusting your previous view of the site because of those strange creatures from far away, seeing with and seeing about it all in an altered way. You did see the trees (as symbols for the north from which Rollof himself came, and yes, albeit a somewhat different north, towards which a lot of people in Tijuana look) but those damn trees stared back at you – making you aware of where and how you saw what you saw. The act of a contextualized perception was underlined by the slow-motion movement of the panorama vision (something you only have access to if you rotate around in a circle like, you know, the kids at the playground do), adding another great twist to the process.

Rollof's act combined deliberate naivety and accessibility, the conventions of children's playgrounds and the joys that they are meant to spread. This time the machine was re-located to an unusual site. Here it was, in a previously left-over waste land, inviting the neighbours and their kids to be part of it and enjoy it. The vehicle was indeed a sort of a make-shift carousel, but then again, it was also something else.

And precisely as a 'something else' it also survived in those new circumstances. Against the odds and against the expectations of the local organizers, this carousel as a work of art became a very specifically situated hit. It was taken up as part of the collective property of that site. Contrary to the warnings of the art event organizers, there was not one single act of vandalism against it. The people living next to it became its proud users and caretakers, making sure that it was used with love and care. They guarded it and they used it. True, some of them used it while drinking beer and shouting heart-felt insults to

others, but at the same time, the site gave a much needed and desired space for kids to come and play in safety, not only with this work, but in the cleaned-up area next to it.

So, what happened afterwards? After the exhibition event was over and done, after the artists had disappeared back to wherever they came from – after that came the initiative by the local residents and users of the work, promoting the idea of it staying where it was. It was a work with situated social significance and engaged beauty. Was the work allowed to stay? Unfortunately, no. It was removed even though the local residents were willing to commit themselves to maintaining the place that had provided the very first functioning site for their children to play safely. It was taken away even if the artist was ready to donate the work to the city on the condition it would be taken care of. But no, the city declined the offer, referring to the costs of maintaining the work and the danger of it being vandalised and broken. All reasons that were given were either invented or exaggerated ones, contrary to the experiences of both the artist and his unusual but all the more active and pleased audience. But yes, reasons that were referred to in order to legitimatise the decision – and reasons that, even if a small corridor of change had been allowed into the social imaginary, were swiftly used to kill that hope and keep that social imaginary locked and stopped, dead on arrival.

### Characteristics and Requirements

After the examples, the boredom of abstract recommendations and theory. Or is there another way? I mean: how could we combine the detailed and specific cases with the conceptual requirements and challenges we all face when trying to move towards performing a space into becoming a place? That's a task that is crucial, whether this is a direct intervention into a site in the urban environment or it is about re-working and re-visiting the content of a concept (image, act, symbol) - and not to forget, how to keep these active and up in the air simultaneously through the strategy and attitude of both-and?

What is it that we need? Or to put it from another perspective: how much can we articulate and have attachment to the roots and routes when staying on the abstract level? As an attitude and a potential strategy, it is important not to forget or overlook the inherent changes of contemporary art that are so often marginalized, not being in themselves a part of the logic of spectacle and consumption – while not

denying either that some parts of contemporary art definitely strive to do exactly that.

But from our position of trying to create and generate ways of being with and thinking with, it is about how to cherish and maintain the courage to be naïve, to ask the stupid questions, to use the invisible diplomatic pass that is available for us as artists. And yes, to do all these seemingly inferior but effective acts of questioning with the purpose of (at the same time) questioning one's own motives and acts. In short, it is absolutely required that we not think that art in itself is a solution or is per se good. Performing public space is characteristically a quixotic act – but not through attacking windmills, but learning to be friends with them (in whatever form or colour they appear). This is to shift the attention from putting blame on this or that, for example, on the tourist industry or gentrification, and to force the focus onto ways of thinking differently and acting differently. The process of self-criticality requires an ability to let loose of perfect enemies, those lovely voodoo dolls that always do exactly what we want them to do. But of course, that is the reason why they are so uninteresting and fruitless, except in supporting our vanity.

However, let us now return to square one, but part two. This is the square that takes us by the hand to lead us to the corner where we are asked to think and to think again and again about the whole ongoing process and its implications for what happens when we try to perform a common space into a singularity of a place. This is to ask the basic question with the necessary stamina. Contemporary art in public space: what does it mean, what does it require? What is included and what is excluded if and when it is taken to be a procedural activity that is self-reflective and self-critical?

The abstract answer is not that difficult to articulate. It begins with the idea that no matter whether permanent or temporary, an object or an action, a commercial event or a socially engaged process, contemporary art in public space must be situated and thought through in all the steps of why, how, where and what is it for, and so on. This requires confronting three main questions and their complications.

- 1 What is it you do when you do what you do?
- 2 Why do you do it?
- 3 For whom is it done?

In the language of contemporary art, what we are talking about then is not a drop-dead sculpture, not a universal either-or model, and not just another weary buy, play and throw-away product. We are talking about and yearning for something else. It is something else, something more, something that does not break even, but is constantly on the move, leaving something short or filling it up too much – under-scoring and overheating, adding too little or not enough, demanding way too much, expectations boiling over and nothing, absolutely nothing sitting still.

Following the practice and experience from Lucy Lippard (1997, 278, 286), what this means and requires is a place ethic, not a tourist gaze. This ethic implies a respect for and engagement with a place that goes much deeper than just a tourist's once-over take. It is an act that is not disposable, not detached, but on the contrary, an act that carries with it the weight of controversies and complexes, an act that nevertheless is able to do a version of that act and to look further for the promise and actualization of yet another version of that act.

According to Lippard, art governed by place ethic is characterized by the following list. It is:

- 1 Specific
- 2 Collaborative
- 3 Generous and open-ended
- 4 Appealing
- 5 Simple and familiar
- 6 Layered, complex and unfamiliar
- 7 Evocative
- 8 Provocative and critical

For Lippard, the aim in a far more perfect world than our current one – one that is socially compassionate, egalitarian, unbigoted, responsible, heterogeneous, peaceful, somewhat socialist, and respectful of art – is that culture would be recognized as a crucial social ingredient and would be funded as generously as science and social services. Public art would be part of curriculums from kindergarten through doctoral programs. (Ibid 291)

Well, is this outlook, this inspiration, this promise to our collectives and to ourselves naïve enough? Yes, and it is that, precisely because it is a version and a type of a hope that is anchored, situated and embedded. It is openly and decisively part of the mess, part of the problem, not pretending to be outside of it or fantasizing ways of solving or

providing remedies for the dilemmas we face. Because, yes, without these nagging dilemmas, without the breath-taking excessive load of demands that we are confronted with, without the near impossibility of even getting into the process of moving towards these aims, without these, there is nothing. Without these inherent dilemmas there is no possibility of doing what is required: staying put and enjoying these controversies and dilemmas. One by one, like dominoes they fall and cause an effect, a productive effect. They get next to us, and we must find ways to get next to them. One by one, not all of them at the same time, we must negotiate and navigate our ways in relation to these claims and demands, acts that must happen in and through self-reflective and critical open-ended practices, specific cases – which here, as promised, are first a work by Santiago Sierra and then a project by Irene Kopelman.

SANTIAGO SIERRA  
**A MAN IN A HOLE**

How do we get attached and anchored to a site – that is a site, as an intertwined complexity of physical and discursive aspects of past, present and future?

One of the most straight-forward strategies is to put your finger where it hurts and then press hard, harder and the hardest. It's a strategy often used and misused, as aggressive as it is effective in its way of causing effects. The question is in each case whether the effects achieved are the ones wanted, or whether the process turned into just another spectacle that follows the logic of a black-and-white world-view that produces more of the same locked-up prejudices.

The Spanish-born artist Santiago Sierra is certainly known for his interest in asking difficult and annoying questions, and his ability to do so. His practice in recent years has taken him truly through a wide variety of social and political issues. We can recall his work at the Berlin Kunst-Werke, where he asked asylum-seekers to sit inside a cardboard box, paying them the minimum wage to sit there quietly and still for a period of four hours. Sierra placed four of these boxes in a line in the middle of the huge white cube of the lower main hall of the exhibition site, creating a minimal intervention with maximum content. In Berlin he was able to shake the tree of taken-for-granted themes of what free will is, what asylum seekers are allowed and supposed to do, and how we react to the situation in which we confront these people who are not visible in the social imaginary, and who here in exhibition were made visible precisely by hiding them in the boxes – boxes that had small holes for air and a pair of see-through holes where we could peer into these dark boxes.

Or we can recall a project where he paid the minimum wage for illegal workers to hold up a complete useless wall inside the gallery space for some hours, or how he paid six men in Havana to each have a line tattooed across their backs, and then, in the post-construction strategy part one, had them stand in a row so that their lines together formed one eight-foot long tattooed line. These men, who were paid the minimum wage and acted with consent, were then reproduced (Sierra's post-construction strategy part II) in a video and a photograph as a work of art.

For our particular case here, I will confront a project Sierra realized in Helsinki as the part of the 2001 ARS exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, the same building we previously reflected on in the example of the Finnish war hero Mannerheim's statue. For this particular case, after a discussion with the museum's curators, when looking for a problematic but local social issue Sierra decided to pick out the theme of homelessness in the city of Helsinki. With the help of the museum he contacted two organizations that work for better conditions of the homeless, approaching them with the idea of employing homeless persons to voluntarily sit in a hole next to the Museum of Contemporary Art building and, yes, do nothing else.

They would be paid the official minimum wage and were asked to sit in that hole for 4 hours each day. The hole was three square meters in width and depth, making it large enough for a person to be able to sit on a makeshift chair, protected against the mid-September rains by a similar makeshift shelter. Still, the shelter was small enough that visitors to the fifth floor of the exhibition building were able to see the person sitting in the hole from the window. A beautiful scenic view from the top, to a man down in a hole! This provided a visual link between the main part of the exhibition and this site-specific, socially engaged project. It also gave the museum staff a handy way of checking up, that these homeless people really did what they were asked and paid to do, and really sat in that hole.

This performance of public space into a singularity of a place was strongly influenced by the immediate surroundings of the museum and this temporary hole. The same distinctive view from the top could also be had from the top floors of the Finnish parliament building, located just across the main road from this particular hole. The hole was in the very heart of the busiest part of the city centre, but also offered a slightly out of the centre opening with its connection to the small city lake next to it.

It was a hole – as in a work of art – dealing with the issue of homeless and their worries, inviting visitors to come around, look into the hole, and to witness how a homeless man was making himself visible. As performance it had a potentiality of forcing together issues that normally neglect or deny the existence of one another – an act of forcing things together, so that we are confronted with things we normally devote loads of energy to not be aware of – including the moments of embarrassment from both sides. This time, even if the cue for the event

was provided by a contemporary art project, it did make the homeless issues part of the agenda in media discussions.

But – and now we come to the main reason why I insisted on thinking with this particular intervention – this performance had another face, a life of its own that it was not possible to control and guard. This is the part that became an element in the process of a narration-in-work. It is the story of how this site and theme was unintentionally performed in a rather nasty but also funny way. It is a story of an urban legend, witnessed by a sufficiently sober museum curator to allow it to be labelled a true story.

It is the story of a man with problems – as in lots of problems. A man with an arm strapped into a dirty sling of a sort, implying a broken or at least seriously injured limb. A man who even with only one functioning hand was now willing and seemingly able to do the job of climbing down into the hole with the help of an aluminium ladder. And that is what he did, after being paid in advance for his services for four hours, leaving the ladder there to help him to get up again once the time was up.

