

PUBLIC ART:

Structural Restraints and How to Deal with Them

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In order to understand the present situation, some historical considerations might be useful. I will start with an episode told by Vasari. According to him, in 1504 the young and relatively little-known Michelangelo was given a huge block of marble to work on, which was however deemed untreatable because of a crack on its bottom. As we all know, he nevertheless made a tremendous success of the commission, creating the famous David. This sculpture was originally meant to adorn the outside of the clerestory wall of the cathedral as part of a programme consisting of several heroes from the Old Testament. But when Michelangelo had finished his work, everyone agreed, that it deserved a better location.

A committee including Leonardo was appointed and they decided that the best spot for the work would be in front of the Palazzo Vecchio, where the municipal government was (and still is) situated. And so it came to pass. Immediately, the

David began to assume a political meaning. It was now understood to be a political statement against the dictatorial Medici regime; it was meant to show them that the weak and small like David (representing the people) might overthrow the big and strong like Goliath. Thus, the mere placement of a piece of sculpture independently of the intentions of its creator, had the power to change its meaning. In its original intended destination on the rim of the roof of the cathedral it would have been a mere piece of decoration and would have had no political meaning whatsoever. As we can see, site specificity is of paramount importance for works in the public realm.

Public monuments are more often than not a means of displaying power. In ancient Greece, for example, even in rather small city-states you could find thousands of sculptures in front of public buildings such as the famous Doryphoros (by Polycleitus). The representation of a strong

youth with a weapon acts as some kind of symbolic sentinel. Sphinxes, lions, and other similar representations are meant to symbolize the power lying beyond some social border, and they are still used in this sense. One should be intimidated from trying to trespass. The purpose is to impress or awe.

In common parlance, we distinguish "art" as the general term from "public art," which is seen as something apart. Again, the common understanding is that "art" is what can be seen in art galleries, what is shown at art exhibitions, what is described in art magazines, what art critics discuss and art historians or aestheticians write about, what can be bought in an art gallery or at an art auction etc. It is usually produced by professional artists trained at academic art schools. In other words, we have what can be called the "art-system" with its various professions, institutions and positions, where what is regarded as art is defined, as well as how it is treated and what value should be accorded to it.

In contradistinction to this, "public art" is regarded as somehow outside of the art-system. The public in particular is different. Whereas only those who are interested in experiencing art go to an exhibition or into a museum, public art is seen – or at least meant to be seen – by everybody. People who might not ever have been to an art exhibition are exposed to public art. Public art in this sense belongs to the City. Quite often works, which are highly esteemed within the art-system, for examples sculptures by Richard Serra, are contested as works of public art – even by the same people. Conversely, works of public art, which are popular with the public – let's say the little mermaid in Copenhagen or the Statue of Liberty in New York – are dismissed as kitsch or conventional by the art world. In our

art history courses they are treated – if at – as part of cultural history and not as genuine works of art in themselves.

How did we get to this situation? The "art-system" is not that old, it developed historically and might therefore also change in the future in accordance with historical vicissitudes. Furthermore there are many cultures where nothing like it exists or existed. It came into being only around 1800. In the second half of the eighteenth century, during the Age of the Enlightenment, aesthetics was founded as a philosophical discipline and shortly afterwards philosophers like Kant, Hegel or Schopenhauer wrote extensively on art. At roughly the same time, art history came into being as an academic discipline following the example of Winckelmann. At the same time artists were no longer trained in workshops: art became an academic discipline with the foundation of a series of art academies, where not only the practice but also – and even predominantly – the theory, history and philosophy of art were taught. Equally, art criticism developed after the fashion of Denis Diderot. But the main new development, which changed art irreversibly for good or ill, was the creation of museums. Art was locked into museums. Of course there had been collections before, but it can be said with little exaggeration that the museum itself as the place to encounter art was the result of the French Revolution.

