The Uncontrollable Discourse

Or

Why contemporary art has nothing in particular to do with democracy

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Thesis Abstract

From the outset, it is important to point out that this thesis does not simply consist of a stand-alone text and practice. This is an artist's thesis inextricably linked to practice and is written from the position of an artist practitioner. Hence it must be read in relation to, and within the context of, the evolution a body of work and the personally directed nature of this project which perhaps results in a text that at times seems quite strident and without the 'neutral' argument usually required of a thesis with scholarly pretensions.

My written thesis consists of an introduction, conclusion and three main chapters entitled *Participation, Deliberation* and *Effectivity*. My research context is the realm of politics and art, in particular, the realm of politics and contemporary art that developed in the 1990s when the theory of democracy took a strong deliberative turn vis-à-vis the work of art/architectural team Böhm/Lang/Saffer, contemporary artists Thomas Hirschhorn, Rikrit Tirvanija, amongst others. To properly reflect on this work and its democratic credentials, I contextualise this in relation to the work of Richard Serra and in particular his work *Tilted Arc*.

The work of Chantal Mouffe provides the main theoretical context for my critique. I claim that one of the implications of Mouffe's concept of 'adversary' for contemporary art is a rationalisation of art. One of the ways in which this becomes evident when deployed within the realm of contemporary art is in terms of a kind of 'participatory logic' – a 'being in communication with' or 'participating in' so to speak. In other words what might be described as an art practice that seeks to 'involve' or 'implicate' the viewer in the artwork.

While the expression of this 'participatory logic' will vary from the overtly benevolent to the abrasively confrontational given the particular artwork, I nonetheless claim that this work sets itself apart from other artwork in not being 'disinterested' or, put another way, in seeking certain 'outcomes' with the work.

In addition to examining the work of the aforementioned artists, and in order to provide a curatorial context to my research, I also examine a number of relevant exhibitions and cultural publications such as the exhibition *I promise it's political* and the publication *Parachute*. Democratic theory, I claim, currently resides at the very core of contemporary art and is not necessarily good for art.

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> ...The spectacle is that which escapes the activity of men, that escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue (Debord, 1983, 43).

At The Movies

As I was writing the introduction to this thesis, a scene from Steven Spielberg's recent film *Catch Me If You Can* went through my mind. The scene involves Frank Abagnale Sr, played by Christopher Walken, in a man-to-man conversation with his son Frank Abagnale Jr, played by Leonardo DiCaprio. Frank Sr, in a worldly-wise kind of way, says to Frank Jr, "Why do the Yankees always win?" to which Frank Jr, replies, "because they have Mickey Mandle on their team". No, comes the reply from a rather self-satisfied Frank Sr, "The Yankees always win because nobody can take their eyes off the pinstripes" (*Catch Me If You Can*, 2002).

I was thinking about this scene in relation to the increasingly pervasive sense of what I want to call a 'participatory logic' within the realm of contemporary art. I was thinking, if 'winning' could be spoken about in terms of contemporary art then it would be spoken about in terms of art's continued visibility. Why current contemporary art 'wins' under these terms is because, as in the case of the Yankees, we remain dazzled by its stripes. Art does not win because it has Steven Willats **(fig. 1)**. or some other well-meaning, discursively oriented, artist on its team. No, art wins because it continues to provide spectacle or what is for Debord the opposite of dialogue. Art also wins because it refuses to be subsumed into a democratic public sphere, to become as bland, and vapid, as liberal democratic discourse. Ultimately, art wins because it refuses to give up its sovereignty, and become socially engaged.

fig.1. Steven Willats

The Spectacle

I think of the 'spectacle' in terms of what is 'disinterested' within the realm of contemporary art, what refuses an overt deference to 'the Other', as in the work of Steven Willats[1] for example. This is not to say that the work produced is more or less political but just not political in the manner in which it is increasingly naturalised within the realm of contemporary art. So while I don't exactly imagine downtown Las Vegas **(fig. 2)** when I consider the spectacle, I do think about the spectacle in terms of 'something' that can deliberately and without apology challenge us in our understanding of how the public sphere can be constituted, and moreover, as something that is wholly and without apology instrumental in the public sphere. As something that ensures the complexity of contemporary art, and finally as something that can resist the current 'politicisation' of contemporary art.

fig. 2. Las Vegas

I want to examine if this 'something' I am trying to imagine is found contrary to the current prevailing tendency, in the irreducibility of contemporary art to a particular democratic discourse and if so what this means for contemporary art.

> Spectacle is the best means by which an official story is formed and is a superior mechanism for guaranteeing its longevity (Senie, 2002, XI).

The Legacy

A number of moves were made in the 1960s and again in the 1980s against art's continued visibility under the guise of making art more democratic. Lucy Lippard **(fig. 3)** et al wanted to see art's de-materialisation or "de-emphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)" (Lippard, 1997, 5), as did

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[1] "Steven Willats's work explores the relationships between people in society, often focusing on aspects of behaviour; the way that people encounter each other, how they reach agreement, how they respond to their environments. His work aims to make people more aware of their social and societal contexts....Willats work often functions as a facilitator, creating opportunities for people to speak their own minds" (*democracy!*, 2000, 108).