As the story goes, this man did not have that much time to settle into the work of sitting in a hole when another man entered the scene. This second man had some unfinished business with the man in the hole. Before talking business, the second man acted. He pulled the ladder out of the hole. This was a strategic move with great importance attached to it. After getting the attention of the man in the hole this way, the second man started a dialogue with him. The substance of the dialogue was how much money the man in the hole owed the man above, how it was to be paid, and when.

It was absolutely, fundamentally and positively a point of encounter, an everyday act of negotiation that faced the facts and got into the act of give and take. It was a performance of the space that became a singular place. The place was filled with angry words, shouting and spitting, threats and demands. It was filled with the agony of everyday life, as a consequential part of a work of art, but also as an act unique and nasty in its own right.

IRENE KOPELMAN  
**ARCHIVES, FILTRATIONS AND DAMN FINE DRAWINGS**

One of the most visible new strategies of contemporary artists in recent years has been the interest in the structures and contents of wide variety of archives. This strategy is used both as a source for material and information, but also as a means to collect knowledge and frame issues. The attractiveness of archives for artists comes as no great surprise. Whether these are archives of, for example, art museums, historical collections of maps or a local labour union, each of these sites serves as a location for re-collecting symbolic capital and reconstruction of memory. By their very nature, archives gather material and store it for future potential use and function.

But rather than analysing why these sources are so beneficial and used so often, the question raised here articulates this phenomena from the side not of why, but how archives are used. This allows us to address the chances and challenges of how to relate to and deal with the vast resources of archives in the process of making an exhibition, both in terms of the materialization of the piece and overall installation of the work.

Here that task is done with the aid of talking and thinking with a specific project by the Argentinian-born artist Irene Kopelman. It is an example that shows how, in order to really do something with the source material and go the needed distance, there is no escaping the ways of constructing a narrative as the act of what goes in, what is edited out, and what one finally does with the original material in the exhibition.

In case of Kopelman it is the inter-twined road that goes from a archive of a natural history museum through crucial transformations as in productive filtrations and then lands firmly on its feet at the exhibition site as a installation of a set damn fine drawings contextualized into the frame of a classification table.

With Kopelman, the starting point is not just any archive, but a very specific part of a much bigger one. This one is located at the Entomological Collection in the University of Amsterdam (UvA). It is the site of her ongoing research, which focuses on the morphology in insect patterns, looking at the specimens themselves but at the same time examining the overall structure which is needed in order to archive collections of this sort.

It is a site that Kopelman has frequently and consistently visited for the last five years, sometimes at briefer intervals, sometimes with longer periods between visits. Her work has involved going in and staying put, digesting and thinking things through, talking with the employers and winning their trust, obtaining the ability to use the source and have full access to it. What she was drawn towards was the archived collection of butterflies, a collection that is as vast as it is comprehensive. Already here, we face the important element of how to deal with archive material and its very materiality – both with its volume and the notion of time that is inherently involved.

This particular collection provides a fascinating point of departure, but also an ongoing motivation for constant return. What one finds in this location are over 8 million insects. Some of them are beautifully restored and catalogued, some of them still in their small paper bags dating from the field work, waiting to be numbered and put in their specific order and place. They are in a room filled with light brown wooden cabinets, each of them with numerous wide drawers that all hold thousands and thousands of species, a true source of surprises and elements of excitement.

But yes, how does one deal with these insects and the overwhelming numbers of them? Kopelman's process is both very telling and in itself strikingly individual, because how it all starts to unravel and move towards something else is through the physical act of recurring revisits to the site, and the endless acts of opening those drawers, taking the insects out and touching, looking and thinking, wondering with them. It sounds as banal as it in fact is. But is an act that cannot be replaced or denied, one that gains its weight and content through the stamina required for it and the endless repetitions it entails. One by one, again and again, working through, looking and thinking with. And yes, most important, staying with the material, seeking ways to relate to it and reflect with it.

It is an act of classical phenomenological perception of reciprocity that re-negotiates the relationship of who watches and what is watched at, bypassing the rigid notions of object and subject into a question of a relationship. It is an act of give and take that is based on the presupposition of both sides being able to be affected and at the same time having the ability to cause an effect. You are definitely looking at something, but during that process that very something is gazing back at you, affecting what you see and how you see. Something is happening, but that something is emerging very slowly, never in a

hurry and never in a manner of straightforward problem solving. There is absolutely no secret to be discovered, no truth to be chased, netted and pinned down. Instead, there is a promise, and there is anticipation. Something, somewhere, somehow, potentially maybe might be activated and transformed to something else.

The next step in the achingly slow process is of what to do after the initial connection is established. In this particular case, Kopelman started working with the raw material not by putting the butterflies under a microscope, not inspecting the logic of their categorizations, but by taking photos of them, studying the mass volume of them but at the same time going into the nuances and details of each specific insect. This then is photography as a means to develop distance and achieve another kind of a perspective. This is the part of leaving off, but leaving the original material in order to be able to get back to it. This is departure as an act of filtration. Something is transformed, but that something is not necessarily in itself enough.

Again, a description of the process might sound strangely inadequate or silly, but that kind of expectation is courtesy of the illusion and lack of understanding of how knowledge is produced and worked through. In short, whether we can admit it or not, in any process of committed and situated research and transformation there is hardly ever an instant revelation or an immediately gratifying end result. What we face and what we work through are small gestures, small steps and tentative try-outs – no matter what the material or theme at hand is.

The point of taking photographs was a step that she repeated through a number of visits. They did not lead to anything by itself. She tried, but nothing interesting came out of it. Nothing happened, nothing got a move on, or produced a moment of visual and content-driven attraction. Therefore she tried another tactic. She started drawing the butterflies. Instead of the digital means, she was back at the very basic tool of visual and experiential perception: a pen and a piece of white paper. She was drawing them one by one, focusing on the individuality of the chosen butterfly, drawing its form, drawing its spots and its lines.

Drawing is an act of meditative repetition that holds both sides of the process close together: the task of doing the same thing, but consciously doing it all the time in a little bit different way. Kopelman herself describes the process: *“It is the same intention but the outcome is always individual because the fact that the model I am drawing is*

*different. It lures and teases out a different chain of reactions. A slightly altering patterns in the butterfly forces me to do a slightly different drawing.*" (Interview 12.3.2009)

Drawing is a wilful and hopeful act that is grounded in the realization that there would be no possible way to comprehend or to frame all those millions of insects. Because of the technique, the drawing gained its internal logic, leading to a moment of recognition of the criteria which make it what it wants to be. This is a point of crucial relevance. It is the embedded and situated act of bridging the gap between having the information about something and then, through that physical act of drawing, re-activating the nuances of that information. This is the act where we locate the sea change, the paradigmatic alteration of understanding from detached to attached, from neutral to participatory, from generic information to an embodied process of production of knowledge.

This is where she crossed that bridge herself, going through the act of drawing the same but the different, repeating the motions and achieving a return of unique content. It is a recognition of how, within the frame of the same type of a butterfly, you always have those strong similarities, but also those magnificent differences that never cease to impress and motivate to look again, to look with more care and with another type of attention, and also admiration.

To quote Kopelman's own articulation of the nuances of the process: *"They are supposed to be the same but they are not. They are all individual, no matter how minuscule the differences are. This understanding of the patterns and development of evolution does not come into being only by visualizing the individual samples but by a very specific approach to this visual information which is the attempt of understand its morphology by drawing the samples. Opening a drawer, observing the samples and even photographing them did not lead me to a very comprehensive understanding of the samples, nor the collection. It had been even impossible to notice, only by observing, that every single wing in every butterfly is different to the other. It has been only by drawing them that I was able to acknowledge the small details that made each pattern became an unique pattern, similar to the next one but not the same."* (Interview 12.3.2009)

This is attention and admiration, as in feeling with and feeling for. The insects are no longer just a huge body of general material. They have become something else. A gap was closed by the drawing of the sameness of a difference. A process of filtration occurred that

managed to shake up the relationship and the road from here to there, managed to make something happen. In comparison to those photographs where nothing happened, with drawings Kopelman was able to do something with the source material. There was the physical fact and act of constant repetition, but the result was not just more of the same but in a different format. Now, there was that needed and necessary bounce, there was the distance gained a distance that holds dearly to the interconnectedness but refuses to stay put with the starting point and position. An act of drawing achieved a meaningful type of a infiltration.

To quote Kopelman again, first from an interview and then from her own text: *“Via the realization of this project that I came into a different understanding of the idea and shift between visual understanding from analog to digital technology. It was only by trying first to photographically record the patterns and after experiencing drawing them that I understood the complete different mind frame that each of those procedures entails and the whole set of different associations that the mind undergoes with the different procedures.”* (Interview 12.3.2009)

*“Another interesting thing about drawing as a way of acquiring a certain type of knowledge is that it also requires a certain type of skill. These skills are not only for drawing but also for observing. You cannot learn this type of skills overnight; it requires some time and patience. ... The time factor becomes then a fundamental factor for this project; time to see, time to draw, and time to engage not only with the material collection but also with the people working in the collection. The vastness of the collection becomes a blockade when one tries to enter it. One can easily get lost, either in the overall landscape of the infinitive drawers, or in the details of one particular sample. It is the people who work in the collections who could help make or break a project of this kind. And it is again the time factor, allowing them to understand what you are looking for in the collection. They need to see what you are doing, look what you are looking at and see you getting lost in the collection few times until they realize how they could help you and they could start guiding you through the collection. Lastly the time factor is also implied in letting the information settle, your processing it until you understand how to materialize it as an artwork.”* (Kopelman 2009, 42-43)

But the central question still begs to be confronted. It is now clear how Kopelman deals with this specific archive and within this specific project. But yet to be articulated is how this process manifests itself in the visual and physical reality of an exhibition.

It is a work called *Ubx expression*, and the first version of it was shown at an Apex Gallery group show in New York at the end of 2008. But before going into the details of it, let us recall the description of the project – reminding us of the insects and the visual demonstrations of evolution. *“The Ubx protein regulates detailed aspects of scale morphology, pigmentation and eyespot pattern in the hindwing in butterflies. Due to the pigmentation of moths and butterflies it is easy to visualize the difference in patterns, nevertheless this rule of differentiation is shared by any living and non-living organism.”* (Apexart exhibition information 2008)

But what do we have? What do we get? How is the strategy chosen to deal with the massive archive of 8 million insects manifested visually and physically at the exhibition site?

We see a truly focused, deliberately minimalistically edited installation object that is very controlled and carefully executed, a series of drawings (the correct number is 47) boxed into the frame of a classification table that normally would hold the original insects. They are set on three parallel levels, next to one another. The size is same but the content is transformed and transmitted into a new realm. We see and we recognize a shift, a bounce and a filtration – the road from the original insect to a situated and heart-felt interpretation of it.

As a process, it is a beautiful act of performing and re-activating a collection that is there waiting to be activated, a source of knowledge and a source of pleasure that waits and waits, year in and year out, so patiently, so calmly, so elegantly. So very unlike almost everything we confront in our daily lives, controlled by the cruel pace of our collective ADHD syndrome. It is an archive that resists fast-forward solutions and spectacular overtakes. It does not beg or borrow or run around in circles seeking attention. It stands tall and proudly as an archive that demands respect and recognition, not through fabulous conceptual or economic means, but through getting close to it and staying close to it.