During that revolution, public monuments were no longer simply destroyed as a result of the change in political power, they went into the museum. Here you can see Alexandre Lenoir preventing the revolutionaries from destroying the graves of the French kings at the abbey church of St. Denis. Of course the revolutionaries did not intend to destroy art as art: they didn't regard the graves

as art at all, they wanted to destroy the symbols of feudalism, of bigotry, obscurantism and so on. There was a decree to remove all symbols of the Ancien Régime. People like Richard Lenoir and also the painter Jacques-Louis David objected to this revolutionary vandalism, declared that these works were art, had an intrinsic meaning beyond their political symbolism, showed the genius of the people and so on. The objects became le patrimoine de tous, i.e. the patrimony of us all. Thus they supported the institution of museums. Incidentally, Alexandre Lenoir later created the Museum of French monuments, by the way as part of the École de Beaux-Arts, so that students could learn from the examples given.

When the Louvre, the former castle of the French kings, was opened to the public as a museum, the Musée central des Arts, this represented in a way the triumph of the bourgeoisie. What once belonged to the king, the nobility and the church, who had restricted its access, became confiscated and could now be seen by everybody. Napoleon even looted Europe in order to fill his Musée Napoléon. Vivant Denon, who made the choice of art works to be brought to Paris, became its first director. Even the habit of erecting statues to great men like philosophers and artists can be seen as a triumph of the bourgeoisie, since they merited being thus honoured not for their rank or descent but for their own achievement.

Of course the destruction of monuments, regarded as representations of a hated and now happily overthrown regime has continued to this day, as you can see from the examples of Paris during the commune insurrection, events in present-day Libya, the destruction of the Buddhas in Bamyán and in Managua in the fifties, when revolutionaries toppled the equestrian statue of Somoza. Still, as you can see from the example of Budapest after

the end of the cold war, there is now a degree of bad conscience when we destroy monuments standing for an obsolete regime. The Hungarians acted out some kind of exorcism to reinterpret a former monument creating a special sculpture park – half-museum half-Disneyland – for the monuments of the bygone Communist era.

With the creation of Museums, the symbols of the power of an overthrown regime were saved and treated with respect and care – probably for the first time in history. What had sometimes existed before were so-called spoils, that is to say remnants of the signs of power of the overthrown enemy, which were kept and incorporated as some kind of trophy. However, this new kind of progress in civilisation in which the obsolete symbols of power were not destroyed but put into a museum came at a price. A new ethics for visiting a museum had to be developed, which implied a conscious elimination of their cultural and political potential. The behaviour one should adopt in front of an art work, the way of treating it, the questions one should ask, the experiences one should expect and so on had to be regulated. Clearly they should not longer be allowed to fulfil their old function as a display of power. Whilst it was appropriate to ask some questions in a museum, others had to be avoided. As you can see here from illustrations by Chodowiecki, this amounted to an education of the public. The silent expression of admiration became the norm. From now on one should talk about style, historical development, the handling of the paint, the composition and such things. One should avoid controversial political issues.

Aestheticians like Kant developed the theory for this practice with concepts such as "interesseloses Wohlgefallen" that is "disinterested pleasure" or "Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck",

that is "purposefulness without purpose". In the museum the "what" had to be dismissed and the "how" exalted. A painting of a bundle of asparagus could be more important than a painting of the Madonna. Instead of seeing a general on a horseback as some tyrant who afflicted pain on many people, visitors were now asked to admire the achievement of the sculptor, who expressed male virtue or the command of a horse as a symbol of ruling the lower instincts, or created an idealization which didn't signify the individual and so on. The same happened with religious paintings. As Hegel famously put it, we no longer bow the knee in front of a Madonna in a museum. As was often described, art overtook the functions, which were once asked of religion

Clearly the works in a museum are thus decontextualized, in the sense not only that they are taken away from their former location, but above all that they are stripped of their former function and meaning. This emasculation was the price paid to save them. They had to be reinterpreted as a necessary part of the evolution of the human culture. In a museum the works are exorcised and lose their contact with life. But on the other hand one has to admit that there is also a healing power in this treatment. In their new presentation in the museum, the works can mean many things to many people and are thus able to harmonize political and social conflicts. The museum promises social cohesion. The task of deciding what is brought into the museum and how it should be interpreted is given to experts and treated in a somewhat detached manner.