Debord's *Situationist International*. For Lippard, and Debord, de-materialisation was synonymous with democratic counter-culture and liberation movements.

> The construction of situations begins on the ruins of the modern spectacle...The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing 'public' must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors but rather, in a new sense of the term 'livers', must steadily increase (Debord, 1981, 50–54).

However, despite Lippard's best efforts and Debord's cautionary tale of the spectacle, and despite the current and prevailing legacy of 1960s' and 1980s' radicalism found alive and well within the realm of current contemporary art, who really cares about its so-called efficacy within the social and political realm? Who really cares about how sincere and virtuous contemporary art claims to be? And who really cares about the democratic discourse contemporary art produces? We really just want to see the art. Yeah, let's see the art...the bigger the better. Give us good art...not merely worthy art, "free of art world commodity status...unfettered by object status" (Lippard, 1997, ix).

fig. 3. Lucy Lippard

Lucy Lippard's utopian fervour may strike us today as a bit silly; however, it is silly more in terms of the overt idealism of the language she uses rather than the content of what she says for, as I have already mentioned, the content stubbornly remains at the core of much current contemporary art.

The Problem

If in the 1960s, de-materialisation was synonymous with a democratisation of art, "a space for the imagination to run rampant" (Lippard, 1997, vii), with the advent of identity politics and 'New Genre Public Art' in the 1980s, it became synonymous with a democratisation of space while in current contemporary art, de-materialisation has become synonymous with a democratisation of content.

The problem is that having invested the concept of 'the public' in relation to contemporary art with the legacy of 1960s' and 1980s' radicalism, we are unable to think about a radicalised public sphere in any way other than through left-wing

oppositional discourses. The concept of the public sphere continues to be treated as a social formation or as an open, discursive realm, free of government or corporate control as distinct from the "pseudo- and private public spheres" (Deutsche, 1998, 58) that, according to filmmaker Alexander Kluge, characterises the bourgeois public sphere (and which philosopher Jürgen Habermas has theorised as a category of bourgeois society), a space that represses debate.

This position has over recent years produced an increasing amount of contemporary art that makes a direct and unequivocal correspondence between the artwork and contemporary left-liberal democratic discourses. In short, one activity reflects and engenders the other. I want to argue this has over time become a conservative and even anti-democratic movement – a kind of backlash by the left against the perceived arrogance and 'private' interests represented within contemporary art. It is also a worrying sign of things to come as this rather insidious 'call to arms' by the left in defence of the 'public' results in a flattening-out, a content-neutral, or closed and increasingly less complex contemporary art – the exact inverse of the claims so often made by the left for contemporary art as an open and discursive field. Because the public, as theorist and critic of contemporary culture, Craig Owens observes, "is a discursive formation susceptible to appropriation by the most diverse – indeed, opposed – ideological interests" (Deutsche, 1998, 59). In other words the public needs protecting and proper representation.

Alexander Kluge goes on to say that

> against both the pseudo- and private public spheres, grounded in relations of exclusion, homogenisation, and private property is the vision of an oppositional public sphere, an arena of political consciousness and articulation of social experience that challenges these relations (Deutsche, 1998, 59).

The Way Ahead

In order to rethink how contemporary art produces and is produced by a public sphere and the possible effect this might have on its production, we also need to rethink how we construct the public sphere as either physical place or social formation.

To positively re-imagine the public sphere we really need to prise apart the naturalised and easy conflation of contemporary art practice and left-wing democratic discourse. For example, while the public sphere can continue to be thought about as a shared space, it does not follow that this should by necessity be open or discursive.

The Argument

The argument I want to rehearse in the following chapters can be put something like this: Because of the obstinate attachment of contemporary art to left-wing radicalism, its most current manifestation as deliberation vis-à-vis the logic of participation becomes naturalised to the point where it is beyond criticism. The variety of forms this currently takes within the realm of contemporary art are understood simply as the given, significant movement they have now become, rather than the result of a belligerent politicisation of contemporary art.

I want to claim that a 'disinterested' contemporary art can be pivotal to a re-radicalised understanding of the public sphere. I argue that Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* **(figs 4–5)** represents an early sign of this radicality even though predictably, it was dismissed by most as a 'private' work of art or, as bad modernism and seemed for many to confirm that 'private' interests in a public sphere are a bad thing and moreover that there exists somewhere a discrete public sphere, without a 'private' interest as distinct from the public sphere of overlapping and mutable definitions and interests.

figs 4 – 5. Tilted Arc

I want to stress that up to this point I am not merely expressing nostalgia for a now discredited form of modernism. I want instead to think through the complexity and transformative potential of contemporary art not only as a social formation but also as a material, physical place. I want to do this through the specificity of a small number of art practices. In short, I want to figure out what a 'disinterested' contemporary art can do on behalf of a public sphere and what in turn is done to it by the public sphere.

The Proposition

The move I am making towards a re-radicalised public sphere is a move towards what I have already mentioned as a 'disinterested' contemporary art, yet this move comes with all its attendant baggage and not least the prevailing spectre for the left of commodity fetishism that this move will engender.