This time that act of respect, recognition and transformation was achieved through a series of drawings, delicate drawings that do not shout, do not scream as through their size or visual gimmicks. These are like small fragile breaths, like those temporary gestures of blowing hot air into a glass panel and then circling some hasty lines onto it. This time, instead of absence or hastiness, what we witness is the power of slowness, the ability to attract our attention to details and differences.

There is that incredibly inviting lightness of the touch, a lightness that plays so well with the massive volume from which it has taken an individual perspective and distance. These drawings make those small distinctions available and alive. These drawings are a collection of observations that lead us towards somewhere, where we have perhaps been before but which we have forgotten or no longer know how to appreciate and wonder with. They are source of amazement and joy based on the archive's incredible richness and evident but vital calmness. The archive has been activated to become something else, not a nostalgic longing but a contemporary performative act of making things both possible and pleasurable, perceivable and persistent in their presence.

# VI VI SOCIAL IMAGINATION

"THE TASK IS TO STAY AND TO LEAVE  
A TRACE – A RECIPROCAL EFFECT OF  
RE-FIGURING AND READJUSTING THE  
PARAMETERS OF OUR BEING-IN-THE-  
WORLD."

SOCIAL

MAGAZINE

ON

POLITICS, IDENTITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

In a very crucial sense the question at stake, and the issue we're focusing on within the concept of social imagination, is as classical as it is simple. First of all, performing a space into becoming a place, and performing a concept (or an image, symbol, act) into becoming unique content within it, is the process of transforming the expectations and anticipations of that site. Second, it is the good old act of how to do things with words that themselves are deeds. It is both about the physical and discursive aspects of the process. Third, in each and every case the process can only achieve what it wants to do and reach what it is moving towards when it is committed, anchored and situated. You have to know where you have come from in order to have any chance of making a difference where you are standing right now. It is in and through conflicts and collisions that something happens – and it is within this process of becoming that everything is at stake.

This process always takes place in a continuity of acts and actions, a game between experiences and expectations. We can relate to the process by recalling the different ways in which something that is known and typical is changed all of a sudden into something specific and strange. These are the moments when things that are taken for granted collide with a new kind of weird touch that alters the way we have understood this given activity. It is literally a moment of awakening when a space becomes a place. Here that space is, for example, a substitute word for a certain fresh, unexpected touch and colour within a genre of communication and production of culture. It is a space which we normally do not consider interesting or problematic, but that now breaks through into a meaningful place which can no longer be ignored (or at least is much more difficult to ignore).

Examples are not that hard to come by. These are examples that by necessity are very personal and serve as a trampoline for your own versions of them. When thinking of the combination of a classic form that is suddenly renewed, it is obviously pleasantly nerdy to recall some works of popular culture that have left a permanent mark. They did not change a dark and cold night into a sunny day (or the other way around), but what they did do was to alter the content of how an act of cultural production is done and performed.

Here the list must obviously include one movie by Quentin Tarantino, especially his re-visiting the classic blaxbotation and crime genre of the 1970's with a film called *Jackie Brown*. This is the moment when we need to watch Jonathan Demme's concert film of the *Talking Heads* again, the title of which already says so much: *Stop Making Sense*.

And yes, this is where we bow down deeply in amazement to the achievement of Michael Chabon in his novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, a book which manages to be politically incorrect in its ability to twist our expectations of the social imaginary of the Jewish state and all that goes along with it. It is an activated and conflictual place which is condensed into a single sentence repeated often enough throughout the book: These are strange times to be a Jew. This is where we remember with sweet gentle kindness both the book and the TV series by Dennis Potter called *The Singing Detective*, dating from the mid-1980s. And yes, this is where we stop and laugh with the cartoon series *South Park*, whether for its treatment of religion or the hysterically fabulous stars that it ridicules.

All the cultural works mentioned above take a form that is thought to be almost beyond renovation and then, bang, they do something fantastic with it. Tarantino does it with his deep feeling for the abilities of forgotten actors who are given a new life with his film, and with a storyboard that is both predictable and unexpected. With Demme's film, in collaboration with the band he makes the impossible possible: a pop music concert film that is intellectually entertaining and possible to watch more than once. Chabon on the other hand combines the elements of hard-boiled fiction into a story that literally alters our way of social imagination. The novel is all about Jewish identity and a Jewish state, but in a situation where that state is not in the Middle East, but where it has been functioning for 60 years as a temporary safe haven at the far end of Alaska. The book starts from the scene where the US government finally wants to reoccupy its own territory. *The Singing Detective* is an example of how a musical in the format of a six-part TV series can be both challenging and entertaining, while addressing the issues of loss and death, nostalgia and belonging, both individual and collective, in a touching but acute way. Finally, with *South Park*, no fancy comments are called for, but just the remark that not everything in connection to the act and performance of becoming a place is intentional or very high-brow. It can be downright nasty, like the episode where the small brute called Cartman gets punished in the classroom for suggesting that a kid in the school ought to be sent to a concentration camp. Cartman tries to defend himself by saying that he had no idea of the Nazis or what horrible things they did, he just wanted to help, do the right thing, thinking that a concentration camp was a place where kids who have difficulties sitting down and concentrating are sent to learn more discipline and the ability to focus.

All in all – and please fill in the gaps with your own memories and interpretations – it is about an awareness of the interplay and interconnectedness between each act and the context within which it tries to turn from general and generic space into a singularity of a place. It is about motions – emotions, houses and concepts on the move. For this, for the movement and the room to do this, we need to use our imagination. We need to think differently. We must shake the bag of how we see, what we see and when we see what we deem to be interesting enough to pay attention to.

Shaking things up is a need that is as basic as it is currently misused as a lifestyle gimmick. But rather than striving for yet another way to package, sell and promote stuff, you know, the fully commodified stuff that is already occupying too much room everywhere, the task is to activate something that could be called ethical imagination. This is the act of feeling with, and feeling for. I don't necessarily mean feeling sad or sorry for, but feeling the wish and need to take part, and then to share, and through that participation, to care.

An ethics of imagination asks us to change perspectives and put ourselves in the position of the other. Here the other is often a dramatic case or a person who is hurt, horrified or abused. It is the imagination to feel for the sorrows that have been and are being experienced. Following Ricoeur (1999, 9), it is also about both our opportunity and our responsibility to tell stories differently – the task of now telling stories that are silenced, ridiculed and neglected, stories that are not only repeated from another angle and perspective, but that are also transformed through the plurality of existing and colliding versions.

However, with the concept of social and spatial imagination I want to insist that we ought to ask for more, indeed demand more of both our personal and collective imagination. Without any doubt, the acts of telling the stories from the viewpoint of the ones who are under-represented or forgotten, the ones getting kicked in the head again, and the hordes of the losers in history is always important and needed. My point is that this in itself is not yet enough. The task is to generate and create ongoing sites where these different stories on the same theme and event are asked to stay next to each other, to bounce off from one stage to the next, with the aim of finding courage to allow that plurality and confusion of interests and that cacophony of narratives to go on and to evolve. The task is to stay and to leave a trace – a reciprocal effect of re-figuring and readjusting the parameters of our being-in-the-world.

What we need to demand is imagination that grows from within a practice of participating in the ways of shaping both the agenda and the actuality of a space. This is then to be viewed as embedded imagination that must rigorously step in beside the cheap one-off effects and then go beyond them, as it moves away from black-and-white binary oppositions. It has to get rid of the tourist gaze, the hypocrite's pose and the cynic's prose. It then is imagination that is more clever than just pointing the finger and telling the other version of the story. It is imagination that adds up in a way that transforms these stories. It causes a reaction of re-thinking and re-telling. It causes an outcome of extra value, a surplus, by not just breaking even, by not letting itself be backtracked or sidelined into controlled categories and industrially standardized DIN definitions.

With any site and its issues it is our duty to remember, to re-work through them and to tell these plural stories. But it is also our responsibility not to get caught in these stories that so easily just reproduce the usual suspects and inevitable structures of rights and wrongs, goods and bads. The task is to find ways that open up the frozen territories, and cheat, lure and bargain the various participants into climbing out of their foxholes and getting into the reality of interrelated beingness in the world.

The kind of an imagination that I am after is not a product. It is by its very vital character a productive act, but it cannot be fully pinned down. It is imagination that is about our social and spatial relationships.

But let us get back to the very central comparison and differentiation between what is seen as social imaginary and social imagination. Where is, in the end, the difference? We do need to recall that, according to Charles Taylor (2004, 195), social imaginary stands for being active, contemplative, describing and defining process. It strives towards the emergence of local particulars – and on the macro level, it is about defining and providing room for the co-existence of the multiple modernities and provincialities of Europe.

But how deep does this go? How could we move from static imaginary to activating social imagination? And why bother in the first place, if the former claims to be a procedural activity?

Just as with the notion of ethical imagination, the difference between imaginary and imagination is about the scale and intensity, not the issue itself. Nor, when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, is it always about

what is achieved, but it is also very much about what one is striving towards, and with what levels of coherence and commitment. It is about how strongly attached and established that version of imaginary is – and how consequentially and consciously it struggles to be open-ended, self-critical and reflective. In one very important sense, the difference is between the scales of how much self-uncertainty and fragility is allowed, and how much the process is predetermined.

We are getting closer to the honest dilemmas of how to comprehend the construction and aim of a civil society – an entity that is not something in itself, but is what it can be only as the consequence and sum of both the quantity and quality of the participation in and through it. Let's remind ourselves of these basic notions, as they function in the constellation of a civil society <sup>(Tester 1992, 172)</sup> as a combination and constant inter-play between

- A Reflexivity and freedom  
and
- B Social order and bureaucracy

All of which collapses back into two main questions: how much consensus, and then looking from the other way around, how much ability to live with internal conflicts is required and needed?

This is a balancing act, most certainly, but then again, what kind of a balance? It is not only about scales of elasticity between movement and control, chaotic hassle and disciplined order. It is very much about what direction are we gazing. Whereas social imaginary looks to the recent past, imagination is only potential as something right here, right now. Rather than direction, it has a thisness to strive for, a thisness that must be generated and activated. It does not pretend to be detached from the past, present and future of our horizon of experiences and expectations, but nevertheless strongly insists on a focus on what's going on now. Such thisness must be activated in time, and in situ, not longing or yearning for somewhere behind, not getting stuck in the pathetic fallacy of being able to fetch something solid from our always over-emotionalized pasts.

What we have then reached with the above differentiation is the following claim: it is about a specific scale of movement, willingness to question and to rock the boat, and finally, the perspective on the currency of doing this right here, right now. It is social and spatial imagination as a self-critical, reflexive and open-ended performative act, an act of

becoming that is able to laugh at and with itself and its surroundings, engaging and inclusive in ways of being and potential becoming that are not necessarily elegant, but are at least productive. Such acts come with a high dose of sweat and smell of everyday tackiness, of being stuck, and not with an über-designed fragrance of lifestyle that keeps pretending to be effortless, but which basically always is just another melodramatic and hysterical illusion.