Of course today in the twenty-first century, we still have the art-system and its institutions, which seems to be stronger than ever – we even live in an era where the building of a new extravagant museum is the most prestigious task we grant to

our most famous architects – and we still have complicated rules about how to discuss art, what to appreciate and how to become an expert and who has the right to express her or his opinion. To become an expert it is necessary to distinguish yourself from the opinions of the uneducated, otherwise there would be no point in being an expert. So there needs to be a tension between popular taste and the taste of people within the art-system and this is why works in the public realm, which function for the people for who they are made, are easily dismissed within the art world as not bold enough, not advanced in terms of taste, not innovative, and so on. Almost all of the art created nowadays is aimed at the art-system and obeys the logic of this cultural field. Of course, there is outsider art, l'art brut and other art forms, but on the whole artists want to have a show in a gallery and ultimately to have their work displayed in a museum.

From the point of view of the art-system a striving artist has a choice: either to accept the art-system as it is, that is to try to become successful within it and maybe to change it from within, if she or he has reached a position from which this can be achieved or, on the other hand to try her or his luck outside the system. The situation is similar to that faced by someone who wants to become a prelate in the Catholic Church, a general in a regular army or a player in the Brazilian national soccer team. Either you enter the respective systems and try to succeed and become influential within it, or you have to found your own religion, your own army or create your own branch of sport.

From an anthropological point of view however, which represents a much more inclusive notion of art than our art-system, the latter is somewhat restricted and cannot represent all forms

of artistic expressions. If we compare the cultures, which have existed throughout history, art has always been public, otherwise it would be as useless as a private language. The small bands of hunters and gatherers from whom we are descended arguably didn't have much privacy 50,000 years ago. What one of them did could be seen by all the other members of their band. Body ornaments and the other art forms they may have developed like dance, story-telling, petroglyphs and rituals were as public as you can get. In one sense the art of our art-system is of course public as well – in principle everybody can go to a museum, attend a gallery opening, read an arts magazine or buy a work of art.

If you are inclined to follow my analysis, what we have in common parlance is an understanding of "art" which comprises only a part of the spectrum of all possible kinds of art – i.e. the special art of the art-system – and which pretends to be the whole and we have also something outside – namely "public art" which is regarded as marginal and not to be taken altogether seriously by the experts. However, this outside art, allows for functions and effects, which are rarely if at all achieved by the art created within and for the system.

So, if you work in the public sphere, what can be done that is not possible within the art-system? In the twentieth century generals on horseback in a park went out of fashion, even if totalitarian regimes such as those in Fascist Italy and Germany or Stalinist Russia still held this kind of propaganda to be appropriate. Do we really need public art?

With public art you reclaim significance. You are dealing with questions of power. You can communicate social and political meanings. You reach more people than simply those who be-

long to the art-system, you can influence them, you can create a scandal which would be much more difficult within the art-system. Take sex, take liberal stances towards religion, art lovers are usually blasé and remain unperturbed since within the system meanings are somehow put into brackets, whereas outside you may arouse a storm of indignation, you may even be persecuted by militant followers of a doctrine – think of the caricatures of Mohammed for example. If you put something in the public realm it has to be dealt with. It is not alienated from its context. There is a difference between what you utter at home and what you declare in front of journalists. If your boss learns that you have called him an imbecile in public he has to react, even if he would have preferred to ignore your carelessness. What you do in public matters. While governments try to dampen the public sphere, to exercise one's rights of freedom of expression is necessary to have a public sphere at all.

In contradistinction to this, art for the art-system is somewhat formalist. Hence there are tasks, which cannot easily be fulfilled within it. To take just a few of them, there is for example an urge to commemorate, which sometimes finds spontaneous expression in ephemeral monuments. We have an absence of formal spaces for remembering violence. There are traumatic events and there is violence which should be remembered and by everyone. The restricted public of the art-system cannot suffice for this, whereas public art is by definition accessible to all. There are questions of a society's self-image, which should be discussed by the general public. Matters of concrete identity, of race and class hierarchies should also be challenged where they occur and not given over to an academic treatment within the confines of a museum. There has to be conflict and confrontation. Se-

lective memories cannot be avoided, but they can be counteracted.