Under current conditions of how we imagine contemporary art to constitute something of the public sphere, a 'disinterested' contemporary art sets itself apart by being irreducible to a once and for all discourse. Hence it risks being mistaken for 'something else', something quite belligerent perhaps, something without the requisite disclaimer that so much contemporary art comes with today and which reads: *This piece of contemporary art is worthy because it is about and you understood it to be about the following concerns: 'real' democracy, active participation, and individual agency. More importantly, this piece of contemporary art is for you, and about you.*

Without this (dis)claim(er), the contemporary work of art can be read or misread, spoken about or just plain ignored.

What I am proposing as a re-imagined public sphere might not look that different to how we can currently imagine it: a succession of overlapping concerns somewhere between materiality and social relations or, at best, what should involve the self-conscious questioning, reassessing and reformulating of private and public interests and identities.

I use the figure of the vigilante in order to explore the position of contemporary art within a re-imagined public sphere. While the form of the vigilante goes through a number of metamorphoses in this thesis, I want to claim that in its most vital form, and the form I am most interested in, the vigilante is synonymous with a kind of antagonism which political theorist Chantal Mouffe seems to think needs to be made safe through its conversion into agonism and ultimately, its naming and regulating. I am interested in this form in relation to politics and contemporary art.

The ambiguous form of the vigilante – the manner in which it can metamorphose – is, I claim, one of its most enduring strengths. It is in this ambiguity that the vigilante can stand as a metaphor for what challenges and refuses the kind of participatory logic of certain kinds of contemporary art. At this moment I understand the form of the vigilante as having a positive inflection on contemporary art.

I also use the metaphor of the vigilante because of its power to conjure images of reactionary causes, the unruly, ignorant, uneducated mob – in other words the very opposite of what we would ascribe to those either looking at or engaged in

contemporary art. This makes the figure of the vigilante sit uneasily within the context of contemporary art.

Chapter Three begins with defining vigilantism as the inverse of anarchism – as that which is principally concerned with improving the law. Within the context of contemporary art, this can take the form of artist as protagonist, public as participant, and artwork as object or event. Moreover, this concept has both positive and negative constitutions, which are not always clearly identifiable. For example, the 'unmediated' (albeit permanent in intention) incursion into the public domain of Serra's *Tilted Arc* carries certain characteristics of the vigilante and is generally perceived to have made for bad politics, so to speak, because *Tilted Arc* seemingly 'ignored' or failed to sufficiently consult and notify the public of its immanent arrival and intention and hence the politics and discourse which it espoused, as is the case with most of the work that carries a participatory logic. Without wanting to reduce vigilantism to some simplistic kind of dialectic, I consider this incursion of *Tilted Arc* into the public domain as carrying a positive constitution of the concept of vigilantism, i.e. that which the vigilante brings to the public domain in the form of a challenge to the hegemonic and prevailing left liberal discourses regarding the proper form and use of the public domain.

On the other hand and in contrast to Serra's *Tilted Arc,* I would ascribe a negative/conservative constitution of the vigilante to the participatory logic I associate with and which is carried by certain types of contemporary art; this epitomises the vigilante as bullyboy who carries all the aggression and dogmatism of what *Guardian* writer Decca Aitkenhead or political theorist Adrian Little would deem to be dangerous about the figure of the vigilante. Because vigilantism goes unregulated, unlike the notion of agonism in Mouffe's politics, the figure of the vigilante must be portrayed and attacked as unruly, aggressive, and the taking-the-law-into-their-own-hands kind of mob. Within the realm of contemporary art and the work of artists like Böhm/Lang/Saffer, Rikrit Tiravanija, Jens Haaning, Santiago Sierra and so on, the vigilante is concealed by a thin veneer of left liberal platitudes regarding the virtues and efficacy of participation, collaboration and discourse. Yet when we take a closer look at this seemingly benign and innocuous work, we are left in no doubt as to its true and aggressive intention – the belligerent 'democratisation' of contemporary art. This very logic might represent a negative, belligerent kind of conservatism – the need to be continuously 'on message', to 'improve the law' so to speak.

While Tiravanija, Haaning and Sierra and others are just some of the current crop spouting this spurious invective, Irit Rogoff, Jean Luc Nancy amongst others – their apologists – work at ensuring their 'logic' prevails and is treated as natural and unassailable.

For Adrian Little, vigilantism occurs at the point at which politics fails, in other words, in the absence of proper public debate, in the political vacuum. This is an apposite description which can be positively applied to contemporary art when we say that the antagonistic, the unregulated, the unruly occurs within contemporary art at the point at which proper debate fails...and which becomes recognisable through the ambiguity of the message, the politics, the position of the artist. Vigilantism attacks the coherence and legibility of contemporary art or put another way, the politics and meaning of contemporary art – *'that it is after all only art and it's clear where art stands'.* Vigilantism attacks the coherence and legibility of the work of Jens Haaning and Santiago Sierra whose antagonistic and confrontational works we encounter in the knowledge that their politics are the right kind and, if in any doubt remains, several bulky and reassuring texts by contemporary cultural and critical theorists can attest to this fact! - unlike Chicago's South Side Priest, Father Pflager whose actions were 'identical' to some of those undertaken by Haaning and Santiago Sierra but which have left the public in some confusion as to whether he is hero or vigilante.