Thus, not to beat around the bush, the aim is now openly articulated. The aim is to challenge and to enjoy that challenge, and avoid nostalgia, preservation, mysticism and essentialism – and NOT to allow itself to be treated as a product or turned into a one-dimensional commodity. It is a task and an act that cannot be comprehended and participated in at an abstract level, but which is what it can be only in and through locally potential and structured experiences – and ways of altering, twisting and turning the scope, space and content of these experiences. The hope we can have and generate (and also to pass around, further down the line, sideways and forwards) comes from the practice of doing what you are doing in a meaningful and interconnected way. What any one of us has is that very act of doing things: it is the practice where the full potentiality lies, and that we must have the courage to place our trust on. This practice has to be open-ended, acknowledging and cherishing both internal and external challenges.

Quoting an original source which serves as a bridge between a time thought to be long gone and an activated sense of current thiness of a practice: *“If we take a flautist or a sculptor or any artist – or in general any class of men who have a specific function or activity – his goodness and proficiency is considered to lie in the performance of that function.”* (Aristotle 1976, 75) Thus, the focus is on the act of doing, and of experiencing that act. In Aristotle’s terms, we have to ask: What is it that we are doing, and what is its meaning? Turned into a process of self-understanding, it translates into the maxim: *“A good life is spent searching for the good life.”* This task has to be a never-ending search; it cannot be about arriving, but must be about how we are able to travel and enjoy that awfully bumpy road. It is about the ethics of the unattainable, about cherishing and respecting the full absurdity of life.

Let’s hear Aristotle again: *“If we assume that the function of man is a kind of life, an activity or series of actions of the soul, implying a rational principle; and if the function of a good man is to perform these well and rightly; and if every function is performed well when performed in accord-*

*ance with its proper excellence: if all this is so, the conclusion is that the good for man is an activity of soul in accordance with virtue.” (ibid. 76)*

But this journey has two very important qualifications. It is a slow process, intended to last a complete lifetime, which in itself places it absolutely in the opposite corner from the trends and dynamics of so much of today’s living, in and out of institutions and companies, not to mention the rhythms and tempos of contemporary art. We are talking about virtues like being courageous, temperate and noble; in any case, about being true to the spirit and aims of a practice as an evolving enterprise. This means that if a practice is to lead towards knowledge, that practice must be done properly. *“I have not really learned for myself (taken to heart, made second nature to me) that they have this intrinsic value until I have learned to value (love) them for it, with the consequence that I take pleasure in doing them. To understand and appreciate the value that makes them enjoyable in themselves I must learn for myself to enjoy them, and that does take time and practice – in short, habituation.” (Burnyeat 1980, 78)*

Second, it is a process that must always be particular and contextual. To go back over 2000 years, in Aristotle’s example, it is about the way *“a carpenter’s interest in the right angle is different from the geometrician’s.” (1976, 77)*. And to continue with classic examples: *“The good man is one who performs admirably the activities specific to his kind.” (See Wilkes 1980, 343)*

All this is fine, but begs the pragmatic question: How? And of course, how and who can define what is ‘specific to his kind’. For example, what are the expectations and requirements that we have or wish for when we think of the good of a video artist who does research on the question of narrative self-understanding? This involves a set of complex questions that brings us to the second main part of this section of this chapter (the first having been the necessity of focusing on each particular practice). It brings us to the idea of how we define goods internal to a practice, an idea that relates to reflection on the main assumptions and structures of knowledge production.

Following the train of thought set in motion by Aristotle’s idea of good practice that is maintained and developed through practising that practice, it is not all that extraordinary that the criteria and qualifications are closely interwoven with the doing of that practice. We are therefore talking about both the internal goods of a practice and the internal logic of the practice.

To quote a contemporary and highly influential interpretation of Aristotle: *“A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”* (MacIntyre 1985, 191)

Let us here play with words for a second. If we want to be nasty – and nastiness is indeed often a welcome antidote to self-congratulatory tendencies – we can say that to be good at something is to be good at that something. More precisely, this would mean that to do good research is to do good research, or that to paint a great figurative painting is to paint a great figurative painting, or that to be a master of sitting on a bus you must sit in a magnificent manner in a bus a great deal – short and long distances, looking back and then facing forwards. I could go on with this litany, but what I am trying to stress is how this ‘silliness’ really forces us to focus on what the ‘good’ is or can be in terms of the particular practice. Thus, we need to ask who defines it, and in accordance with which rules and habits of the heart. We also need to ask: Where does it come from? How is it defined currently? And what are its future ambitions and perspectives?

To repeat, what we are talking about is the idea of good practice that is maintained and developed through doing that practice, and that its criteria and qualifications are made and maintained in and through the acts of doing of that practice. And because we are concentrating on both the internal goods of a practice and the internal logic of the practice, we ask: What is the virtue of the practice? Meaning: what makes it what it is, and how can it be coherently and logically taken further and carried out?

What this means is that the definition of a good practice cannot stem from somewhere outside it. Each practice must define itself, not alone, but rather in close interaction with other practices and ways of expression. This is done in interaction and through experience. In a larger framework, it is done through tradition (both within a one version and in competition between rival versions), by developing it, breaking away from it, and then returning to it. It is again the act of getting close in order to distance yourself, the act of push and pull, give and take. Through this, we are asking the vital questions about power and empowerment: Who is talking and what is he or she talking about, and with whom? This is an awareness that yet again awakens us to the necessity of participating in the construction of concepts in accordance with our own views, values, wants and fears. And why?

Well, as ever, if you are not doing it, you can bet your bottom dollar that someone else is doing it, and doing it in a manner that goes against your aims and interests.

But let us take a slight side step. What is a practice? Quoting MacIntyre again: A practice is *“any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.”* (Ibid, 187)

Thus, what are the qualifications for a practice? As you might already suspect, they are anything and everything. A practice is any activity, as such, which makes sense and which is done systematically – potentially such acts as collecting fir cones, doing experimental walks in a park while carrying an expressionistic oil painting over your shoulder, or well, to return to that example used before, sitting on a bus. A practice always has a certain past, present and future, but a practice has to be open-ended. A practice only makes sense through simultaneous but contemporary versions of its past, present and future – those horizons clashing and effecting, shaping this very interrelatedness.

There is no need to shut any doors or to decide once and for all on any one set of a priori criteria. What it is as a reflective practice and what it can become is something that only emerges in interaction. And yes, cherishing and maintaining this procedural openness, this content-driven activity, is one of the main ingredients of an adequate and valid practice. Such a practice has a very clear direction and theme that it goes towards and addresses, not as an abstract principle, but as a journey in which you have to take one step after another – steps that then affect the way the subsequent steps are directed and performed. A good practice does not exist in itself. It hangs in the air solely as a potentiality, because first we have to do it. Repeat it and return to it, accumulating knowledge of how to do it, how to define the good and the internal values that exist in and through it.

The potential act of a space becoming a place is an act that is what it is only in connection to its inherent limitations, short-comings and structural necessities. No, this is not a conservative attitude, and it is not about giving up. This is not the same as learning to admit your own limitations or love your failures, but rather contextualizing these acts

of potentially becoming a place into the settings and constellations of the space where they are happening.

It is thus the question of the site and structure within which x, y and z are imagined and seeking to become a place. With this main frame, we face the fundamental dilemma that is called the hierarchical order of values. It is a dilemma that is too easily given overplayed importance by mumbling something about determination and superstructures, but nevertheless, it is a proper, honest dilemma that is not possible to wash away with any soap of silly detached individualism or brute liberal fairy tales. We exist in a certain limited and structured space that has a history, and especially a genealogy of its power relations and the values that it supports – either openly or covertly. There is a setup that always and by necessity serves as the backdrop for any activity that tries to achieve a place within a space. An activity with that goal tries to go the distance and make, really make that move, but does not entertain any illusion of getting rid of the space (and its limitations), but is rather interested in the slow transformation of that space through the occurrence and credibility of the continuity of the singularity of places actualized within it.

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But the honest dilemma is: how to challenge them ('them' being the whole range of biases, prejudices, expectations and weltanschauung that we always carry with us and that are embedded in the structures where we exist)? Can this be done only when you are already inside the game? Can the parameters of the game be challenged and changed? Is it necessary to sleep with the enemy? Is it possible to sleep with the enemy with your pants on?

In one highly important sense, as has been advocated here all along, for these alternatives to have a chance to succeed, what we face and confront is that moment of movement of the activity and idea from a space – more neutral and unspecific but yet always a given positioned version of it – towards a place that is specified and openly value-laden and controversial. That movement is about becoming something that does not exist alone, that can't be traced back to the original start-up position but happens then and there in all the interactions among all the participants and involved parties. This is then understood as becoming in its singularity – not an object, but as an ongoing process. What it aims at is a certain 'thisness', a unique temporality. It is not about singularity as something solid and stable, something you desperately hold on to once you have reached and achieved it.

Instead, it is (as it must be) something on the move, a process that becomes that moment of thisness in a never-ending process. It is a singularity in the way it becomes what it is, a singularity that is one but many. The oneness of its thisness is made and shaped right on the spot, right at that moment, but the aspect of the many of it is just as necessary and important. The many of the singularity is about how it is linked to where it comes from, how it materializes for that one moment of thisness, and where it seeks to move on towards from there. It is a singularity in a continuation of situatedness and commitment of a physically and discursively located practice. It is many in the manifestations of its own development and various phases, and it is many in its inherent and necessary interconnections to other manifestations of singularities becoming a place next to it – or at least close enough to it (again recalling that this being next to and close to is always both a physical and a discourse proposition and a potential act)

It is a potential singularity that gains its weight, credibility and long-term perspective in close mutual reactions and interactions with other potential singularities. These are not acts of balanced harmonies of win-win illusion, but acts which both burn and heal, bother and caress. They are part of a complex network of activities that happen right there at the heart of the issue of shaping and forming the social imagination of a site and situation, activities that must bounce off each other, not just slide past each other in the mental darkness of avoiding contact and connection.

What this inherent interrelatedness and the need to seek sites of interaction implies and demands is that within the interdependency of any kind of a relationship (one singularity to another, or between a space and a place), this meeting must be a meeting that leaves a trace – one way or another. It is a navigation and a negotiation that does not happen elegantly or neatly. It scratches and it screams. It is an engagement that can be actually and perhaps even surprisingly effectively defined. If, and only if, in this interaction the whole process of give and take makes – oh sorry, forces – each participant to think again what, how and when, then it is taking place. Otherwise, it's just the same old wheeling and dealing, positioning and possessing, trading and selling of views and wants.

Articulated in the terms used in this book, social imagination requires that it is an act (for example, of an artist) that tries to infiltrate, affect and even transform how we see, perceive and feel what is going on in a public place. This version of an act and an interpretation has to bounce

back and have a similar effect and intervention on the person (for example, an artist and his/her way of working). And yes, the negative alternative is just another detached consuming gaze, another cheap gimmick, yet again a new, fast and furious intervention that goes as deep as the latest sticker slapped on your forehead.

At its core, the act of a content of a concept (image, act, symbol) to become a place is a productive act. It is the act of questioning and eventualizing, of making us aware of systems and conceptual structures, of concepts and of events that we normally pay no attention to and take for granted (see Foucault 2002). It is about participating in the processes of how social and spatial imaginations are shaped and made, revisited and maintained, criticized and constructed.