We need to develop coherent historical narratives. Cultural memory is distanced from the everyday and an appropriate form for expressing these narratives, maybe even involving public rituals is necessary. Memory has to be performed. Of course an art, which tries to tackle these tasks cannot be free or only interested in its own forms. Still the task is exciting because it connects art with life. Public art fulfils social functions.

Nevertheless an artist working in the public realm faces a dilemma. She or he might try to be successful within the art-system, which usually means not to produce works, which have functions outside of the system and are the best solution to a social task, or else to fulfil the given social task successfully, but at the price of being neglected by the art world. It is rare to be able to have one's cake and eat it. Still some artists have managed this kind of balancing act. The means they use are double bind and irony. For the general public these works are just something nice, pretty and inoffensive, while the cognoscenti can appreciate the sublime humour, refined coding and allusions, which escape the ignorant majority. There are even works which are regarded as art works only by insiders, while others are allowed to enjoy them without knowing that they have just been confronted with a work of art. However, the possibilities of this postmodern strategy are rather restricted. Often they lead to a cowardly solution, which cannot work in all situations and cases.

There are other constraints. The public realm is a contested field. Not only do we have architecture, streets, advertisements, and storefronts and so on, there is always the question of who reclaims a particular spot. Is it in front of a go-

vernmental building, a market square or is it some neglected and abandoned location in a suburb, a park or a cemetery? Whatever the case, there are people who use this location for their daily routines. There are also traditions, rules of behaviour. A space is never empty. Even if it is empty, there are claims to it and expectations of it. While heterogeneous uses coexist quietly side by side in a society, they easily can become conflictual and incompatible if they are invested with claims which clash in the public arena. The material fixation of a work of public art gives it visibility and importance. To change the character of a location one has to exert power. To insert something into such a place one has to cope with what is already there and it is a social and political question whether what one wants to do is regarded as an improvement or not, and by whom. A conflict of interests is not uncommon. This is why a public monument is always necessarily a political statement. It is even meant to be one otherwise it would be pointless. A work of art inserted in a specific location brings latent conflicts to the surface. When they are confronted with your work, you cannot expect people to act in the same manner as you are entitled to expect of them in a museum context or in the spaces of the art-system. Maybe there are some locations such as a sculpture park, a cemetery or in front of a museum or some public institution where the works is somehow protected and the anticipated behaviour of the onlookers resembles what would one find in a museum, but this is the exception and not the rule.

If you take the statue erected to commemorate Salvador Allende in Santiago (unveiled in 2000) you can see that all kinds of deliberations, conflicts, compromises, objections and so on could still be triggered by a public monument. The artistic merit of the statue was the least consid-

ration. Nobody really cared about the handling of the surfaces, the balance of angles, or how the style of the statue fitted into the history of art. Monuments can still be catalysts for conflicts; in Tallinn, for example, the removal of the monument to a Russian soldier almost led to a civil war and triggered a serious conflict between Russia and Estonia, which had serious economic implications.

Even if you create a work avowedly without political meaning, it tends to divide people into those who can accept its style and can make it their own and those for whom the work means: "get out of here, this is for better educated or more affluent people than you." Art works in fashionable spaces usually have this kind of function and the subsidy of public art by a city council or the local business world is usually understood to be a way of gentrifying a certain site. The percent-for-art-program, which is created in many countries to support public art usually aims to increase the acceptance of a building. This gentrification need not be a bad thing, but there might be resistance from those who lose out as a result of this kind of improvement. Public art serves a territorial purpose. Inside/outside demarcations constitute all animal territories, but also fulfil the most elementary form of human need for imposing order. The opposition to a work of art usually means: "This is our place and we don't want it to be taken over by other social groups." Vandalism therefore always has to be taken into account.

It gets even worse. Herbert Marcuse coined the expression "affirmative culture". He means that works of art, even against the intentions of the artists, have reinforced and still reinforce the primacy of contemporary political power. He understood that, in a way, what you see around

you in the city, i.e. its architecture, the cars, the design of a shop front, everything in fact, is there because someone wanted it like that and had the power, the influence or the money to make like it is. What exists is therefore the result of a power struggle, and you can see the winners. Those in power can build and shape while the opposition is usually disempowered. If you work for the former you affirm their stance. Insofar as art is commissioned by the powerful, it affirms their supremacy. You can accept this condition, which was after all what a Michelangelo, a Titian, a Rubens and many others did. Even the habit of erecting statues to cultural heroes like Mozart or Goethe can be seen as a sign of the victory of the bourgeoisie. Immigrants, racial minorities and other disenfranchised are shown the dominant culture.