So, while on the one hand I want to denounce Little's portrayal of vigilantism as what occurs at the point at which politics fails - in the absence of proper public debate - on the other hand I want to take Little's portrayal of vigilantism and apply it positively in terms of a kind of force or activity that goes unregulated and think about this as what might actually signify the beginning of politics, or where politics succeeds.

To sum up: while I want to use the concept of vigilante to say something about an unregulated and potentially antagonistic force that can, when contextualised within the realm of contemporary art, problematise the seemingly naturalised conflation of democratic theory and contemporary art, this same force of the vigilante can also be ascribed to objects, particularly those like *Tilted Arc*, which, even when they are site- or context-specific, fail to disappear – so become obstinate obstacles and have to be removed.

And finally, in its negative form I want to think about or use the figure of the vigilante as portrayed by Bauman, Aitkenhead or Little in order to claim that this figure is somewhere contained or embodied by the very participatory logic within contemporary art which identifies a political role for contemporary art through seeking art's 'liberation' and 'democratisation'.

The shift that I am proposing is a shift towards a more confident, deliberate manipulation of the public sphere, in short, less concern for the public and less apology for contemporary art's visibility. A number of things can be said about this shift and what it might look like. What I'm proposing will become a little clearer when we look again at Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*. Despite having removed *Tilted Arc*, this complex

contemporary artwork has not disappeared. In 1993, critic Eleanor Heartney, cited by Harriet Senie in her book *The Tilted Arc Controversy* saw *Tilted Arc* "as the turning point in developments leading toward the de-materialisation of public art."[2] and the (re)emergence of a democratic contemporary art.

The following pages rehearse and elaborate a number of related issues:

(1) If we can assume that the artwork is invariably associated with discourse, the question at the heart of the deliberative turn within contemporary art is not whether the work will or will not produce discourse but rather, what kind of discourse is desirable and what kind of discourse needs to be produced?

(2) A body of democratic theory supports the production of certain kinds of discourse over others within contemporary art practice while in turn, certain kinds of contemporary art practice work on behalf of a democratically constructed public sphere.

(3) Despite a de-materialisation or de-commodification of the material object within current contemporary art, form remains as vital to this work as any other. A shift of emphasis takes place from material form to rhetorical form. The rhetoric of accessibility is privileged. This precedes and surrounds the work, in an attempt to specifically frame the work. In some instances it is the work.

(4) Radical pluralism proposes a conflictual public sphere, one that is both agonistic and discursive. This is represented within contemporary art through the logic of participation or what seems to dissent from art's so-called sovereignty; however, this may be just another form of Jürgen Habermas's 'ideal discourse' which radical pluralists take issue with.

(5) Continuing with the above claims, contemporary art is today conflictual by its very nature. The question put by contemporary art would then be: What particular kinds of conflict are radical pluralists such as political philosopher Chantal Mouffe espousing? And at what level (institutionally) are radical pluralists seeking to produce this? (This question is particularly aimed at radical pluralists who espouse the creation of a conflictual public realm.)

(6) While contemporary art may be used to represent certain tropes and movements associated with a democratic public sphere, such as mutualism, benevolence, reciprocity and discursivity, that art is not inherently democratic. Its vitality and

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[2] Landscape architect Martha Schwartz was commissioned to redesign the Federal Plaza after the removal of *Tilted Arc*. Harriet Senie claims that although a great admirer of *Tilted Arc* she had no qualms about working in Federal Plaza. The controversy helped her form her ideas about public art. In the end, she felt that Serra's sculpture did not work for the people in the building and that art was not above the rest of the world – 'What would Serra have done?' she asked herself. He would have done whatever he wanted. And so did she (Senie, 2002, 98).

continuing 'visibility' derive from contemporary art being in fact anti-democratic, or more precisely, contemporary art is ready to serve any master, any set of concerns.

(7) How the terms public and private can be re-imagined will determine the particular radicality of a contemporary public sphere.

The above questions and arguments are covered in the following chapters.

The chapters develop the argument concerning the role of contemporary art in a contested public space and are ordered in relation to certain current and overlapping debates, which bear upon contemporary art and result in its politicisation. The main themes taken up in each chapter are delineated as *Participation*, *Deliberation* and *Effectivity*.

I move from exploring and identifying the politics and meaning of what constitutes participation within the realm of contemporary art, by refusing discrete categories known variously as Public, Civic, Socially Engaged and so on before moving on to look at the shift towards a 'deliberative turn' in democratic theory and how this currently frames and informs what constitutes participation within the realm of contemporary art in a democratic society. I go on to look at the effectivity of deliberation within contemporary art, the desire amongst artists and theorists for a non-instrumental realm for art free from the ravages of market liberalism and whether this leads to a more democratic form of contemporary art or society, before finally calling for a re-politicisation of contemporary art.

The Practice

Finally, I want to conclude this introduction with a brief description of how these thetic concerns arose in relation to, or were 'produced' within my practice.

The thesis arose out of a demand in my practice that it be political and 'do' politics. At the time I understood this demand in terms of how the practice could 'really' engage the public as distinct from what I considered to be the kind of pseudo engagement provided by the gallery or 'white cube' space. Such a move I understood to be adversarial to the gallery or 'white cube' space on the one hand and adversarial to what I thought of as civic and public art (which likewise lacked any 'real' engagement) on the other.

