

I am not a genius declaring that contemporary art is a product of western society. A product, a relevant idea and a cultural movement and so to say a historical event of the West.

Approaching contemporary art as a historical event it facilitate us the visualisation of a chronological order. We can see a commence and probably we could see an end of it. The challenge comes within accepting that we are living the times of the end. As a 'post-apocalyptic survival' I have the privilege to fantasize on the future, where this category of art has exhausted itself and we are stepping in a new era.

The subjects I want to focus on in this text are: how long are we still going to experiment inside the 'white cubes'? When the Westerns are asking for change; how does art respond to it ? Do we, the producers, have a **plan B** ?

First,do not enter the Netherlands

... and now what?

Public art, an overview

From the concept of 'non places' to the concept of 'public non-places'

Supermodernism

The role of the public artist and the insurgent public spaces

At the origins the act or the word?

The West

Dissensus VS Consensus

Democracy never happened

Colophon

First, do not enter the Netherlands

I would like to begin this text looking back in the days when in 2011 Dutch government publicly announce their decision on making cuts in the Arts subsidium system. The cabinet would no more support museums, film, music, performing arts and visual arts by more than 50%.

Currently the Netherlands credits its exceptional international reputation for a major part due to the innovative and daring work from independent artists in the small and middle-sized art institutions. It is exactly these artists and institutions to be hit hardest by the drastic cuts. The installed subsidy structure was the result of decennia-long investment and development. Now that the current cabinet demolished this structure, The Netherlands is losing its cultural independency and depth.

On June 23, 2011 an international call was published in the New York Times. A collective of several Dutch artists were drawing attention to the situation.

The Arts and Culture page of the daily newspaper was for a quarter occupied by a black advertisement, here readers were awarded to do not enter the Netherlands because of a cultural melt down. An e-mail address was given to support the public protest.



**Do not
enter the
Netherlands**

**Cultural
meltdown
in progress**

Dutch government decimating support for the arts.
Severe damage will be done. Dutch arts can no longer
hold their unique position on the world's stage.

Disgruntled Dutch Artists
dutchartists2011@gmail.com

Advertisement by Dutch Artists 2011, New York Times, 23 June 2011

After the drastic communication of the Dutch Council for Culture (Raad voor Culture), art institutions have to re-plan their future in order to continue existing while the autonomous artists has to revalue their position. What is to be done? How to work further without harming the current level of the art world? What shall we do with the accumulated knowledge and practice? Institutions need to re-think their models of action, re-invent strategies and look for support within other sources.

With Arts excluded from the founding program we are witnessing a new era in cultural production. According to the actual western political discourse; we are living times of transformation where support for Arts would be hand out to the category that can embrace a wider public; roughly massive concurrence to big shows. With the economical crisis at the door, the politicians can see coalition as a solution for surviving, not only on the governmental floor (f.e. The European Union) but also on a local level. They donate a 'political power' to the citizens not only through the right to vote but also through an open invitation to participation. Apparently everyone is invited to think and take action. Citizens, for western politics, become not only consumers, but participants. Multitalented, multi-educated and multitasked is the model of the western citizen of 2000.

... and now what?

Parallel to the Netherlands, countries as the U.S.A., has supported the Arts through public funding. I am referring to North America because of their actual economical situation which is quite similar to the one in Europe, where they are experiencing a gradual collapse of the system. Not to mention that they, as Europe, are a model of a democratic western thinking apart.

As an example of the undertaken solutions to this situation the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) intent to provide the costumer with their guidelines to the applications for grants. Since 1965 the target for the commission of the NEA was to give the public better access to art of our time. Currently we can read in the NEA's plan for 2012-2016 their decision to be responsive to the changing landscape.

'It is no longer enough to provide access to artistic works of high quality; the Agency will also reward innovative strategies and models for engaging the public directly with such experiences. Likewise, the Arts Endowment has a responsibility to help preserve America's great artistic traditions in all their diversity—but it also has a responsibility to bring that work into diverse populations so that it may stimulate new discoveries in people from multiple backgrounds. This emphasis on art—delivery-systems is entirely in keeping with a new

generation of arts audiences who, faced with many competing leisure options, nevertheless appear to value personal participation over passivity'.

In the last sentence we can appreciate the urgency to make the Arts more participatory and less passive. The question is how to bring the museum to the audience and not the audience to the museum. Skipping the internet accessibility and the art educated visitors, with this paper I would like to rethink how to make the Arts more public?

Art historian Patricia C. Phillips [1] insists that to make Arts public is insufficient to establish that it will happen by placing it in public space. Although Public Art is a movement with a participatory character that goes beyond passive spectatorship. According to Phillips art doesn't automatically become public by placing it in an easily accessible place. She elaborates more on this concept using some key-questions like : What makes a work specific for a public space? What connects a work not to any kind of public space but to a specific public space? What are the elements that make the public space so, and what is the relationship with it?

[1] Phillips P.C. (1988), *Out of order, the public art machine*, Artforum International, vol. 27, Dec.

It seems that it is not anymore sufficient to wide open the doors of the museums for the people to embrace contemporary art. Maybe even the idea of spectacular buildings in touristic city centres start to be old fashion. It feels like an extra steps should be taken and an extra effort should be made in order to come closer to the common public.