You might also be content to work as a kind of urban designer who works for democratic clients and tries to repair some muddled situation. To create human street furniture, which makes a location agreeable and supports civilized behaviour is as good an occupation as any. Sometimes street furniture acts as part of a nation's identity. Famous examples include the metro entrances of Paris or the red telephone booths in Britain. Street furniture, embellishment, the gentrification thus achieved - I wouldn't dismiss this as unimportant or not meriting some effort. The beauty of an environment influences behaviour. If you feel treated like a rat you start acting like one. Even pride in the beauty of your neighbourhood can be benevolent. Still this kind of repair to the environment means reclaiming parts of the city only for certain sections of society, even if the majority approves. Homeless people and others might be chased away. We are back to the idea that art somehow delivers a sign of victory.

Many artists, however, won't accept such a humble definition of their work, which not only deprives it of the glamour of artistic freedom, but also feels somewhat unimportant. And of course, the possibilities of art are by no means exhausted by such an artistic objective. At least a work of art, in contradistinction to a piece of design, should give an idea of a future utopia. Take the guerrilla art group working in Detroit, whose project orange, for which they painted derelict houses bright orange in order to make visible the failure of the authorities to cope with the situation and force them to do something, aims at the embellishment of urban spaces even if the means employed are illegal.

But as soon as you accept a commission, the danger that you affirm the values of your client instead of those you deem necessary for the improvement of society is multiplied. In an argument similar to that of Marcuse Hegel notoriously said "das Wirkliche ist das Vernünftige," meaning that the "real is the reasonable," in the sense that it has proved itself to be better adapted to the circumstances than the alternatives. Otherwise it would not exist and be real. In a way, this is obviously true, and if you want to change things, you should understand why the situation you face has become as it is and where there are chances to intervene. Of course there are always conflicts or a hidden dynamic and similar attack points beneath the surface, and what appears to be strong one moment might topple down the next. So although there is no need to subject oneself to the affirmation of those in power, one has to reckon with their power. There is hope because of the contradictions inherent in every society. One could choose to work for parts of society, say NGOs, in which what they want and what you want are at least temporarily compatible.

However, the absolute freedom of art, which is a myth anyway, is simply not possible if you accept a commission in the public realm. Even if you are told that you can do whatever you like, you celebrate the tolerance, the liberal attitude and the magnanimity of your sponsor. He who pays the piper calls the tune.

Still as an artist you can decide to work like a designer or an architect and wait for a commission and then, by accepting one, to swallow that you somehow affirm your client. After all, not all clients are thoroughly objectionable and there might be compromises. You might be independent enough not to work for certain clients, say by boycotting a company selling alcohol, or not working for a political party whose goals you don't support, but it is hard to find clients who are morally impeccable, and if you have to survive, pay the rent, or send your children to school you can easily get into quandaries. It might be that you convince yourself that, even if the client has a dark side, what you do is for the common good, and would be done anyway, but there is always the risk that you and what you do become morally vulnerable and therefore lose the impact you hope for. There is the demand for authenticity and artistic integrity. Of course in the history of art there have been numerous scoundrels who commissioned spectacular palaces or gorgeous portraits, and it is a well-known strategy of the nouveau riche who have gained their riches in a debatable manner to patronize the arts in order to become respectable. In this case, the context of the art-system would be less compromising for an artist than accepting a commission for public art with the support of some dubious backers, since as I have tried to show, in the context of the former the works are stripped of much of their political meaning anyway.

As an artist you might, instead of constricting yourself to urban design, try to influence people - not just ameliorate their lot a little - but, try to make them conscious, educate them, and become active. In a sense, this is political work whereby you use artistic means to achieve your ends. Activists who are politically motivated combine their artistic interventions with protest.