However, the problem seemed to arise in my practice at the point at which I attempted to valorise a certain kind of contemporary art that could do this, that could be political and do politics. The problem with this move was that the so called political work I was endeavouring to make had a particular look, position and methodology and was not as first thought the open field I imagined it to be.

The problem was compounded by what I perceived to be an inverse relationship between the increasing demands made of the work to 'do' politics and be political versus the burgeoning testimony required to explain or legitimate the work as doing this. In other words the work would eventually and perhaps inevitably become the testimony on behalf of the work. This was an obvious move to make in that it allowed me to 'properly' position the work, offer testimony to the particular engagement and/or event and finally and I would say, most importantly, to vouch for my own moral integrity and political allegiance. In short, the work became my testimony, became about how I narrated what had happened.

Predictably, this development was in large part due to my frustration in wanting to target certain issues and contemporary events and finding the resulting work to fall short of the target in as much as the work often remained inconclusive and open-ended. Perhaps exactly at the point where the work may still have been interesting so to speak. At the point at which I insisted that the work address a particular issue more succinctly, then I very often had to stand in for and make the work. If the goal after all was to produce particular outcomes through the work, well, then the art kind of gets in the way of this ... this political project.

An additional and related paradox in the work at this time and one which I have briefly mentioned above was in terms of how the position I espoused within my practice vis-à-vis the gallery or 'white cube', rather than presenting me with a more open field proved to be more of a well worn path replete with a particular politics and position and was in fact probably more conservative, dogmatic, intolerant and ultimately exclusive than the position I was attempting to critique.

Ultimately, I found myself taking up a position steeped in *ressentiment.* I had produced a kind of work that was only ever set up to fail, to be rejected, to be at best antagonistic, and in so doing, point to the prevailing and belligerent market driven system of contemporary art as represented within the gallery or 'white cube' space. This work like so much other work in the field would prove to be utterly predictable and predetermined in the politics it espoused. In short, it would prove to be simply more of the same.

Chapter 1*: Participation*

> In a de-commodified 'idea-art,' some of us (or was it just me?) thought we had our hands on the weapon that would transform the art world into a democratic institution (Lippard, 1997, xvii).

Chantal Mouffe's model of radical or agonistic pluralism features prominently in this chapter as does Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* **(fig. 6)**. While I am critical of Mouffe's position I also acknowledge my own position to be close to hers albeit with one crucial difference, which runs to the very core of her work and which I examine in terms of contemporary art.

fig. 6. Bataille Monument

My difference with Mouffe is around the distinction she makes between the rationality of the positions of Rawls and Habermas as opposed to her own. Mouffe wants to accommodate or manage conflict through thinking about it in terms of a kind of agonisim or the 'friendly enemy' or, in other words, what results from the transformation of enemy to adversary, antagonism to agonism. *Antagonism* according to Mouffe is the struggle between enemies, while *agonism* is the struggle between adversaries.

I want to claim that one of the implications of Mouffe's concept of 'adversary' for contemporary art, or one of the ways this becomes evident when deployed within the realm of contemporary art, is in terms of a kind of 'participatory logic' within the work – a 'being in communication with' or 'participating in' that describes an art practice seeking to 'involve' or 'implicate' the viewer in the artwork.

This 'involvement' will vary from the overtly benevolent to the abrasively confrontational. However, this work sets itself apart from other artwork in not being 'disinterested' or, put another way, in seeking certain 'outcomes' with the work. So

whatever the particular tenor of the work, it is nonetheless set up to be 'in communication with' or 'participation in' the so-called social and political realm, the public realm.

In order to illustrate these claims I will explore a range of work that I feel carries this kind of logic, from Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* (*Documenta 11*, 2002) to the curatorial pretext of the exhibition *I promise it's political* (Ludwig Museum, 2002) and the more explicit work of 'activist' or adversarial artist groups such as *Ne Pas Plier* **(fig. 7)** or *Bureau d'Etude* **(fig. 8)**. The sum of this work, I claim, is broadly speaking exemplary of what constitutes an avowed politics and the political within the realm of current contemporary art.

fig. 7. Bureau D'etude

fig.8. Ne Pas Plier

Chapter 2: Deliberation

> I don't have any assumptions of humanistic values that art needs to serve...I'm not going to concern myself with what 'they' consider to be adequate, appropriate solutions (Serra and Weyergraf, 1980, 76).

A substantial body of contemporary art is currently produced as a democratic 'act', in the 'form' of democracy, and endlessly recycled in terms of democratic theory and discourse, resulting in what we might call a tautology or self-fulfilling prophecy. This is due to an increasingly effortless conflation of contemporary art with democratic practice and discourse naturalising what could otherwise seem a rather odd alliance.

In this second chapter, I try to prise apart this conflation of contemporary art with democratic discourse. I underline the fact that contemporary art has neither any inherent political affiliation with democracy, nor any other inherent political leanings. In fact, contemporary art will ultimately serve any cause regardless of how perverse it seems. I want to point to this blindness and disregard for any particular political cause and say this is in actual fact contemporary art's abiding power. I argue that it is in its materiality that contemporary art is irreducible to a definitive (democratic or political) discourse. Contemporary art produces and is produced by uncontrollable and conflicting discourses.