The first to be harmed in this struggle to last are the small cultural institutions, that need to catch up with the museums in number of visitors. As a paradox it is a lost battle form the beginning, museums are formally educational spaces and small institutions fight for more experimental programs. While the last ones are coming up with temporary solutions I would like to post the question of how long are we still going to experiment inside the 'white cubes'? When the Westerns are asking for change; how does art respond to it ? Do we, the producers, have a plan B ?

As artist working in public space I do not feel to take part of a drama but more of a bright new era, where art will be capable to include everyone. This future is the public space! But before diving positively in this premonition and anticipating that is what the the art world needs, I will give a short overview of public art and it's practice from the '60es and further in the text I will show several aspects of it's contemporary landscape.

Public art, an overview

Public art is a branch of contemporary art which may be declared an official movement from the group practice of Land art and the Minimal art. In her book Lorenza Perelli, teacher of 'Arts in public space' in the Politecnico di Milano, tries to define some aspects of this practice based on its historical stages :

- site specificity* : the starting point is the Minimal art and Land art from the '60. The artwork is not meant to be transportable to an indoor exhibition space
- *participation* : the public as the centre of the work. The artwork is not a finished product ready to be collocated in a space but is dialogued with the public. The criteria for the artist choice are the problematics he/she wants to elaborate on
- *social aspect* : if public art has the public as the centre of the work then it has to include the social aspect of it
- *community art* : contemporary art + space+ politic debate = construct or brake a public space
- *activist art* : the challenge of the artist is to find a status not in separation from the world, but inside, in direct contact with it, he/she becomes then a cultural worker. [2]

[2] Lorenza Perelli (2006) *Public Art: arte, intrazione e progetto urbano*. FrancoAngeli.r.l., Milano, Italy

Mostly the work happens to be outside of the limits of an exhibition space and only later it can be translated or passed to it. To make the artwork possible a collaboration between professionals is needed, incorporating the knowledge of architects, urban designers, landscape designers and interaction designers. Furthermore within community art projects and activist art, the practice requires a teamwork by professionals and amateurs.

The field of action of public art extend to the streets, squares and all the free accessible places in the city, to continue in the space outside of the city boundary. The villages, fields and woods, rivers and waterfalls and all the nature areas are included in this large range of possibilities.

To all appearances public artists have the agency of freedom. They can decide where to work, how to work and when to work. This anarchistic state has an impact on society, therefore the freedom of public artists is also their restriction. Similar to all the other artists the first condition for work is the space, art in public space naturally depend on the space self, it's political conditions dictate the rules of the game and becomes a limitation.

What does distinguish the public space from museums, art galleries and private collections ?

When it comes to cities it is difficult to give a specific definition of a field of action. Perhaps it is helpful to retrocede to the '90 and analyse the concept of the 'non places' introduced by the french ethnographer Marc Augé.

The new frontier of public space, to those who believe in its essential purpose, is represented by gasoline stations at the highways, discotheques, large shopping malls, stations and interchanges, from all that is more or less connected to the system of infrastructural mobility in a society made up mainly of nomadic tourists of their intimacy, epidermal as consumers hurried lives, spaces and emotions .

Places or rather 'non-places' which lay down the definitive separation between public space and social space, offering a substantial divergence of the two terms, between urban space and public, faces the first to mean a multimedia tic, approved, planetary scene of crossing and consumption, and the second the crowd of people divided and anonymous, able to meet and coalesce only in the form of minority and therefore aimed to express and represent more private than public'. [3]

[3] Marc Augé (1992) *No lugares*, Editorial Gedisa, S. A., Barcelona, Spain

If ideologically the public space typical of the city is the place where *urbis* and *civitas* come together, as for example the city centre, the present situation instead tells us of the continuous overlapping of types, a mixture of urban form and functions. The process of hybridization of new and ancient forms.

The new frontier of public spaces for Augé, are where the space becomes more only space which is public, from public space to public and space.

We are observing a process of disintegration of the compactness of the town and the public space into an urban space, decentralized and widespread.

Metropolitan areas populated by more than ten millions inhabitants. An aggregate of old city in new features, of urban areas expanded like oil: the *megacity*. Here city centres and suburbs fuse, and form a new landscape where there is no centrality. Old industrial areas and former farms are gradually occupied by a large number of citizens with different backgrounds. Therefore an a city becomes an agglomeration of neighbourhoods, with different characteristics, different cities in a city.

A continuous migration of rich and poor colonize the *urbis* and mold any area to their necessities. With modernization, gentrification comes as local political solution in new build areas as long as in the historical ones.

This gives us an notion of what the history of public art is and what stands for public space today. The coming paragraph is an attempt to focus on the working field of public artists in Western society in order to understand what are the guidelines for public art production.

From the concept of 'non places' to the concept of
'public non-places'

With the decentralization of urban activities we are facing the loss of recognition of the city with certain inherited characteristics. The actual landscape fragmentation forces us to read the city based on our interests and incomes. Meanwhile low cost tourists are streamed by travel guides and maps, the locals avoid the touristic attractions. The historic city centers have gradually altered to entrainment areas where international commercial companies earn their profits. As a result the historical attributions are lost, as tourists we will find identical shopping possibilities in Europe, America and Asia. To be able to discover the identity of a place we are forced to get outside of the touristic routes and to interact with locals. Distinct neighborhoods carry distinct patterns, with distinct social life. By definition a city center is where two general streets meet, in *megacities* the center vanishes to proliferate in several centers. There is no more space, there are a lot of small pieces of spaces.