To quote Foucault at length on this concept of eventualization: *“First, one takes groups of elements where, in a totally empirical and temporary way, connections between mechanisms of coercion and contents of knowledge can be identified. Mechanisms of different types of coercion and maybe also legislative elements, rules, material set-ups, authoritative phenomena, etc. One would also consider the contents of knowledge in terms of their diversity and heterogeneity, view them in the contexts of the effects of power they generate in as much as they are validated by their belonging to a system of knowledge. We are therefore not attempting to find out what is true or false, founded or unfounded, real or illusory, scientific or ideological, legitimate or abusive. What we are trying to find out is what are the links, what are the connections that can be identified between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge, what is the interplay of relay and support developed between them, such that a given element of knowledge takes on the support developed between them, such that a given element of knowledge takes on the effects of power in a given system where it is allocated to a true, probable, uncertain or false element, such that a procedure of coercion acquires the very form and justifications of a rational, calculated, technically efficient element, etc.”*

(2002, 200)

The connection made here with Foucault is mainly to the processes of knowledge production. Therefore the focus is very strongly (and for a very good reason) on the outcome of the processes in their striving for acquiring the components of validity or truth. It is a focus that nevertheless can be slightly overwhelming, and also misplaced since it has a tendency to dramatize every act within a practice as being about power games. Obviously, this is a complicated balancing act, but as clear as it is that every act is potentially an act of power, it ought be equally clear

that not every act in itself is a meaningful and situated act. This is a distinction which I believe is only to be made inside the processes, within the rules and aims of the practice – where it takes us, and where it shuts down the doors and options. These are then acts and decisions about doing things and while doing these things, accepting that anything we do is more often than not coloured with the ordinary daftness of our lives, not with great fanfares or heroic danger.

One strategy available to combine the act of eventualization in and through a practice of production of knowledge (i.e., taking part in the processes of giving content to concepts and acts that seek to become a place within a space) is the act of estrangement. This concept provokes us with its connection to the politicized past usage of the term, but at the same time confronts us with the task of re-actualizing the potential strength that is embedded in it. It is a term that is well attested the writings and practices of Bertolt Brecht, but a term that in itself is not without its roots and interesting routes to contemporary usage within social imagination.

It is an inviting topic, since it is fascinatingly easy to mix and confuse it with another central concept, namely alienation. It is a familiar confusion caused by the closeness of the terms in German: *Verfremdung* and *Entfremdung*. The confusion in English-speaking discourse was made total, according to Jameson <sup>(1998, 85)</sup>, after the mistake of translating Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* as alienation, which, in fact, is the other concept, *Entfremdung*. Jameson therefore suggests the term 'estrangement' as reproducing the idea of making-strange and defamiliarizing that Brecht was after. Interestingly enough, Jameson also makes the connections visible with how Brecht used this concept, and what inspired him to start using it. This is a train of thought that links estrangement with the Russian concept of *ostranenie*, which stems from the Russian formalists such as Eisenstein and Tretiakov <sup>(Ibid. 39)</sup>.

However, hiccups of translation aside, what Brecht's concept of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (or in short, the V-effect) was articulating and striving for, in its simplest form, was the act of doing x in a site and situation where it normally did not belong, and where it did not come from. The act alters the site of the act while the act is still being done. This is the moment of productive confusion when we see a woman on the screen but what we hear coming from her mouth is explicitly a voice of a man. Or just to throw in another similar example: it is the uncertainty of lost balance when an ice hockey player is deeply involved in the action of participating in a game, but now within the parameters

of a game of basketball – a game that is really happening in that same contemporary multi-complex entertainment centre where the hockey game was finished yesterday but the basketball game is now being played. The player is doing what he is supposed to be doing, but now by a chance of estrangement, just a bit late, and in a weird synch. Like skating on parquet. This act grows in its importance once we pay attention to how seriously the hockey player still tries to control the puck and make those moves that only function on ice, while the others concentrate on the skills inherent to basketball.

These examples are as silly as they are deliberate. While the aim behind Brecht's concept is something we all can still clearly share and commit ourselves to – the aim of seducing us to think differently and to see our 'reality' through new eyes, aching for alternative ways of experience and the freshness of a recovery of perception – the cruelty of time gone past is something we cannot deny. Whereas in Brecht's day the social imaginary of those troubled times was something where the effect of making-strange had a certain novelty, when we fast-forward to the social imaginary of our times of different troubles we can't escape the flow of cultural and commercial information that deliberately uses the elements of defamiliarizing. The problem is not only the overwhelming shallowness of the cheap irony that we are being flooded with, but the awareness of the interrelatedness of each and every utterance.

From one side, we are very well schooled in sneering at commercials that do the dirty old thing of actually showing the product that they sell, rather than pushing forward a lifestyle that plays with the force of opposites. Similarly, we are very well acculturated into reading second-level meanings from the context of the information provided to us. Our recognition of a brand is especially strong when the name of the brand is effectively camouflaged or hidden. And yet, from the other side of the dilemma, we are discouraged from making use of this strategy, since it so saturates all mass communication.

The answer (as in developing a strategy of what to do) is not to disregard the potentiality of a concept such as estrangement, but to win back its power of actualization, the power of potentially making things be seen and experienced differently. In one deliberately awkward sense, it is the need to eventualize the act of eventualization, which in itself is grounded in the awareness of always being discreet about not churning out yet another formality from a situated and specific strategy. In other words, while the overall effect of shocking and shaking the bag

through putting together things that are not supposed to be together has gone stale and weary, that in itself is more of a positive and productive opportunity than a negative hindrance. It is the wake-up call to actually steer away from the all-too-lame and oversimplified binary opposition, and again ask and demand more of ourselves when we are doing the act of eventualization and estrangement. It is not about the intent and content of the whole strategy an sich. Instead, it is about our ability to actualize the potentiality of it in each given site, in each given situation where act, utterance or whistling in the dark wants to become a place within that space where it happens.

But why? Why all this trouble? Why all the sweat and imaginary blood and tears when everything could be so neat, so easy and so fine if we just hold on to the view that whatever it is we have to face, there is always a clear-cut right and wrong way of doing it – and that because it is we (or our colleagues) who decides what's right, what's wrong, it is difficult to end upon the wrong side of the fence if we just keep our heads down and follow the rules.

The point is that we need to take all this baggage along and keep it in our minds in order to avoid the economy of the spectacle. Instead of the tacky and oh-so-predictable big bang, you go from outside towards the inside, trusting one-to-one connections, those small gestures that are personal and direct. This is then about being as practical and pragmatic as any reality allows, about trusting your ability to be smart and be naïve, proudly holding high the diplomatic pass we have access to as participants in the seemingly toothless and meaningless field of contemporary art – but participants who may disguise ourselves as being innocent and harmless, but have the desire and motivation to poke where it hurts. It is about how to stir up and to question – and to stay put with the complexities. It is to face the music and dance to the tunes that are difficult and demanding – while giving content to concepts that we must be able to have access to, and with which we must have time and energy to participate. In semi-vulgar terms, we need to get down and dirty, sleep with the enemy (one-dimensional instrumentalization of reason and never-ceasing commodification of our life-worlds) with our tiger suit or our stained jogging pants on.

And yes, with the truckloads of luck that we depend on, there and then, meaning right now and here, we will have a tentative, abstract but yet hopeful and constructively critical strategy for survival when we want to give credible and challenging content to the title of that modern classic of a song which deserves to be remembered and taken

into the core of activities of performing content of concepts: what's so funny about peace, love and understanding?

A shout from the top, and a cry from the river low but mountain high that seeks to hit home this precise point: sayin' it ain't doing it, to follow the famous social-political critical thinker James Brown, a performer who definitely was able to cherish the complexities of the act of what's in a word and/or in a gesture; and especially how that all changes in weight and value through the currently established version of social imaginary. Because with all the wishing well of conceptual fabrications going on full steam, there is absolutely no lack of macro level articulations of the aim of tickling and constructing social imagination. We watch these concepts rise a bit higher, like semi-full hot air balloons, but then, lacking stamina and feeling the pull of gravity, taking a dip that reads like the titles of politics of belonging, becoming communities or, with no hesitation at all, the whole effort of this very book of turning our attention from static social imaginary towards the actualizing processes of social imagination.

Just to focus briefly on one more example from the side of the social sciences active in articulating versions of social imaginary, and not repeating the versions as promoted by Habermas or by Taylor, let us take a look at the conceptual work of William Connolly <sup>(1999, 57-59)</sup>, who has tried to come closer to the idea of the politics of becoming – something that is out of the ordinary and happens through conflicts and crises. It is a conceptual exercise that certainly tries to activate social imaginary, but which unfortunately fails. And it fails in a very symptomatic manner.

What Connolly proposes is clearly an act of conceptualization that is overactive on the macro level and underperforming in its connectedness to particular practices. The main problem with the macro level aspirations and its thin line of factual perspirations (as in, embeddedness in our being stuck) is that the view of becoming and imagination is still so static. It's pre-cooked and ready-made, to be served or thrown away – it is not boiling or burning. There is very little aspiration to even picture that window of opportunity for doing things differently, not to mention opening that window and jumping right out of it, experimenting, taking risks and enjoying the failures in and through acting out those risks.

The second inherent difficulty is that while a macro level is a necessary tool in order to keep hold of an overview, it is nothing only by it itself.

It needs its counterpart in the crime of conceptualization and imagining the horizons of experiences and production of knowledge. It requires the micro level entries and entities, which in Connolly's case fall short. There are examples of major big issues and the problems of slavery, or like in this book of mine, concerns connected to human rights issues (gay/lesbian rights movements), but they are purely descriptive of both what is at stake and what is perhaps about potentially to become, instead of participating in the act of performing these issues and participating in these acts of giving content of concepts (image, act, symbol or a sign). By its nature, the problem is structural. It is written into the practice of theorists like Connolly (but by no means only him) that this participatory element of actively getting into the mess is not to be touched, or even flirted with. We have here a structure that through its internal logic of wanting to remain neutral and detached is static, and therefore a priori closes down the potentiality of a performing a space into a becoming of a place.

When dealing with social imagination and the act of becoming a place, it is a necessity to get down and to get involved, to get into the blatantly boring processes of the micro levels of the everyday mess. In common usage of languages games, it is the move from analysing what a meaning of x is in the game to interpreting 'thickly' how x is used in a given site and situation. Nothing more, and none less. But it is a move that is only there in and through a specific case. And yes, here it is a case focusing on the realization of a public work of art with a very specific theme and site of actualization by the artist duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset.

MICHAEL ELMGREEN & INGAR DRAGSET  
**TWO MEN KISSING IN BERLIN'S TIERGARTEN**

This is a case study that invites us to make a critical yet constructive comparison in and through the process of both social and political imaginary and its contrast position, the social and political imagination. It is a case of a public sculpture by the duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset that emphasizes the important shift in the discourse of public space – changes that it points to which have relevance not only on that precise site of Germany's current capital of Berlin and its history, but also beyond the factual physical aspects of it. It is a very efficient case for reflecting and thinking with the chances and limits of performing the public space into becoming a place. It is also a vivid example of the truly productive character of such a public gesture as an event that one is never able to control or guarantee – not where it moves toward, or in terms of the quality of the discourse and potential protests attached to it. There is a not so subtle hint of a sub-plot or spin-off debate to the whole story that we will in due course focus on. But first, let us articulate the background for the whole case of the aim and process of building a commemorative public work of art to the memory of persecuted homosexuals during the National Socialist regime of the years 1933–1945.