In this case you have to work for the general public. You have to create proper public art in the broadest sense and not art for the art-system. The public who visit the galleries and other spaces of the art-system are not representative of those with whom you might wish to communicate. You have to mess with power, apply counter-power and get your hands dirty. I repeat: the art in the art-system is by necessity depoliticized and cannot act as a substitute. L'art pour l'art is possible in the museum or gallery, but not in the public realm.

To be sure, there are many politically interested and committed artists working within the art-system and on the whole the art-system is more open to experiment and tends to be politically more progressive than other parts of society. Still, a work of art shown at an international biennial or the documenta in Kassel, even if it is duly registered by the art public, cannot achieve the desired results. Its reception makes no commitment and the work has little influence on areas where there should be action. Nevertheless it might sometimes be useful to use the protected spaces of the art-system to realize a work, which might not otherwise be possible, especially if there are no other appropriate spaces and means of communication. Within the system of art there is some protection. You are allowed to express some controversial opinion in the name of the freedom of art, but the price is, that it is taken to be rather

insubstantial. I don't doubt in the least the integrity and commitment of Doris Salcedo or Alfredo Jaar, but their dedicated works shown at some art event don't lead the public to action. We tend to regard their works as simply showing further examples of injustice and suffering, almost like any story from the passion of Christ even if we experience some compassion for the victims. In this context the identity of both victims and perpetrators is dissolved.

There is also the obvious solution of working without a commission. This is fashionable with my students. They admire guerrilla art, graffiti, protest, culture jamming or culture bashing and take their inspiration from the Situationists of the sixties. I don't have to remind you that there is a significant graffiti tradition in South America, most especially in Brazil. What is called "new genre public art" is also mainly art without official support, even if some support from NGOs or alternative groups is not declined and even sought after. After all even an artist working within the art-system has to be prepared to survive for lengthy periods without being paid for her or his work.

Sometimes, as is mainly the case with graffiti, they perform their interventions without the consent of authorities in order to communicate social or political messages. The messages might be anarchistic with slogans like "property is theft" or "reclaim the streets" or they might just show that someone is reclaiming her or his right to express her or his individuality. When they get noticed and defended and taken seriously by others, however, the message they convey needs some acceptance. Usually therefore, as is the case with the self-titled "art terrorist" Banksy, they take a moral stance. Even as a subculture that rebels against authority, there is some need for justification.

In a way this kind of protest via graffiti and other public markings has been around for as long as there has been a hierarchy. Irony, humour, satirical mockery and so on are the means of choice, and they are rightfully feared by those in power. Ridicule kills. In Fascist Germany or Stalinist Russia you might have been sent to a gulag for telling a good joke. That is why civil disobedience might even be a moral obligation. Of course to create a real influential and successful work in this vein is not easy, and you need a proper understanding of the artistic means at your disposal. That happenings, actions, and other kinds of street theatre are ephemeral has its intrinsic logic.

The problem is that you won't easily find someone willing to pay for your activities. One might make a virtue of this and consider a paying public not to be representative of the public to whom one is trying to communicate. But if you challenge the authorities you not only remain unpaid, you might be persecuted and, even if you succeed in the long run like the Swiss graffiti artist Harald Naegeli, who was imprisoned for a time but whose works are nowadays protected by the state as a part of the national heritage, this is not a career strategy I could recommend to my students. The example of Banksy also shows that some illegal art might achieve official recognition. Still it's a dangerous enterprise. The existential urge to do this kind of work, even in the face of serious disadvantages, gives it authenticity. In order for it to be taken as a serious moral statement, its author has to appear disinterested, committed and full of integrity. A protest, which is relatively easy to coordinate at relatively low risk is less of a protest, it gets less attention and is less effective. There needs to be some existential commitment.