The essayist George Perec has attempted to give a definition of the space that we daily inhabit. He begins from the page he is using to write on then he zooms out to the furniture he is sitting on, the room he found himself in, his apartment and so on. He decomposes the whole based on the meaning that we give to it.

'We will see that is something primarily geometric. It could establish from three simple spatial forms that can be applied to different institutional arrangements that somehow feature the elementary forms of social space. On the contrary, in the geography that is us daily familiar, we can speak about itineraries and axes or about ways that conducts from one place to another and has been traced by man; from the other side about crosses, meeting points, that were designed, sometimes with a giant proportion to satisfy, specially the markets, the necessity of the economic exchange, and to conclude, centers of religious and politics gatherings, constructed by certain men and that define frontiers for other men.' [1]

For Percec our itinerary is the one to dictate our social interaction. Daily we cross different notable points that constitute other meeting points, the just position of which in the end form public space. This simple forms doesn't characterize the big political or economical places, but they simultaneously define the domestic space.

So to see the domestic feeling can be experienced not only inside our homes but within a familiar itinerary.

[1] Georges Percec (1999) *Especies de espacios*, Novografik, S.A., Barcelona, Spain

Our ways to our destinations are the extensions of our houses. We domesticise the bar where we drink coffee, the toilet of that bar, the market, the park, the office, the train, the cash machine. Private becomes an extended concept, we are sharing our privacy when we share the same place with others. We make our privacy public, our behavior transform the '*non-places*' to '*public non-places*' by acting familiar in non familiar places.

As visual example of domestication of the public is the work of the Dutch social designer Rocco Verdult. He creates temporary meeting places by hacking public domain. In a short time he collects materials and alter the existing structures of a city. His interventions aims to gatherings of people.

For *Klimrektent* he occupied a children playground in the city of Eindhoven. With a plastic isolating film and some tape Verdult transformed a climbing frame in a tent for an evening. In his own impression of this action he tells that some children out the neighborhood helped him and that during the night a group of Turkish and Moroccan and Kurdish guests appeared.



www.rocoverdult.nl

Supermodernism

In recent decades several cultural Western and non movements has been dominated by Postmodernism. Postmodernism reject modern philosophy but as his foregoing maintain the beliefs in progress and the faith in reason.

With Modernism we attended the assumption that a specific style should be applied internationally while the frontiers and the time zones are not anymore an obstacle for exchange, a modern human of the 20th century aim to be international.

'Without the modern, the former would not exist, would still be present and current. Therefore the modern is what makes the present age, what comes to displace the present backward toward the past.'

[2]

On the contrary, from a postmodern perspective, sensitivity to the context and assimilation of elements make up the right environment to be. This contextualist position is substantially impregnated of the *genius loci* concept, based on the idea that each place has its own specific character, according to their geographical and historical location. [1]

[1] Hans Ibelings (1998) *Supermodernism*, NAI Publisher, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

[2] Josep Quetglas (2001) *El horror cristalizado*, Actar Publishers, Barcelona, Spain

In the decades of '50 and '60, more than in any other time in the past, there was a convention that people belonged to one global community beyond its origins. Thanks to the improvements in communication and international connections it became relatively easy to be part and feel included in a global society. With the release of Internet and the expansion of worldwide infrastructures at the beginning of the 21st century we are able to reduce great distances. Although actual awareness of unity and living in one world is based on today's global commerce, Neo-liberal markets enable us to buy similar products everywhere.

Dutch architect Hans Ibelings put globalization in the first place when talking about his Supermodern concept of the city. Globalization or homogenization is the dominant theme of the contemporary mindset. Inevitably media and increased mobility, which have played a dominant role in the process of globalization, also affect the urban and architectural planning. No matter where we turn our view, it always seems to have nourished urban skyscrapers, outside residential areas and new neighborhoods with highways and business polygons. Meanwhile airports, infrastructure and roads knots become catalysts of modern urbanization it seems as logical as the appearance of ancient human settlements, where two converged routes or an accessible river

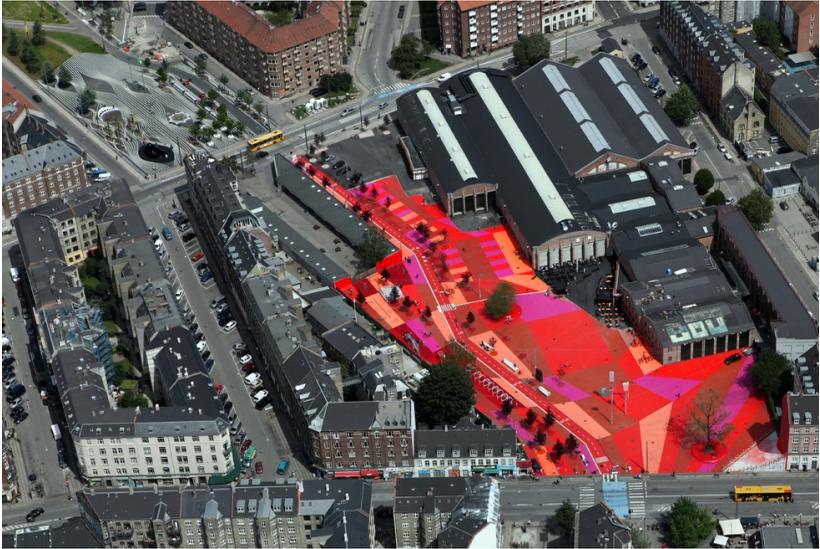
would form the future urbis. This global evolution is now accompanied by a decline of city heart and city centers life and thus channeled into a total transformation of the concept of classical city.