At the core of this chapter is the work of art/architectural team Böhm/Lang/Saffer **(fig. 9)** and the much-discussed controversial *Tilted Arc* controversy.

fig. 9. Böhm/Lang/Saffer

Set against the background of the work of Böhm/Lang/Saffer, I claim that *Tilted Arc* is in fact 'doing' a lot of the work that the art/architectural team either claim to do or represent. I will also claim that the problem with *Tilted Arc* in terms of the agenda of democracy is not just in its 'presentation', but also in its material and permanence.

Finally, while I agree that there is no explicit social agenda at work within contemporary art, I propose that taken together – as an activity, so to speak – the specific aim of the deliberative tendency is to produce (or maybe it has already produced) a type of left-liberal politicisation of contemporary art. In other words a particular type of social engagement becomes the *de facto*, unassailable core of contemporary art.

Chapter 3: Effectivity

I consider how 'participation', when taken up through a deliberative model, produces a non-instrumental vision of community, in other words, an environment for certain virtues and values to thrive and how this is constituted within the realm of contemporary art.

> If the macro-political environment is no longer conducive to the prioritisation of Aristotelian virtues, we must ask where they should now be most appropriately

located and how can we establish environments for certain virtues and values to thrive (Little, 2002, 11).

This chapter is set against the background of the 2002 *Documenta 11*, and also touches on the work of Jens Haaning **(fig. 10)** and Rikrit Tiravanija **(fig. 11)**.

fig. 10. Jens Haaning

fig. 11. Rikrit Tiravanija

I will consider how a non-instrumental vision of community or, in other words, 'an environment for certain virtues and values to thrive' is constituted within contemporary art and escapes or seeks protection from the economic expediency of the marketplace, and finally how community returns larger-than-life and financially lucrative in *Documenta 11* which ranks as the most 'community-conscious' *Documenta* and represents no less than a near full maturing of the contemporary art project within democratic liberalism.

In conjunction with the exhibition, in the work of Jens Haaning and the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija I want to examine the concept of community based on non-instrumentalist principles (or what theorist John O'Neill in *The Politics of Community* refers to as a non-market order) as a kind of contemporary interpretation of the Aristotelian *polis* which fosters sharing, friendship, voluntarism, mutualism, co-operation and so on. I go on to consider how this concept of community might be understood through radical and orthodox positions as represented by Chantal Mouffe on one side and the orthodox communitarianism of political theorist Amitai Etzioni[3] on the other, how this vision of community is at one and the same moment heterogeneous in its 'competing conceptions of the good life' yet homogeneous in the morality and manner in which this is achieved. So while difference and 'private' desire is acknowledged, the individual is expected to carry this responsibility along with the morality and characteristics of community in its traditions.

Within contemporary art, the concept of community is expressed through the often transient 'collectivity' of individuals, producing a type of work variously called collaborative, participatory, social engaged or, in other words, an expression of benevolent self-interest, an oxymoron that speaks to 'community' within contemporary art.

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[3] Adrian Little in his book *The Politics of Community* describes Etzioni as "the pre-eminent guru of political communitarianism" (Little, 2002, 19).

Documenta 11 consolidates and homogenises a particular understanding of community in its de-centredness and non-exclusivity, and so reminds us that the old enemies are still present. It also raises a number of particular issues around the representation and meaning of community on the one hand and the wider political ambitions for community (in its non-instrumental form) on the other.

Conclusion

It seems obvious that if contemporary art has anything to do with democracy then it's not merely in terms of how 'reducible' contemporary art is to discourse or how ethically sound and open-ended contemporary art can prove itself to be. In conclusion what I'm proposing or calling for, for contemporary art, is its 're-politicisation'. This requires that we

a) denounce contemporary art's radical political agenda

b) reject liberal democracy's ethical agenda for contemporary art

c) embrace contemporary art's sectarian roots

d) create our very own utopias.

fig. 12. Ne Pas Plier

> *The MA Curating seminar was drawing to a close. Final heartfelt sentiments echoed around the room…"It's not just Palestinians that are suffering," said Adi, "ordinary Israeli's are suffering too…anyway I only want to curate an exhibition…I only want to expose the facts." The announcement was made that with some effort a video copy featuring the work of political art-activists Ne Pas Plier had been acquired with a screening to be held that afternoon in the students' own time. Everyone was invited. At that moment within the charged atmosphere of the seminar room, a palpable sense of occasion could be felt. You just kind of knew it was important. Important like things that are not quite legal are important* **(fig. 12)**.

Without necessarily being conscious of or naming the activity, a kind of 'representative thinking', as Hannah Arendt refers to this in *Between Past and Future*, is at the core of the well meaning and heartfelt attempt on the part of Adi to include all voices, well, all reasonable voices at least, in a mindful and carefully curated exhibition she has planned.

In his commentary on Arendt, the political philosopher Dana Villa proposes that political (as opposed to philosophical) thinking is characterised not by the rigorous logical unfolding of an argument but rather by imaginative mobility and the capacity to represent the perspectives of others. As Arendt puts it:

> Political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them. This process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual view of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective; this is a question neither of

> empathy, as though I tried to be or feel like somebody else, nor of counting noses and joining a majority but of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not. The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I ponder a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion (Arendt, 1968, 240–41).