### **Background**

There are longer and shorter versions of the background for this case. Neither of them involves a short time span. The longer version is the important connection to the historical facts of the Third Reich in Germany during the years of 1933–1945, the catastrophe of the war, and consequently the archaeology of the processes by which Germany as a state and as a public space of discussions has dealt with its past. This case directly links what is being done now to what happened on that site previously, and at the same time it is case that strongly and instantly intertwines the current discussion with the overall debate that in German is called *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – a term that already allows us to underline a major point of departure that has significant implications for the whole question of how we confront and deal with the issue of the past, memory and commemoration.

It permits us to address this question because it begins with the attitude of how we understand and construct our relationship to past events. The alternatives are a version that seeks to overcome and 'solve' the past, therefore enabling us to move forward, and one

acknowledging that while it is a procedural activity, this procedure is not one of solving something but of coming to terms with the past. It is not that difficult to contemplate the political consequences and aims in which each strategy is embedded. While the former is grounded on an assumption that the past is something that one must leave behind in order to move forward successfully, the latter underlines the continuity of the life process and the never-solved responsibility that we must face with our past, and the versions of it that we construct and narrate in each time and space. (For an overview of the multi-faceted debate, see Benz 1992, Halbwachs 1985, König 1996 and Mommsen 1979)

I will here follow the route provided by the strategy of coming to terms with the past, that includes in itself the notion that a public discourse has and takes changing views and perceptions on the same issue – here the issue being how German society deals with the various aspects of its excessively dramatic pasts (pasts: plural versions of the past co-existing within the same primary framework).

The shorter version of the background is directly connected to the history of the desire to construct a memorial for persecuted and murdered homosexuals. Again, this is a history that is mixed through and through with its own pre-history. Historical research gives us the numbers. The estimate is that during the years 1933–1945 about 54,000 homosexuals were prosecuted and about 7000 of them died in the concentration camps. Documents show that this prosecution concerned male homosexuals, as lesbians were not prosecuted under Paragraph 175 because the law did not recognise their existence. This is an historical understanding of facts that will play a central role in the sub-plot that emerged, which I already hinted at. Another important fact that will have a role in the future discussion is the notion that it was enough for a man to be seen and caught kissing another man in public to be prosecuted.

The history of the aim of realising such a memorial dates back to the early 1990s and the immediate aftermath of German reunification. Lobbying for the memorial was begun then by a loose group of gay and lesbian organizations (*Lesben- und Schwulenverband in Deutschland – LSDV*) which came together with this common aim. It is important to say that until this, until the realisation of this monument in May, 2008, no official memorial addressing this particular aspect of the Nazi past had existed. After a slow process, a decision in favour of the memorial was made in the German Federal Parliament in 2003. A site was selected, a budget approved, and the plan for an open competition for artists

was announced. This call, in its essence, read: *“Der Gedenkort soll die verfolgten und ermordeten Opfer ehren, die Erinnerung an das Unrecht wach halten und ein beständiges Zeichen gegen Intoleranz, Feindseligkeit und Ausgrenzung gegenüber Schwulen und Lesben zu setzen.”*

The site selected is next to where a much bigger monument for the Jews murdered in the Nazi years was already being constructed. This is a monument on a very different scale than the one by Elmgreen and Dragset, but which gave them the motivation and also posed a challenge to them of how to construct their own version. It was designed by Peter Eisenman, and it was dedicated in May, 2005. It can actually be thought of as the main monument for the whole theme of Nazi judicial murder and the process of coming to terms with it, since the vicinity includes the monument for homosexuals, and a memorial for the Sinti and Roma that is now also in the process of being realised. This main commemoration complex combines the publicly accessible works of public art at the site with a vast documentation archive that is placed underground, beneath the actual sculptural and spatial work. Later on I will return in some detail to the specifics of this memorial and its interrelatedness to the Elmgreen & Dragset work.

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But before going into the actual details of what was done in this newly chosen site and how, let us wrap up the background history of the project with its chronology. The idea of the competition was outlined deliberately so that it was to commemorate harassed, prosecuted and murdered people – but not just looking back, not just revisiting and visualizing a trauma and tragedy, but also addressing the issue of how homosexuals are represented today. This was a distinction that made a difference to the outcome, and also set it apart from the aspirations and aims of other similar memorial projects. Here, the importance is the very act of deciding to look with great care at past events, but then not getting stuck with them but linking those past events with contemporary issues connected to the exact same theme – a theme that is about how a certain public space deals with and treats homosexuals and what kind of a position they have and occupy in the public agenda and social imaginary.

Here again the historical facts provide a cruel but important background. The reason for linking the memorial for the prosecuted homosexuals to the present is also of a factual nature. Amazingly or not, the fact is that Paragraph 175, which criminalized male homosexuality in Nazi times, remained in force in the West German Republic until 1969. That fact means that those people who were prosecuted

and harassed due to their sexual orientation were again prosecuted and harassed, even after the horror of the Third Reich was long past. History tells us that between 1950 and 1969 about 50,000 men were prosecuted and sentenced, often to long jail terms, due to their homosexuality (See Zeit online 26.5.2008)

### **The actuality of the commemorative work by Elmgreen and Dragset**

Let us return to the indisputable facts that structure the content of the events and discourses in and through them. The competition for the memorial opened in 2005. In January, 2006, the jury committee selected Elmgreen and Dragset as the winners. The decision then started a protracted procedure accompanied by a very heated and unexpected debate, that finally ended with the dedication on 27 May, 2008.

What happened in between, how and why? The artists' motivation to take part in this competition is obviously a complex issue, but it is highlighted by the curiosity about participating in a process of shaping how the image of gay men is presented in the public space in their chosen home city. Besides this ethical and political aspect of the question of the representation of a specific sexual orientation, their motivation was fuelled by their wish to offer an alternative to the ways in which memorials are designed and constructed. They were challenged by the self-defined aim of how to be critical about the culture of memorials, but not end up in a default position of claiming to be anti-memorial artists. What they wanted to articulate was a sense of homosexuality in its everydayness, and to take part in the processes of shaping and making the image of homosexuality in Berlin – a reality that is currently somewhat widely accepted in certain rather well known parts of the city, but which still remains invisible or not that often seen in more mainstream public sites and spheres.

In one very clarifying sense, their participation was also partly a provocation. On the one hand, their own practice rests strongly on opposing the big gestures of '90s monuments and monumental installations. On the other hand, they saw a chance to be provocative. Since it was assumed that they would work within the parameters of their already well established and accomplished practice, what the proposal was going to focus on were the strategies of appropriation, strategies they have been following and renewing effectively since the very beginning of their collaborations. Appropriation is a strategy they clearly locate within the evolution of the 1970s artists – mainly feminists – who, in

a manner not all that different from the strategy of estrangement, started to appropriate already existing works by remaking them or replacing them. Well-known examples range from Sherrie Levine photographing Walker Evans canonical works and then showing them one to one, but with her signature in them, to the photos of Cindy Sherman casting herself in the roles of movie characters. It is a strategy of a sort of ready-made form or imaginary that is then taken and used in order to emphasize values and interests of a different nature. Or in other terms, it is a game of opposites that potentially suffers from the exact same problem as any strategy that is grounded on seemingly solid oppositional forces, but which becomes so easily obsolete when these oppositions are no longer upheld. I will later on return to the inherent limitations of the appropriation strategy.

But for now, the question emerges: with what kind of proposal did Elmgreen and Dragset win the competition? Meaning: what do we see and confront at the site in Berlin Tiergarten, visible from a main street called Ebert-Strasse, located diagonally opposite of the impressive area (in terms of size) of the Eisenman memorial? We see a new memorial still looking a bit lost in that park atmosphere, where the surrounding bushes and garden elements have yet to be integrated into the landscape solution.

On one level – and that is the level of instant recognition and recollection – what we see is a column made of concrete, 360 x 450 cm in size. It is a block of grey material, not unlike a cube, but designed to be slightly tilted, and with a significant detail on one of its sides: a window about one meter wide and 30 centimeters high that invites one to look into the box. From the outside, however, the interrelatedness to the larger memorial immediately becomes evident. This is to say that their proposal sits well in the overall visual elements of this particular area. It is a work of art that deliberately makes one of its main priorities noticing and comparing these different settings and different solutions. It is a work that is a willed, open citation that activates the site and engages us in a comparison of these memorials that address the same horrors of the past, but from very different viewpoints.

The comparative gaze is a lucrative act. A pleasure, so to speak. We have the difference in size, in numbers and in access. Across the way, along the Hannah-Arendt-Strasse, the Eisenman memorial has 2711 concrete pillars situated in a seemingly random pattern. They allow visitors to get inside the area, forming paths in and through it, horizontally and vertically. It is designed so that the ground level

alternates in parts, making it into a modestly steep wave which serves to accentuate our experience of the physical site, making us aware of where we are and how we are. The pillars are much thinner, and there are enough of them to cause visitors to get lost among them. In contrast, Elmgreen and Dragset built one single column, made it wider and deeper, and in their choice of the window emphasised what is to be seen inside the box. Instead of making it alluring to walk through the work and to access it both individually and collectively, as in Eisenman's case, here the idea is construct a site which you access only one at a time, creating a sensibility and potentiality of intimacy.

But what's in the box? It is easy to describe. It is a kiss: a black and white film three minutes in length that loops endlessly on and on. The movie was directed by the Dane Thomas Vinterberg, known, for example, for being part of the loose and not that long-lived group of film directors in the 1990s who worked under the name *Dogma 95*, and for his 1998 work *Festen* (party, in Danish). There is fabulously little room for doubt that it is a kiss that we see. An intimate and tender kiss. Two men standing beside one another, looking in each other's eyes, approach gently and embrace, flowing into a kiss, then briefly draw apart while maintaining concentrated visual contact, and then returning again to each other and starting to caress and kiss again. As an act it is almost laconic: very simple, very solid, very powerful, trusting the very essence of that act we all recognize, we all know, and we all relate to – but an act that carries with it the anticipated terror of a kiss done in the wrong place and with the wrong participants, which, done on that very site not all that many years ago, would have led to prosecution and even death. The innocent kiss is outlined as an act of complexity and provocative properties. The two men kissing look, you know, normal. There is nothing explicit about them, other than that they are white, possibly in their early 30s, and that they kiss one another. But no rancor, no s/m-gadgets, no make-up, no flimsy summer dresses, nothing. Just two men kissing, looking not unlike just any two of the men who pass that site daily in their thousands and thousands.

### **Productive performative consequences, part I**

So that's that. Right. A long process of incubation for a memorial, then a competition, a winner is chosen, and the work (with some not so unusual but annoying delays) is finally realized and yes, time to move on. Well, not quite, because in this particular case the public character of the work is as complex as it gets. It has the deep complexity of an issue that has served for many years as projection surface on which fear

and loathing originating from another source can be parked. It is obviously also a case with a highly complex group of participants who feel that they own the issue, and defend their wish to be included in the discussions and in the potential representational visualizations of it.

Regardless of the ability to imagine the complexities and problems of the theme, the debate that the work caused came as a surprise. It was a surprise for the artists themselves – as it is, a surprise once we have the benefit of hindsight. The debate was constructed and initiated by a self-proclaimed feminist journal called *Emma* in their Fall, 2006 issue. It was an article titled “*Mal wieder die Frauen vergessen!*” – which can be translated as “*Yet again the women are forgotten*”. What *Emma* stirred up was a controversy claiming that the winning proposal was too one-sided and that the decision must be reversed. Their campaign text read: “*Ich protestiere dagegen, dass das geplante Homo-Denkmal in Berlin ausschliesslich männliche Homosexuelle zeigt und fordere, dass auch die weiblichen Homosexuellen angemessen berücksichtigt werden.*” An online action received thousands of signatures, and the article caused a lot of shuffling of feet among the responsible organizers and politicians, all promising to take a careful look at the process.