With Supermodernism the city happens to be a self-sufficient entity linked to another element in the omnipotent urban territory, several cities in a city.

The public art project *Superkilen* from the art group Superflex embed all the characteristics of the notion of Supermodernism. *Superkilen* is an urban park in Copenhagen divided into three main areas: The Red Square, The Black Market and The Green Park. While The Red Square designates the modern, urban life with café, music and sports, The Black Market is the classic square with fountain and benches. The Green Park is a park for picnics, sports and walking the dog.

The citizens living in the immediate vicinity of the park relate to more than 50 different nationalities. Instead of using the designated city furnitures meant to be for parks and public spaces, people from the area was asked to nominate specific city objects such as benches, bins, trees, playgrounds, manhole from other countries. These objects were chosen from a country of the inhabitant's national origin or from somewhere else encountered through traveling. The objects were either produced in a 1:1 copy or bought and transported to the site.





www.superflux.net

The role of the public artist and the insurgent public spaces

Leaving the reality of cultural movements and institutions we will face the actual phenomenon of public insurgency . Citizens' groups, neighborhoods, grassroots collectives are leading a charge to create public space where it does not yet exist, to reclaim it from where it was lost, and to rejuvenate it from an undesirable or incomplete state. This self-rising and independent force is an aspect to put in consideration when it comes to the role of public artist today. Referring to DIY (Do It Yourself) ethic, the sociologist P. Bourdieu summarize :

'Every established order thence to produce the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agents's practices to be reasonable'. [1]

An actual *urbis* authenticity illustrate a continuous proliferation of identities. Our nomadic existence teaches us how to adapt to places which we are not accustomed to. Lately immigrants and locals started to co-work in designing their neighborhoods with the uniqueness of a creative, self-organized, self-managed and ecological character. Essentially without the involvement of local governments which mostly will spend too much time on bureaucracy.

[1] Bourdieu P (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Nice R. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Therefore public space activism is, by default, forging strategic linkages, mobilizing people not otherwise connected with activism, and providing a more accessible and generalized language for advocacy and citizens engagement. Re-inventing, re-constructing and re-creating means claiming a better place. Guerilla urbanizers are activists, architects and landscape architects, community organizers, graffiti artists, home owners, parents, sex workers, squatters, students, teachers and urban farmers. Perhaps most importantly, the movement links together to form elements like: people engaged in street reclamation, guerilla gardening, parks advocacy, disability activism, counter-surveillance, anti-billboard lobbying, street artistry, progressive urban planning and design. Personally I named the DIY phenomena *soft-activism* or *generous-urbanism* or *urban activism*, it's entity doesn't require police intervention.

'There are diverse means through which individuals and groups can change actively in the contestation and remaking of 'public space', and the city by extension. From conversion of private homes into community third places to the occupation of streets for alternative uses. These acts do not require overburdening investment of infrastructure, they enable individuals and often small groups to effect changes in the otherwise hegemonic urban

landscapes. Because of the scale and mode of production, the making of this alternative public space is more participatory and spontaneous, and therefore more open and inclusive. The making of insurgent public space suggest a urbanism that is different from the institutionalized notion of urbanism and its association with masters planning and policy making. Unlike the conventional practice of urban planing, which tends to be dominated by professionals, the instances of insurgent public space suggest the abilities of citizens groups and individuals to play a distinct role in shaping the contemporary urban environment in difference of the official rules and regulations. Troughs continued expression and contestation, the presence and making of insurgent public space serves as barometer of the democratic well-being and inclusiveness of our present society. ' [2]

Cities are highly paradoxical places. On one hand there are vital cultural economic centers, and on the other they are resources vacuums, supporting extraordinary high population densities at the expense of surrounding region and international commerce.

[2] Jeffrey Hou, (2010) *Insurgent public space, guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, New York, U.S.A.

Currently over 75% of the global population lives in cities. As this percentage is increasing and the rate of environmental pollution is quickening, it is urgent to change our lifestyle to a more sustainable one. Humanity has entered an era of decreasing energy resources. Modern agriculture system, an outcome of the the Second World War, is highly dependent on cheap energy not only for growing food but also for distributing it. Will cities still be capable of supporting their population when big trucks are no longer delivering food? This question is of vital priority. The key to establish community food security is to have food coming from multiple and diverse sources. Urban farms and gardens can grow a considerable amount of vegetables, while fruit and nut trees in parks can provide community crop. Neighborhoods micro lives stock collectives can be formed, with members sharing the responsibilities and benefits. Growing food in the city is a way to build communities, support local economies and be rooted in a place. The professor Eyal Weizman, while talking about critical spatial practice, insist on:

'The idea of critical practice necessitate that you intervene in order to research and not research in order to intervene.'