What I see more and more often is that artists regard themselves as some kind of moral conscience of society and do works, which no one can refuse without losing face. They still work without commission and remain unpaid, but they (and their work) cannot be persecuted by the authorities without the latter appearing immoral or at least humourless. An example would be Jochen Gerz, who together with his students clandestinely dug out some cobblestones in front of a castle which the local government used to hold receptions, inscribed the names of locations where Jews were incarcerated and killed during the Fascist era and put them back, in such a way that the inscriptions were not visible. When he made his actions public, he created a scandal since politicians were unwittingly trampling the memory of the holocaust underfoot. However, since nobody in Germany wants to appear to be a holocaust denier, it was also impossible to remove the cobblestones. The artist Gunter Demnik has even received the Federal Cross of Merit for his work. He puts stumbling blocks with the names of victims of the concentration camps and deportations on the pavements in front of their former homes. The first actions he carried out unpaid and without permission, but he began to be asked more and more often by citizens and even local authorities to lay down his stumbling blocks. By now he has laid several thousands of them in many European countries and earns a modest living from this artistic project.

Many artists are interested in giving a voice to the neglected and disenfranchised. One example among many is represented by the polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, who now lives and works in New York City. He uses older monuments with their prestigious settings and historical connections of authority and power, and projects slides

or videos of, for example, abused housewives, homeless people or other neglected societal communities onto them often combined with sound in order to attract attention. Other artists work directly with minorities and help them with bureaucracy, organize meetings and tell them how to express their identity. It is not easy to distinguish such artistic projects from normal social work, but I will deal with this question shortly. Working with people in the favelas, for example teaching them to take part in local radio or enhance their self-esteem is fine, but it is tricky if you want to declare this an artistic enterprise.

Artist Jeremy Deller works with the practice of re-enactment. Seventeen years after the event he restaged the so-called battle of Orgreave, where there was a furious confrontation between striking mineworkers and the British police in 1984. This event was part of the oral history of the people involved, but the memory of it had somehow been suppressed and consigned to oblivion. With his re-enactment in the style of regular re-enactments of historic battles in the appropriate costumes, Deller not only gave the workers self-identity but also a means of reclaiming some place in history. The promotion of counter-memories, the effort to re-inscribe minorities into the public space is what drives many activists, who themselves come from groups which feel somewhat suppressed. After the movement for the liberation of women and the gay and lesbian activism, it is now ethnic groups who are demanding human rights and using artistic means to attract attention.

The reinterpretation of existing monuments whose ideology no longer fits easily into current understanding has even become some kind of industry. This kind of work is mostly made on commission, but usually an artist has carried out

a spectacular intervention beforehand, in order to sensitize the public to the fact that there is something, which should be changed, thereby to a certain extent creating the demand for the job she or he wants to do.

This all leads to artistic interventions, which are eminently politically correct. Artists seem to be driven by the urge to moralize society. Since nobody can be in favour of drugs trafficking, exploitation, war, injustice, corruption, child abuse, consumerism and so on, there is not really a dispute or a negotiation of conflicts involved. The constant appeal to human rights and democracy to which we are exposed or the tirelessly repeated reminder that we should support sustainability or pay attention to injustice may be annoying, but there is no easy way to escape.

An aesthetic criticism of these kinds of activities is difficult, since any objection to the quality of the work – the how – tends to be regarded as a criticism of the intentions – the what – and as such immoral. However, as the German poet Gottfried Benn quipped, "the opposite of art is not nature, but well-meant."

Somehow the structure involved in these kinds of activities leads to methods similar to the work of medieval saints. They were paragons of taking an existential risk for the sake of society. Also for them, however, it was not enough to do something philanthropic, one had to do it in a spectacular, memorable fashion. Affect is the point. They also had to follow the maxim: "Do good and talk about it." Ultimately, they needed followers or pupils who did the talking. Their deeds had to stick in the mind. What they did could not be ignored by the mighty. There was also of course the problem of credibility and of integrity. In the public realm nowadays if the artist acts on behalf of the people it is also re-

garded as objectionable if she or he earns a lot of money. Somehow, we only trust disinterested interventions. We look what people do for society. The standards of moral integrity might have changed, but there is some continuity. However, as any member of the computer generation will explain to you, the web is not only changing the way we learn, it decides on the importance given to an event and thus on what is remembered. The web produces as much as it records an event. We have not enough attention for all the information available and have to choose somehow.