Representation in this sense is a consequence of the faculty of judgement, which is for Arendt "the most political of man's mental abilities" and "the political faculty par excellence" (Villa, 1999, 87).

What gives judgement its specific power and validity she claims is that it depends on agreement or at least, potential agreement with others. You are even when on your own, in anticipated communication with others and therefore in the knowledge that you must come to some agreement with others. This is why Arendt claims 'judgement' must be 'liberated' from "subjective private conditions" (Villa, 1999, 98), from the kind of idiosyncratic private opinions that may suffice for the person within the privacy of their own home, but however, are invalid in the public realm, and "not fit to enter the market place" (Villa, 1999, 98). Villa says

> Judgement for Arendt transcends its own private individual limitations and can only occur in the presence either conceptually or physically, of others. Arendt calls this process, this kind of pluralism, 'representative thinking' and 'enlarged mentality' (Villa, 1999, 89).

As curator, Adi attempts to be representative in this way by wanting to give an equal voice to everybody in order, as she says, to merely expose the facts; yet a profoundly moral yet utterly predictable position is highlighted through Adi's deliberations. The dilemma seems to be in the order of how might it be possible to deal with complex socio-political, historical and philosophical issues within the context of a contemporary curatorial or art practice that has long been eviscerated by doxic liberal principles and democratic orthodoxy. What can be 'achieved' by such a strategy, what in other words can it amount to other than 'something interesting', 'something familiar'?

The question seems to be whether Adi's work here *is* to do no more than state the problem as tragic and intractable. And if this is the case, then further questions arise: Where are the politics? What is the art in this position of intractability? And what is so predictable about her dilemma?

How is Adi to think in the face of such overwhelming moral and ethical questions posed by the ongoing conflict? Is this ultimately to think against the morality within liberal democratic politics and what would this constitute in any case? To think against a kind

of *ressentiment* which supports this morality and to think against the political as necessarily bound to a predetermined morality or to a discrete realm of activity clearly distinguishable from the realm of culture – the kind of activity which Arendt would consider as unfit to enter the market place in other words. And finally, should she even care about these questions given the most she is attempting to do is to curate an exhibition for an often indifferent and easily pleased public?

The problem however is that if she is at the very least to consider less than all reasonable voices, all shades of opinion, she runs the risk of being described as careless, authoritarian, in short – undemocratic.

As contemporary art increasingly condemns the 'sovereign', the 'autonomous' artist, the artist who refuses an explicit deference (to the Other) in his or her work (Richard Serra comes to mind for example) so too perhaps does the language and politics of liberal democracy condemn a certain kind of strength, ambition and desire within a particular contemporary understanding of the social and the political. For if there is some correspondence between the politics of liberal democracy and contemporary art, it is in the failure of one and the success of the other to democratise the agon, to resolve the antagonism. In other words, contemporary art can transform antagonism through deliberation and discourse, and where it cannot, then at least it can be explored by reasonable and intelligently minded people. Courtesy of contemporary art, we can reason and be seen to reason; we can create potential and possibility for discourse, and not only discourse but also action in the construction of what it is to be political.

The problem is however that when we look a little more closely at the politics of liberal democracy we find that deliberation and discourse have not necessarily eliminated or transformed antagonism but merely obscured or hidden it, hidden rather than transformed the political so to speak. 'Political romanticism' is at the root of this, of what political theorist Carl Schmitt sees as the liberal tendency to substitute perpetual discussion for the political – a tendency also fast becoming the preserve of contemporary art; where this happens through a process of devolution, the 'sovereign' power of the artist is transformed. Power is recuperated through collaboration with, participation in and benevolence towards...the illusion created; contemporary art looks convincingly as if it preserves and articulates all that we collectively cherish about democracy, about society. However, it is not what it declares itself to be but on the contrary as Schmitt would say, it's what it conceals from view, which is ironically what democracy claims to protect itself from: authoritarianism or orthodoxy albeit an orthodoxy of democracy.

So the perceived failure of liberal democracy in general and deliberative democracy in particular as regards its ability to transform antagonism to agonism can be recreated as success within the realm of contemporary art. With a sleight of hand and a bloody-minded insistence, the politicisation of contemporary art is declared natural and spontaneous. The liberal democratic project creates a mini state within the sympathetic realm of contemporary art and preserves and makes safe its principles. In doing so it is answerable not to the demands of any aesthetic principle or market place expediency but to higher principles rooted in universal humanitarianism. The question remains: How can Adi hope to deal with the conflict in any way other than impartially if she does not want to run the risk of being seen to be undemocratic and even unfashionable?

Adi definitely looks as if she needs some help in resolving the dilemma she finds herself in. In other words, how can she say 'something' without excluding someone? Yet perhaps Adi should not so much look to resolving her dilemma as much as she should to living and working with the contradictions of it. Perhaps if anyone can help Adi understand the dilemma she's in then it is political philosopher Chantal Mouffe who is after all in the business of 'not resolving' things, of living with conflict and contradiction.