Interview article on Bomb Magazine (2012): *Critical spatial practice: Nato Thomson and Eyal Weizman*, by Anna Altman

By creating international counter culture events, calling for participants through the web, the founder of *Guerilla Gardening*; Richard Reynolds, mobilize citizens all over the world to participate in planting greens. The *international tulip guerilla gardening day* and *the international sunflowers guerilla gardening day* took over in the last two years with 100 of participants. At its core, it is a direct political action statement intricately tied to land reform and land rights.



www.guerrillagardening.org

'The illicit cultivation was started in London in the early '00 , by now is a growing arsenal for anyone interested in the war against neglect and scarcity of

public space as a place to grow. To get started is necessarily to have some seeds, some tools and an urban space where flowers or vegetables can have a life. '

The struggle for urban agriculture among diaspora groups epitomizes an element of the environmental justice movement that seeks to link demands for open space, ecological protection, and food sovereignty with demands for fair and adequate housing, meaningful jobs with living wages, and the protection of essential common space that neighborhoods and families require to sustain a sense of place and community. Guerilla Gardening develop in sustainable food practice as urban growers become a progressive force for social justice and environmental self-determination.

Alike the european *Guerilla Gardeners*, in the U.S.A, the group *Rebar* approaches the public realm with temporary solutions to create an awareness about the environmental situation. They provide temporary public space in privatized part of cities. One of the more critical issues facing outdoor urban human habitat is the paucity of space for humans to rest, relax, or just do nothing. For example, more than 70% of San Francisco's downtown outdoor space is dedicated to the private vehicle, while only a fraction of that space is allocated to the public use.

'Our goal was to transform a parking spot into a PARK(ing) space, thereby temporarily expanding the public realm and improving the quality of urban human habitat, at least until the meter ran out. By our calculations, we provided an additional 24,000 square-foot-minutes of public open space that Wednesday afternoon'.



www.rebargroup.org

With my own art practice I apply tactical urbanism methods to temporary interventions. *Plein dag* (*Square day*) is an act of 'hacking' the public realm by placing house furniture outdoor. A street

roundabout in Utrecht were domesticize and, by inviting unknowns and passers-by to drink and eat together, an independent gathering space was so created. In one day more then 100 reactions where collected, where the majority evidence the fact that there is a need for a public square in this specific area of the city.



At the origins the act or the word?

Guerilla gardening, tactical urbanism and DIY ethics are the reason to rise for many communities, under the motto of 'sharing is caring'. This movements are examples for artistic pioneering in the new role of initiators of a new tendency. Accordingly the historical and cultural role of public artists come under examination. Because of this new social duty public artists transform in mediators linking communities, political parties, commercial organizations and non profit commissioners.

Traditionally the producing of artworks in public realm does not require citizen's opinion or participation. Monumental sculptures and street furniture does not embody freedom and they are often victims of vandalism thanks to their passive aspect. Besides being symbols of the past that remind us of our glories, they invade our common space as UFOs came from an outer universe. Instead to realize a successful contemporary artwork a balance between the producers and the users, which will form a farther relationship, is significant.

During the period of economical decline in Europe, new political models as Participation are introduced. Different parties try to engage their voters to actively take part in their own daily structure. Participation enter as crucial political strategy for economical development. On this scenario it is

very easy to confuse grass rooted activism with governmental activity. In some cases artists are triggered to produce meanwhile awkward political actions happens at their shoulders. A clear example of failure for community art projects is the one designed to the district Transvaal in Den Haag. Transvaal is a so called action area, selected for demolition. Here funding, professionals and amateurs collaborate to make the eviction of the lowest incomes citizens smoother.



In the period until 2014 the Transvaal District, will undergo a comprehensive transformation. Some 3000 council houses will be demolished, in their place 1600 new houses will be built, the majority of which will be sold. For quite some time the vista of the district will be dominated by boarded-up buildings, construction sites in scaffolding, empty shop premises and wasteland, all next to the remaining old houses. The social structure of the Transvaal district will change drastically as the old inhabitants move away and new ones come in. Instead of "writing off" this transition period, mobile office OpTrek commissioned architectural firm RAL2005 (Jan Konings and Duran Doepel) to design the concept of Hotel Transvaal as a means of revaluing districts during their transformation process. Hotel Transvaal cooperates with local residents, neighbourhood organizations and local entrepreneurs. This gives our hotel a wide range of facilities. Turkish, Moroccan and Surinam restaurants, fresh bakeries, beauty salons, an ayurvedic massage parlour, bars with live music, hairdressers and several internet cafés. Most shops are open seven days a week, also during the evening. And all of that within walking distance from the accommodation. Hotel Transvaal avails itself of the surplus of empty locations in the area. Therefore its rooms are not situated in one building, but spread all over the neighbourhood.

In this case art is used as a decorative tool to entertain residents and distract their attentions from reality. At the same time the position taken from the artists determine their political point of view. Artistic skills can be utilized to underline the abuse of power in this situation. The core of any interpreted action becomes political. The paradox of a victorious situation is when the commissioning bodies are the artistic ones.

In his book ' Wild Park. Commissioning the unexpected', Jeroen Boomgaard question the status of art in relational aesthetics.