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To be able to address this heated debate, a chronology of the events is helpful. The winner was announced and the proposal presented in January, 2006. After the announcement, nothing spectacular happened until August of that same year, when this controversy was staged and followed up by the magazine. *Emma* politicized the decision by arguing that not only men should be represented, but also women – collecting signatures against the proposal, protesting against the decision. *Emma*'s argument was two-fold. They claimed that the winning work was against the rules since it focused only on gay men, and that it was artistically of very poor quality, framing it as just another example of what in German is called *Betroffenheitskunst*. It was especially Alice Schwartz, the former editor of *Emma* and a well-known figure in German public discourse, who became the face for this argument, crying out how once again women are forgotten.

And yes, the argument did point to the discrepancy of the winning proposal showing only men kissing. Where are the women, where is the representation of lesbians in this work? The call for proposals did clearly say the focus was not only the crimes of the past but also ongoing discrimination.

The questions raise two productive trains of thought. There is the question of historical facts and their representation and visualization in and through this project, and then, less attached to this particular case, there is the question of the representation of any 'collective identity'. It has already been mentioned that the historical fact is that the paragraph of the penal code against homosexuality and the actual prosecutions were explicitly focused only on males. This, however, is in no way related to the composition of the lobby for the commemoration. That was indeed a collaboration by a number of both gay and lesbian organizations, which then took part at various levels of lobbying and decision-making. Nonetheless, the point is that no such debate about the content of the winning proposal took place during the decision-making, nor in direct connection to it. The problem was articulated and maintained by *Emma*, not by the organizations that were part of the process. Other commentators woke up when spurred on by *Emma*, rising up the issue of how it seems that once again the men in gay organizations are completely overshadowing the lesbians.

Clearly, and with no hesitation, what's at stake is the issue of what kind of a connection there ought to be between historical facts and their current actualization in a visual work of art. But the overall question is how any group of whatever cultural background or interest is to be represented. In the end, what does representation in this context mean, implicate and demand?

Here the story gets very interesting, since the argument by *Emma* was that Elmgreen and Dragset's work neglected the women and denied access for them by representing just one small part of homosexual life. But if we really look at the work and at the film, what do we see? We see a strategy being used that is very well aware of the dangers of one-to-one illusions in representing group X in ways A, B and C. That is exactly why what we see in the film is so laconic and minimal. Rather than articulating a version of difference decided upon by the artists and locked in, it underlines the casualness and tacit everydayness in its representation. Here we have a strategy that makes us think further than the most superficial symbols of what makes and performs an identity.

But unfortunately, even if the itch and interest of an opening of a discussion was available, there was not to be a proper debate on these two significant issues. At first the artists were simply shocked and thrown off balance. The shock was emphasized by their own understanding of what they do and what their work is very much about: dialogue and

participation. It added insult to injury to see how many women turned against them and joined the magazine's campaign. It was an insult that also made them aware how little contact they had and how little they actually knew about the views of various lesbian positions and organizations. Thus, there was a clash, and a loud debate that did not build connections but only succeeded in deepening juxtapositions.

After the first astonishment faded, being amazed at the level of the accusations and the absence of any desire for discussion, but just angry ranting from *Emma* and some parts of the lesbian community, Elmgreen and Dragset tried to invite Emma and its editors into an adequate give and take conversation. The artists approached the magazine with an open letter and numerous phone calls. But no, no response. Just dead silence, which had drear consequences. Because of the force and intensity of the attack, and the complete lack of interest in engaging in a discussion or meeting with the artists, it is impossible not to read the action by *Emma* as instrumentalization of an issue for their own needs and aims. As an act, it fully set aside what the work is and tries to be, and instead took up a theme connected to it and ran away with it, happily shouting, happily causing effects that were not connected to the actual site and its issues. Rather than confronting the counter-arguments, Alice Schwartz was happy to publicly announce her opinion of the work, calling it "*Ghetto des Kitsches männlicher Homosexualitet*" – kitsch-ghetto of male homosexuality. To quote Schwartz: "*Denn trotz hehrer Stele ist die Reminiszenz an die voyeuristische Klappen-Sexualitet homosexueller Männer aus der Zeit der Repression unübersehbar. Das Mahnmal klagt dies jedoch nicht an und überschreitet es auch nicht – es reproduziert und verkitscht es.*"

(Emma, issue 1, 2007)

The lack of debate on the content of the work and how well it both serves and activates the awareness of the rights of sexual minorities and discrimination in general is a shame. It is a shame since this turn of events was not caused by someone with a position from which prejudice might have been expected. It was unfortunately manufactured by an institution which one might have thought would actually know better. Here, to know better would imply recognising that catastrophe which happens when instead of having substance, the debate is about power games and instrumentalization of the main issue towards personal gains. This is not to say that everything about the work by Elmgreen and Dragset is perfect. But it is to say that it is a disgrace if their work does not generate the needed discussion on the content of commemorations and on the politics of representation.

Again, the point is not to deny negative and critical reactions to the work. Obviously enough, there was direct responses to it when it was dedicated. Curiously enough, it caused a not so atypical avalanche of things projected onto the work, not actually touching the aims and inherent strategies of the work. Thus these comments were mainly about the work, not an open-ended challenging to, but also reciprocal debate with the work. It was criticized for being too mellow, not sexy enough, not enough of a spectacle, or too monumental, proving to be a great example how a public work of art produces a response. Here we see a case of public art as a projection surface for all angst, wishes and wants – a task it is impossible for it to fulfil and please everyone. At the same time, it is crucial that we not forget that this commemoration work has also generated a great deal of positive writing and comments.

But it must be insisted that there are real aching and burning issues to be confronted, issues that are now finally activated and ought to be properly processed. Let us first focus on the question of representation – and how it can be done when the site is so overwhelmed with mixed-up wishes and demands. Or to state it differently: why is it that, as in precisely this case, people such as Schwarz, with all their experience and knowledge, fall into the trap that they have previously been working against in their careers? The trap here is the need to box in identities, to box them into these either-or constructions that label gays to be this and that, and straight persons to be of this and not that essential quality, etc. It is a trap in the truest double sense. It goes completely against what we know and see of the construction of individual and collective identities of any type. Identities per se are not one, and they are not stable. They are processes that are structured by internal contradictions and conflicts. And, not to forget, they are also processes that are always and constantly prey to uses and abuses that may be productive but are also potentially harmful. The point is to stand up and participate in these debates so that they are not left for one-dimensional instrumentalizations.

Second, the wish for a clear-cut answer is dangerous, as it tries to forcibly flatten (and in the worst case annihilate) differences, both within the entity of an identity, and in relations between different identities. In this case, airing the claim that this particular work in itself either wants or tries to represent homosexuality with one single image of a work is more than a strange thought. Why would it want to do that? Next, it is completely absurd to demand that one image connected to the quality of x, y and z serve as a representation of an essence.

In particular, focusing on the content of the collective definitions in a site and situation of Berlin where the fact is that, well, whereas some gays are certainly super-fit and sexy, some of them are big and fat, and still others wear lipstick and women's clothes when having a bit fun, and just to fill the comparison to the brim, well, some of them do really look like those awfully ordinary men in the video of the artists.

It should be evident that the same goes for any collective identity. There is no such thing as an all-encompassing answer to what Germans think or what Germans feel – or Russians or Argonauts or the various creatures inhabiting the *Kingdom of Narnia*. It depends on each case, and on the general level it always depends on what is the social, political and economical background and the current position of the person, his/her family, education, occupation, belief system and, sure, also his or her sexual orientation.

To quote the letter Elmgreen and Dragset's sent to the magazine on this impossible issue of serving every interest group and trying to please anyone and everyone: it would be a nightmare of a cul-de-sac that would lead to the situation in which *“Wir müssten anfangen uns Gedanken über verschiedene lesbische und schwule Trends, Stile und Präferenzen zu machen, um niemanden zu nahe zu treten. Um nicht beschuldigt zu werden irgend jemanden ausgeschlossen zu haben. Um ehrlich zu sein, glauben wir nicht an diese Art oberflächliche Einbeziehung. Alt, jung, langhaarig, kurzhaarig, 'butch', camp, männlich, weiblich. Eine solche Bilderwelt hat eher etwas mit Benetton Werbung oder Popvideos zu tun, die auf eine sehr flache Art und Weise versucht alle vorübergehend glücklich zu machen, einfach nur damit Ruhe ist, ohne wirklich für irgendwelche Rechte oder Respekt einzutreten.”*

More within the discourses of the practices of contemporary art, the work by Elmgreen and Dragset invites us to think through the chances and challenges of a strategy of appropriation of this sort. We do know where it comes from, and we are aware of its potentialities, but what if the site in which it currently tries to become a place in a social space has changed so completely that the strategy has lost its critical potentiality and edge? Here, I am linking this to the discussion of the limitations of not only appropriation strategy, but also to the strategy of estrangement. How is it possible to appropriate anything in a stronger sense of the potential meaning when the canonical contents and legitimizations have been disregarded and partly disowned?

Well, this is what we for good reason call an honest dilemma. It is a dilemma in contemporary sites and situations which have become commercialised so through and through into consumptionist objects that they allow very little or next to no critical distance or ways of thinking differently. It is a dilemma that is actualized by another, and even perhaps still better-known work by the same artists. This is the appropriation strategy of staging a *Prada* shop in the deserts of Marfa, Texas, flirting with legacy of Donald Judd and the fame of the brand *Prada*.

This is the corner where the sign representing the activity reads loud and clear: welcome to the spectacle. It is a corner that cruelly – and so amazingly effectively, with our willing help – churns everything into a big consumable event, where nuances are denied access or availability. The question faced within the structures of a public work of art with these dimensions and complications embedded in its social imaginary and imagination is: can you win, or even at least survive in the pressures of an event culture of spectacles with the size and site of the Elmgreen and Dragset commemoration work in Berlin's Tiergarten?

Finally, there is the question of historical facts and their interpretation. This grows out of the complexity of how we perceive and construct memory – what we want it to be and to do for us. It is helpful to divide this into two strategies. We have memory, as in critical memory – actively taking part in its own formation. Then we have memory, as in repetitive memory – the passive spectator to a spectacle. The difference is between where we look at the past, how we look at it, how we deal with it, and what kind of a role we see it having in our ways of trying to figure out who we are and what we might want to become.

It is a difference in which I certainly am convinced that this particular work actively summons and helps us to take the route towards critical memory and constructive confrontation with plural versions of the past, at the same time allowing us not to get stuck on the accumulating repletion of the past, but leading to ways of articulations that leave room for forgetting, and especially to a version of the past that is coloured with the ability, wish and need to forgive. It is a crucial difference that Paul Ricoeur<sup>(1999, 11)</sup> so very well points out between the tendencies of amnesty and amnesia. This is the choice of actively or passively coming to terms with the past, where public commemorative works such as this remind us so very powerfully that it is an issue that can't be left to specialists and segmantalized categories or essentialist assumptions. It is an issue of who we are, how we are where we are and

how do we want to or try to treat ourselves and others, an issue that must concern everyone participating on that site, in that discourse.