If you take the popular saints, like St. Martin, they did something, which sticks in the mind and provides fodder for the imagination. The task consisted for them, and consists for today's artists in performing the moral action in a memorable way. This means among other elements arousing affects and thus creating a genuine artistic work (and here lies the difference to social work). An artistic intervention has to be unexpected to attract attention, it has to be concrete and vivid, it has to excite our emotions, tell a convincing story and be credible. Artists as experts in influencing others should be masters of making something memorable, which means finding an impressive and suggestive image which surprises and are infused with affect. Only then will it be repeated, adapted and so on. The action itself is rather unimportant, what matters is how it is seen, interpreted and what people desire to have happened.

The first task, however, is to attract attention. Attention is the rare commodity in our civilization. This is understood by city-authorities when they give artists the task of re-enchanting the world in the sense of doing something marvellous, unforeseen to them. Olafur Eliasson's

New York City Waterfalls or Anish Kapoor with his Millenium Gate comes to mind. One feels cheated, however, if there is no deeper meaning, which rewards longer-lasting consideration, and that's where New Genre Public Art might find its *raison d'être*. Only what is remembered, retold and discussed might change attitudes and might lead to a change in orientation. This, of course, is what we expect from our artists. They should promote change and promote the process of civilization even if money, law, power and so on are hostile. In order to win against the latter against all odds, you need creativity and imagination. Of course what is private and what is public in this sense have changed due to media. There are other differences as well, but to find solutions to new problems is what artists are there for.

It seems, however, that a friendlier kind of interventions has superseded a more confrontational approach to social issues. To establish a dialogue, a collaboration and to celebrate shared experiences seems to be sufficient as well as being more efficient. The concept of relational art made popular by Nicolas Bourriaud simply asks for the establishment of social relations through artistic activities. He defines relational art as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space." The artwork simply creates a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity. Social coordination among otherwise uncoordinated groups can be regarded as a strengthening of the public sphere and might even be regarded as a threat to the state, if you think of countries like Iran.

Actions might consist of organizing tables for having breakfast together in the public realm,

thus reclaiming its spaces. The permanent breakfast in the open space is carried out without asking for permission. The idea is to exert one's right to meet in public spaces. In London, a party was held by a group called Space Hijackers in an underground train, the so-called Circle-Line Party. There was music, raving and drinking. This activity seems to be rather apolitical, even if it is somewhat illegal, alcohol being forbidden on public transport. But given the fear of terrorism and the methods of surveillance, security cameras and dragnet research, it becomes less innocent. The insiders needed some kind of logistics to arrange to meet at exactly the right time in a carriage far away from the driver (and to leave in time) and had to conspire rather like terrorists who want to evade the surveillance systems. To create conditions under which a public can self-identify and self-synchronize, even among a relatively small group, is eminently political.

Let me finally touch on the relation of the activists involved in these unpaid artistic projects to the art-system, which is also rather complicated. If they are noticed at all outside the local group where they work, they are usually noticed by and get moral support from the art world. Some striving artists work in the public realm to gain notoriety, but their unacknowledged hope is to make themselves known and to end up with a tenure in an art school. However, social success through projects in the public realm is essentially a by-product. You will get it only, if you con-

vincingly pursue other ends. Attempts to realize your desires openly are likely to be ineffectual and can even make matters worse. Young artists have to invest in their cultural capital in the sense of Bourdieu altruistically, and it is necessary to work for a while without material gain. That is why political and moral activism seems to be the most promising way open to them.

On the other hand the art-system seems to have become somewhat exhausted with the art, which is produced within it. The curators embrace guerrilla art, activism or graffiti and so on as innovative, fresh and lively. There is a real danger that what used to be innovative and important will become swallowed up by the art-system. The art-system is no longer content with itself. It has to produce events and here too we see the need to produce something spectacular, which sticks in the mind and provokes reactions. In the meantime it is museums that organize events of public art, like Christo with his Gates in which the circuit started and ended at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It seems that after "public art" and "new genre public art" we now need something beyond, let's call it; "public art 3.000".

Thanks for listening,¹

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¹ Este texto é a transcrição da palestra oral proferida pelo professor Karl Schawelka, na Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, a convite do Programa de Pós-graduação em Artes, da instituição (PPGA/UFES), transcrita e traduzida para publicação na revista Farol.

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