' Perhaps the most successful participatory artworks in the public domain are these in which the artist succeeds in rendering the desperate motives and interests tangible and visible. But here too all parties agree on the idea of an activated public space, a space in flux trough the intervention of residents or the planning processes of state and private parties. In this way, such projects always comprise an intricate way of reacting to change processes, softening them while simultaneously expressing their inevitability.' [1]

[1] Jeroen Boomgaard (2011) *Wild park, commissioning the unexpected*, Netherlands Foundation for Visual arts, Design and Architecture

Cultural critic Michel De Certeau describes how we attempt to circumvent or adapt to the all pervasive strategies of power brokers and governments. It is a way of acting that is aware of its 'lack' of power but makes life bearable through minor 'victories'. These are 'tactics', analogy to the guerrilla warfare which focus on the mobility of a small group in the face of a large, unwisely one.

'It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunction open in the surveillance of the property powers, it poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected'. [2]

In this semi-illegal and adversarial nature, this analogy is unsuited to the analysing vast majority of commissioned artwork. Such projects are transient, barely noticeable adjustments or disruptions in public space aimed at confusing the viewer. This characteristic can be found in the work of the Dutch artist Harmen de Hoop. He often openly critiques the regulation of the public space and the rules that govern it and its increasing annexation by privatisation and commercialisation. Anonymity is an essential aspect of his work, since it has consequences for the way in which it is

[2] M. de Certeau (1984) *The practice of everyday life*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

experienced. He retreats from his creation, thereby denying the spectator the frame of reference of the 'art' concept. What defer 'Hotel Transvaal' from de Hoops' 'Hotel' in Rotterdam is the absence of a commissionaire. Also he does not publicize the installation, nor does he force the passer-by to pay attention.



The West

BAVO is an independent research office focused on the political dimension of art, architecture and planning. BAVO is a co-operation between Gideon Boie and Matthias Pauwels, both of whom studied architecture and philosophy. They recently conducted research into creative city development and practices of embedded cultural activism. [1]

Based on the commission for *BAK, basis voor actuele kunst* in the realization of the Dutch Pavilion for the *52 Biennale di Venezia* in 2007, the group BAVO research the situation of social housing in the Netherlands. They emphasize on the similarity between the countries of the former Communistic bloc and the Dutch society in the last decades when both are being subjected to a process of 'normalization'. The commission consists of three parts: a new work by artist Aernout Mik in the Dutch Pavilion in Venice, a critical reader and an 'extension' of the Pavilion taking place in the Netherlands. *Citizens and Subjects*, the title of the project, reflects on the notion of the nation-state in the present day circumstances of the so-called West and asks how we can negotiate its prospects vis-à-vis the challenges posed by the enduring state of anxiety stemming from various threats, real or imagined.

[1] www.bavo.biz



2007, Citizens and Subjects: Aernout Mik, Dutch pavillion at the 52nd Biennale di Venezia



2007, Citizens and Subjects: Aernout Mik, Mock up, 4-channel video installation, image from the set

This contemporary condition is co-defined by immigration, an issue of major political and moral consequence, which we seem to have been incapable of resolving. Instead, fear, 'security' and violence have increasingly become tools for maintaining the status quo. The project, in its three steps, proposes this situation as the paradigm of our contemporaneity and prompts us to think through art about other possible ways that a new kind of political reality could be constructed.

Since the beginning of the '90es the Dutch housing market has been subjected to one of the most intensive restructurings in recent history, also referred to as 'The Big Fix-Up'. The liberalization of the housing market is a case in point of how sense of emergency is produced to legitimize decisions that obviously serves as the narrow interest of the elite group. Here neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics come together to enforce a consensus on the inevitability of restructuring the social housing.

'These tactics on the part of the ruling elite seems to be very effective. Also within cultural circles it has become commonplace not merely to 'shout from the sideline' or engage in deep criticism but, instead to 'do', to 'get real' and to make oneself useful for a change. The task is thus defined as one of invention, of micro-solutions to alleviate the

many concrete, everyday needs, discomfort and grievances of these affected by restructuring. The unspoken command is that in making oneself useful, one does not radically contest the bigger political decision and presupposition behind the social process. It doesn't take much to see how the latter is the precondition for being able to work 'constructively' towards feasible actions, in dialog and cooperation with the main players in the restructuring process. Or to put it bluntly, the high costs of so called post-critical cultural commitment is political pacification.' [2]

The western condition and the democratization of art is a driving force for artist Thomas Hirschhorn as well. He doesn't limit his work to criticality but he engage directly with a non art educated audience. With the *Bataille Monument* commissioned for Documenta 11 in 2002 , Hirschhorn opens up the possibility for the audience to build the artwork on artist instructions. For this occasion he decides to construct an eight-part monument, including a library, a snack bar and a TV studio, to the surrealist philosopher George Bataille.

[2] *Neoliberalism with Dutch Characteristics: The Big Fix-Up of the Netherlands and the Practice of Embedded Cultural Activism*, BAVO Rosi Braidotti, Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova (2007) *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example*, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, The Netherlands



Thomas Hirschhorn, Bataille Monument, 2002, Kassel, Documenta 11

Moreover, he decides that the monument must be situated in Friedrich-Wöhler Siedlung, a mixed Turkish-German social housing complex in a suburb of Kassel. Visitors of the cultural event are offered a shuttle service to this district.