### Productive performative consequences part II

The reactions to the work also had another performative version. This version was even stranger, and in itself more telling in its content than the previously described debate about who is represented and how. This is a controversy that effectively illuminates the distance between saying it and doing it, making us brutally aware of the shallowness of the gestures involved from the side of the establishment. In short, it underlines that very content and reality of the social imaginary at work – and the hindrances for the less static and more challenging, risk-taking experimental version of a social imagination.

This again was a controversy that took the artists by surprise. It was a debate which, on one hand, was about the essence of the invitation card that was sent for the dedication, but which, again, is very much about the heart of the whole issue. The process with the politics and aesthetics of the invitation card was started well in advance, when the artists were asked what they wanted to have on the cover of the invitation. They replied that it made sense to use a still image from the video. Thus, their wish was to have a picture on it, a black and white photo of two men kissing.

And that was that, thought the artists. Until they received the invitation card: a card with no photo, no image, just words. Why? The official explanation was that the office of the minister responsible for the commemoration, Minister of Culture Bernd Neumann (CDU), did not want to show just men in the invitation card. They wanted to protect the gender balance and neutrality, and therefore chose a blank grey/white invitation card. And this, of course, was done in the grand manner, without consulting the artists or even informing them.

But what was the effect? Official explanations aside, this last phase of the project leaves a bad taste. The decision not to respect the work and the choice of the artists is very difficult not to interpret as a deliberate act of editing out the content – and to be deliberately acting in a manner that is diametrically opposed to the aim and the spirit of the whole commemorative project. It is impossible not to say that the official invitation to the event went against the content and ideological aim of the work, and against the whole purpose of the commemoration, of making differences visible. It produced an invitation card that did

not tolerate two men kissing. It is a fascinating example of a reality that bites hard into the flesh of social imaginary, where a semi-hidden difference is perfectly acceptable but where the open, challenging difference that would shake the social imagination of a space into a place is again denied access. A project for tolerance and visibility hit a huge wall even before it managed to get open. Michael Elmgreen's assessment of the reality was laconic but so very accurate: *"Die Probleme sind nicht beendet indem man ein Mahnmal aufstellt"*. (Weltonline 25.5.2008)

But these problems also indicate that there is definitely an ongoing process happening. The result of the debate about representation has had an effect. There is compromise, or a compromise of a sort of promise. For now, there is a consensus on a new idea that is also supported by the artists. The idea is to take turns in what is shown in the box. The compromise would leave the box and its structure as it is, but open up a new competition every two years that would invite new videos of kissing men or women. Whether this will materialize or not, and who would provide the money, who would sit on the jury, what would qualify as a kiss, and is there any room for transsexuals are all questions that are still wide open. How much room for creativity is left for the other potentially participating artists? Is the current phase of the debate again completely locked into the one-dimensional version of both the politics of identity and the politics of representation?

One thing at least is certain: the story of the commemoration of the prosecution of homosexuals in 1933 – 1945 continues. Perhaps it even manages to continue in ways that can't be planned or controlled. Perhaps these actions and interventions take place in ways that the work of Elmgreen and Dragset activates us to compare the strategies of commemoration between 2711 pillars on the other side and their single one on the other, and also perhaps how the endless loop of two kissing men might trigger a wish and a need to do some spontaneous re-enactments of the act on that corner of the Tiergarten park – regardless of whatever our passive and active sexual preferences tend to be.

# VII

## CONCLUSION (SOCIAL HOPE)

"AS EVER, IT IS NOT WHAT YOU DO BUT HOW YOU DO IT. TAKE WHATEVER YOU THINK YOU NEEDED. TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE MACINTYRE AND MAYFIELD, AND IF YOU DECIDE TO GO AND WALK, TALK AND ARGUE WITH THEM, THEN TAKE ALSO JESUS (PRINCIPLES OF NON-VIOLENCE AND LOVE) WITH YOU. BUT PLEASE DON'T GET LOST OR LONELY. DO SOMETHING WITH THEM, TAKE IT OUT THERE, PUSH IT FORWARD, MAKE IT MOVE, LET IT DANGLE."

POLITICS, IDENTITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

So here we are, at the end, on that most imaginable rocky shore, achingly asking: what's going on, what's new, what's the deal with this, yet another constellation of a set of words placed one after another? Anything interesting happened here along the journey from social imaginary towards social imagination?

To use a different kind of vocabulary, where do we go from the point of both admitting and cherishing the knowledge that there are no answers, no solutions, no magic tricks, no completely new techniques? All we have are potential sites of our practices that might embed a chance for them to become a place within that structured space. A place, by which we mean a situated and committed interpretation, a version, a participation toward the content of a concept, image, act or a symbol – an act that is productive in and through its comprehension of the loving and caring limits within which it moves, an act that defines and describes, produces and reflects, never neutrally, never detached, but always as part of the very tackiness of our being stuck with our anticipations and expectations.

Yes, these questions nag and beg. What do we do when we have finally, with pain and agony, now comprehend that nothing can save us from the ever-pressing duality of freedom and responsibility to act here and now, and that it is precisely in and through the past, present and future interpretations of this very site, trying out ways to create and generate actions and interventions, that we can make things become possible? What are the acts of production of meanings that can turn a generic and general space into a singularity of a place?

Well, we face the facts, and the facts make us stay with the practice – whatever it is that you decide to do when you do what you do when you do it. Practice is that site which we must shape and re-make, maintain and keep moving. It is the one and only possibility of empowerment we have access to, but only when understood as self-critical, open-ended, situated and committed practice. Even a practice which fulfils all that is not the solution, but a site for participatory reflection – in and through doing things. It is the practice that carries the knowledge, enables us to connect the dots, and makes us invest more time and energy in doing what we are doing.

A practice is not a single act. It is a long continuity of the same or similar acts that are connected and in the constant act of comparison and competition with one another. This then is acts, plural, generating an environment where their credibility and ability to survive depends

fully on how they manage to create for themselves a site for collective action, a constantly evolving site of sustainable reaction, an emerging site and situation where you give in order to get and receive in order to be able to send out again, in a never-ceasing process of leaving and returning, taking distance and gaining nearness. This is a process where the meeting is only potentially there if and when all sides allow themselves to be affected, thrown off balance, and react to the different ways of being-in-the-world.

Once in this give-and-take continuity of an actively imagined and constantly temporarily realized collectivity, according to Alasdair MacIntyre the main burning and healing ethical question is how to find our way through conflicts. This means acknowledging and confronting the internal conflicts of each issue, each site, each practice and each potentiality of a becoming place, rather than lamenting and cutting down on the complexities. Referring to MacIntyre again, in the final analysis it is about the task of creating a “*relatively self-sufficient and independent form of participatory practice-based community*” (2006, 155).

To activate this same strategy and ideology of hope, but this time around social imagination, more focused on the heart, not on the mind, I want to connect MacIntyre with a completely different type of a vernacular practice of doing things with words, but which nevertheless pretty much articulates and moves toward the same views and wishes, values and wants. This is no other than Curtis Mayfield. I want to anchor his songs to the early major changes in the recent history of the 1960s and 1970s, and especially his first two solo albums, entitled *Curtis* (1970) and *Roots* (1971), accentuated with the lyrics of the songs such as ‘*Move On Up*’ and ‘*Miss Black America*’, and in the second album ‘*Keep On Keeping On*’ and ‘*Underground*’. This comparison is a deliberate act of bringing together that is not hip, not naïve, but something else. It is the act of social imagination, and an activation of social hope.

I can say without any hesitation that these works resonate with and carry with them an activated relationship to the central issues within social history and social politics in recent years. These are works that deal with the legacy of a site called Chicago, and social imagination of a very specific period that wanted and managed to emphasize the chances for empowerment and freedom. Despite all the hardships and all the troubles, theirs is a voice that wants to strive towards something else, something better, a voice that wants to believe in social

hope, that refuses to stay passive, choosing to act and to anchor itself in these processes of keeping on keeping on. With a clear understanding of the dangers of nostalgia, all we need to do is to open that double sleeve of the album called *Curtis*, see and witness that hope in action, Curtis carrying his daughter high on his shoulders, the evening sun glimmering from behind, gently lifting the spirits up, intimidating us with a effortless elegance and powerful urgency. A cover like that makes me want to both laugh and cry, put my hand on my heart while making use of the chances of it activating a place within the right here and right now, in connection and in combination with the mind that matters.

Because this is exactly what it is all about when we try to act with and activate sources of static social imaginary into events of performative social imagination. These are acts that must not be fearful of falling down or of sounding not necessarily so cool. Who cares what it looks or sounds like, as long as the process is searching for and striving towards actions that combine the sources of motivation and inspiration but does not get stuck on that starting point and position of departure. Mixing with the everyday, with products of cultural capital, the dangers of celebration of exotic consumerism, the blatant one-dimensional commodification, or the sad chauvinism of certain type of vernacular is something that is doomed to stay on the agenda. Dealing with a source, you must be aware of its implications, inherent limitations and in the end, its wildly unused or under-used potentialities. In order to take it somewhere and use it as a trampoline or tool, you must learn how to work that particular vehicle as a trampoline and that very pragmatic tool for thinking – especially thinking differently.

This then is social imagination as a kind of huge, vast archive that invites you to ways to do something else, do something different with it and at it. It is not a fancy lifestyle choice, not a promising sticker that you place on your forehead each and every morning. This is the act of interventions and infiltrations, of bounces and of something transforming from one thing to something different. As ever, it is not what you do but how you do it. Take whatever you think you need. Take, for example MacIntyre and Mayfield, and if you decide to go and walk, talk and argue with them, then take also Jesus (principles of non-violence and love) with you. But please don't get lost or lonely. Do something with them, take it out there, push it forward, make it move, let it dangle.

It is a combination of both-and strategy, of having a direction but making sure that what happens next is open, that allows us to keep that process of social imagination moving and evolving. The task is to avoid falling into the traps of static versions of social imaginary. These are versions that certainly tell stories of how we ought to construct the way we live and love and hate together, but which have unfortunately become stories that no longer allow internal conflicts to flourish. They are versions that have become too self-aware and self-contained. They have lost the ability to laugh at and with oneself. It is a laughter that is sometimes without darker shades of blue, but a laughter that sometimes is truly characterized by a melancholic touch that we are after, to be attached to. Laughter like that opens us up and makes us think and relate – reflect. And yes, re-think, too, in and through the practices of who we are, where we are, how we are and what we try to be and become.

In this constant negotiation and navigation between what was, what is and what might become, it is these rare moments of how a space becomes a place that we must focus on. We need to trust, and we can trust situated and committed practices, focusing on how to develop, protect and maintain them. There is a temporariness that is what it is only in a connection to other temporalities. Alone, none of them can make it and maintain the momentum. It is only when they are aware of one another, and when they seek critical yet constructive interactions between themselves, that they might have a chance of making a difference.

A temporary moment passes on and by, but an effective moment of an act and actualization of it leaves a significant trace. Connecting the heart-felt complications and making things happen, a moment bounces on and off other moments, relating to and re-shaping each other, giving and providing hope, company and protection. These are passionate moments, when a social site, a non-naïve local practice and a particular issue indeed becomes an activated and emerging place within a space – a place for hope, social hope grounded on individual acts and actions that are situated and committed.

**VII CONCLUSION (SOCIAL HOPE)**

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