After a week in direct contact with all the parties he question the capability of art to include everyone and the impact of such a project on them. What begins as a democratic action ends up in a personal identity struggle. Hirschhorn declares that he is an artist and not a social worker. As result he face a dichotomy of the whole: on one hand he illuminates new paths for artistic production, where more space is given for social interaction. On the other hand the work doesn't alter the public, it reduce itself to a 'safari' experience for Documenta visitors and vaguely improve to the german suburb.

Evaluating all the previously mentioned artworks under a psychological perspective a general artistic struggle could be diagnosed, either in professionals or in collaborative projects. The diagnosis gives an impression that at the core of many artworks of the last decades there is an attempt to remove an obstacle which prevent from producing a democratic master peace.

Dissensus VS Consensus

Is difficult to doubt when it comes to the topic of a commune manifestation within the artistic multitude, from a critical or an activist position, the art world seeks for a democratic change. In a society that has exploited its socio-economic possibilities, the artist is reduced to a minor range of themes to work on. In this situation the autonomy of the artists forms an advantage position, over other professionals. Art is better than any existing political party for its flexibility and its ability in constantly renewing itself. The belief in autonomy function as initiator for many projects, although the reality is that freedom is unattainable when rationed. Freedom creates an enormous disbalance when is injected in a conservative country such as Europe, particularly in European democracy. Due to its hierarchical administrative dominance, many projects in Europe land inside bureaucratic drawers. The reality does not compensate the expectations when this discourse is prompted into a message as order and disorder. When assumed the first, the second step is to request for an equal dose of regime and freedom, only then autonomy becomes a positive actor.

The architect and essayist Markus Meissen stresses the notion of 'participation' as a violent political model that gives micro scale solutions. Therefore participation is nourished as social sedative in order

to pacify conflicts. Consensus is mistaken for unanimity and less attention is donated to negotiations processes.

'There seems to be an underlying consensus that we are not only supposed to think and act in politically correct manner, but, put bluntly, we are also supposed to be nice to each other and stir as little confusion and disruption as possible.' [1]

The threatens truth is that, due to force majeure, the antagonist of participation in such a scenario would be interventions and activism. Obviously this has nothing of a promising future for the ruling policies. A folk without discipline is dangerous for economical stability, on the contrary effective solutions rely on unpredictable actions. Actions that could thereby open up a space for alternative cultural form. Cultural agents would do better to endorse Jacques Rancière's theory of political art. According to him the social relevance of arts is to produce what he calls *dissensus*, the radical political moment in which two social factions cannot simply 'agree to disagree'. [2]

[1] Markus Meissen, *The nightmare of participation*, Sterberg press (2010) Berlin, Germany

[2] Jaques Rancière, (1995) *La Mesentente. Politique et Philosophie*, Editions Galiléé, Paris

Every established order is a consequence of previous political practices. When it comes to hegemony to improve any established order counter-hegemony is required. The authenticity of the western thought is carried out rationalism and individualism which unable a harmonic social development. An agonistic concept of democracy brings the opposites to collaborate. [3]

A democratic master peace would be capable of emancipation. Here public space offers some pre-eminence to institutions, as a free platform for social life it embrace the uninvited audience. In such a instances passersby are the crucial element for an artwork to be completed. Art complete its articulation as an 'eye opener' and it's up to public opinion to go along or to refuse the experience.

[3]Chantal Mouffe, (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, London, U.K

Democracy never happened

In his book 'In defence of lost causes', Slavoj Zizek focus on the concept of failure as the drive for innovation. In the same model in which democracy needs the anti-democracy to rejuvenate, the State needs the resistance of the people to be rejuvenated. Two reasons cause modern society to reconciled with itself. The first is the interaction inside the civil society. But this interaction is a continuous conflict, and the mechanism of disintegration, where the end result is competition. The second reason, since this conflict and this competition make people completely interdependent is thus the generated social ties .

' Every crisis itself is a stimulus to a new beginning, every failure of short-term measures and pragmatism is a blessing in disguise, an opportunity to rethink its foundations. What we need is a recovery through repetition, through a critical engagement with the whole European tradition, we have to repeat the question: What Europe?, What does it mean for us to be European? And so make a new beginning. The alternative is a slow decadence, a gradual transformation of Europe into what that Greece was ripe for the Roman Empire: a destination for tourism. Politics then proceed within distortion. Contrary to the appearances the 'American century' is over and we are entering the period of the formation of multiple centres of global capitalism.

So maybe in this new era, each new centre will represent capitalism with a specific feature: the U.S.A. neoliberal capitalism, China the oriental values, Europe and Eastern Europe what remains of the social state enfin populist capitalism for Latin America. After the failure of the U.S.A. to impose as a unique superpower, there is now the need to establish the rules of interaction between these local centres in case of a conflict for interest.' [1]

Today we can observe a new kind of professionals. A contemporary freelancer is the first to proclaim that the world is changing, that it is no longer possible to perform under the exploitation of the neoliberal markets. The economical recension of Europe deliver identity crisis to its citizens. Time is becoming progressively disjointed as long as the 'developed' countries push ahead into a science fiction economy of de-materialized labour and virtual capital and simultaneously push the developing countries centuries back into time by outsourcing manuals and industrial labour that imposes working conditions on them from the times of early industrialization. The working class has extinguished and mutated to intellectuals, and what remains of the material workers or so called 'proletariat' is based outside of the frontiers of Europe.

[1] Slavoj Zizek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Adraino Salani editore, (2009), Mauri Spagnol, Milano, Italia

We are living the era of sophisticated requests. The new established comfort zone stays for excess in comfortability. Everything can be done from our houses: working, as freelancers, and shopping using internet, through click and download, as a world wide market platform. A combination of mobility and technology makes our everyday life 'easier'.

Capitalism is able to adapt itself to any other existing systems, are they political or religious. All kind of combinations are possible: democratic neoliberal capitalism, socialist capitalism, buddhist capitalism, christian capitalism ect.. With capitalism as sovereignty we observed the function of diplomatic governments as ineffective, technical management (for example as occurred in Italy or Belgium) demonstrate to be sufficient. Economists replaces politicians and it is the triumph of neoliberal markets. Although this strategic movements do not monitor progress. Technical governments are temporary solutions to a huge administrative problem. Meanwhile the excessive consumerism continues and the media are broadcasting a inevitable end to human race, no genuine solutions are taken.

With the decline of the West, to declare oneself a dreamer has become inadequate, pragmatism comes to front and to 'get real' is the following motto.

Participating should not anymore stand for complicity with capitalism, where citizens transform in their own exploiters; participating should mean autonomy, here all the citizens celebrate their heterogeneity to create new spaces. Further on it allows them to put critics on the spot by demanding that, in the face of the 'crisis' the driving forces should come up with a realistic alternative. I'd like to think that a community that can act not because is guided to do so by the institutions of power, but by an unconditional virtue, exuberant politics of dedication will achieve a considerable change, begging from its own environment.

It's now time for cultural producers to make a clear distinction in art between what does a commission mean and what an grass rooted action does. Artist are citizens, and they should use their knowledge as a weapon to reinforce their citizenship. Cooperating with individuals and groups, artists can shape social changes and cultural innovation. In a world where nothing is a guaranty for success dedication and perseverance are the secrets for achievements.

Following the theoretical discussion and the introduced concept of 'outsider' by Maissen, we are in need of non professionals to renew. Amateurs which actions would be of minimal evidence but, as mosquito bites, would break many of existing

protocols. This and other concepts as 'agonism' and 'failure' introduced by Mouffe and Zizek, holds authorities at the background, they decentralize power and asses an equal distribution of responsibilities. Freedom is no longer individual but social so that interconnected relationships can flourish.

An autonomous citizen is not only a consumer, but also a producer. Considering myself as one of them I choose to do not serve neoliberal society or to do not be an employee of institutions. I want to work against it, so I could create space for 'in-betweenness'. In my work I want to explore how dependent and independent can be an individual so that I can later on translate it to my citizenship.

Phillips P.C. (1988), *Out of order, the public art machine*, Artforum International, vol. 27, Dec.

Lorenza Pirelli (2006) *Public Art: arte, intrazione e progetto urbano*, Franco Angeli.r.l., Milano, Italy

Marc Augè (1992) *No lugares*, Editorial Gedisa, S. A., Barcelona, Spain

Georges Perec (1999) *Especies de espacios*, Novografik, S.A., Barcelona, Spain

Hans Ibelings (1998) *Supermodernism*, NAI Publisher, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Josep Quetglas (2001) *El horror cristalizado*, Actar Publishers, Barcelona, Spain

Bourdieu P (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Nice R. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Jeffrey Hou, (2010) *Insurgent public space, guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, New York, U.S.A.

Interview article on Bomb Magazine (2012): *Critical spatial practice: Nato Thomson and Eyal Weizman*, by Anna Altman Scott Kellogg, Stacy Pettigrew (2008) *Toolbox for Sustainable city living*, South and Press, Brooklyn, New York

Joy Murray, *Art and Sustainability in Enough for All Forever: A Handbook for Learning about Sustainability*, Common Ground, Champaign, Illinois, U.S.A.

Jeroen Boomgaard (2011) *Wild park, commissioning the unexpected*, Netherlands Foundation for Visual arts, Design and Architecture

M. de Certeau (1984) *The practice of everyday life*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rosi Braidotti, Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova (2007) *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example*, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Jaques Rancière, (1995) *La Mesentente. Politique et Philosophie*, Editions Galilée, Paris

Markus Miessen, *The nightmare of participation*, Sterberg press (2010) Berlin, Germany

Chantal Mouffe, (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, London, U.K.

Pascal Gielen, *The murmuring of the Artistsic Multitude. Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism*, Atennae, (2009), Valiz, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Slavoj Zizek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Adraino Salani editore, (2009), Mauri Spagnol, Milano, Italia

I would probably had written a more beautiful and inspiring text if while working on the thesis a 'burn out' was not diagnosed to me. That's why is relevant to thank all the people that stayed close and support me in this difficult time: Elena Komarova, Igor Komaroff, Liza Komarova, Txell Blanco, Tim van der Maden, Arthur van Steveninck, Justia Heijkoop, Manel Esparbè I Gascà, Q.S. Serafijn, Ken Zeph, Martien Suijkerbuijk, Inge Thoes, Cristina Carillo, Frank Visscher, Susanne Stokvis, Evert Rutgers, Anna Bitkina, Natalia Pershina and many others. Also I would like to thank Bak, basis voor actuele kunst, for showing me who the bad guys are and to Casco, office for Art, Theory and Design, for showing me who the good guys are.

Asia Komarova