Mouffe says

> Modern pluralist democracy, even a well-ordered one – does not reside in the absence of domination and of violence but in the establishment of a set of institutions through which they can be limited and contested. To negate the ineradicable character of antagonism and to aim at a universal rational consensus – this is the real threat to democracy (Mouffe, 2000, 22).

This chapter then takes on some of Adi's obvious and seemingly irreconcilable concerns, explores her dilemma in terms of the proposed efficacy and value of the political as constituted within the realm of contemporary art, in other words, what kind of claims are made for the political and how these claims seem, at times, almost to run contrary to its proposed constitution.

As one of the chief exponent's of radical pluralism, the work of Chantal Mouffe represents the main source of critical reflection throughout this thesis as Mouffe's position seems aptly suited to dealing with the contradictory demands and desires facing contemporary artists today – a fact borne out by Mouffe's increasing co-option to the world of contemporary art.

Mouffe says

> 'Agonistic' democracy requires accepting that conflict and division are inherent to politics and there is no place where reconciliation could be definitively achieved

> as the full actualisation of the unity of 'the people'...what is at stake is the legitimation of conflict and division (Mouffe, 2000, 16).

Unlike Mouffe, both Rawls and Habermas seem to agree that the deliberative model can transcend the dichotomy between liberal (individual rights and liberties) and democratic (the claims for equality and popular participation) demands. Both emphasise the power of public reason and a form of rationality which is, as Mouffe says,

> not merely instrumental but has a normative dimension: the 'reasonable' for Rawls, and 'communicative rationality' for Habermas. Politics then is about the 'exchange of arguments among reasonable people guided by the principle of impartiality' (Mouffe, 2000, 85).

For Mouffe however, as I mentioned above, this fatally ignores the 'antagonistic' dimension of human relations; it ignores the unreasonable person, the person not interested in making common ground, in short, the person not guided by the 'principle of impartiality'. Ultimately it ignores the plurality of interests and contingencies at stake at the heart of any model of human coexistence.

Mouffe says that both Rawls and Habermas deal with this by clearly separating

> the realm of the private – where a plurality of different and irreconcilable comprehensive views coexist – and the realm of the public, where an overlapping consensus can be established over a shared conception of justice (Mouffe, 2000, 90).

By placing the concept of adversary at the heart of 'agonistic democracy' Mouffe proposes this model as a development of the political project of modernity – of democratic politics, which according to Mouffe signals the 'advent of the democratic revolution'.

When viewed through a model of agonistic pluralism, democratic politics acknowledge the 'us and them' of society in an equal yet adversarial relationship that Mouffe claims is the real meaning of liberal democratic tolerance. And while it may be agonistic (adversarial), such a relationship (acknowledging the opposition in a manner that does not seek to destroy it), also acknowledges a common symbolic space but with conflicting ideas as to how this might be arranged. If adversaries do sometimes agree, she believes, it comes as a 'conversion' rather than as a result of persuasion and while compromises are possible Mouffe says these are merely temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation. As I have said, the problem for Mouffe then is that the deliberative and aggregative approach ignores the ineradicability of conflict through assuming that within a democratic polity conflict can ultimately be 'resolved'.

Mouffe offers an ideal model for thinking about the various tropes considered synonymous with current contemporary art such as the concepts of 'agency', 'contingency', 'democracy', 'politics' and 'the political'. With her model of 'agonistic pluralism' and I would think much to the relief of our curation student Adi, Mouffe offers the simultaneous possibility of 'having one's cake and eating it': that is, in having a framework for actions (the instrumental realm), and hence a target and limits within which to act, yet acting as if there were no framework (non-instrumental realm) or, in other words, as though one's actions were spontaneous, leaves others in no doubt that they were undertaken in the proper spirit. Ultimately Mouffe makes it possible for us to live with a contradictory set of desires perhaps ideally suited for today's contemporary curator/artist.

fig. 13. Ne Pas Plier

One of the implications of Mouffe's concept of 'adversary' for contemporary art or one of the ways this becomes evident when deployed within the realm of contemporary art is in terms of a 'being in communication with' or 'participation in'[4] – what might describe a practice that seeks to 'involve' or 'implicate' the viewer in the artwork. What is common to the concept of 'adversary' is a 'participatory logic', in other words a particular discursive disposition in the artwork or which the artwork carries, so to speak. This will vary from the overtly benevolent and discursive to the abrasively confrontational; however, it sets itself apart from other artwork in not being 'disinterested' or put another way, in seeking certain 'outcomes'. Whatever the particular tenor of the work, it is deliberately set up to be 'in communication with' or 'participating in' the so-called social and political realm, the public realm. Examples are the work of Thomas Hirschhorn and to varying degrees, the work represented by the exhibition *I promise it's political* and at the so-called radical political end of contemporary art, the work endorsed by critic Brian Holmes such as *Ne Pas Plier* **(fig. 13).**[5] The sum of these practices become analogous for what constitutes politics and

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[4] The obvious association with Jean Luc Nancy's *'Being with'* or *'Being in common with'* is not lost on me and I will return to Nancy in chapter 3.

[5] *Ne Pas Plier is a* Paris-based artist collective that supports the unemployed in France with visuals and strategies for their demonstrations. Holmes says "*Ne Pas Plier* (Do Not Bend) is an association for the production and above all the distribution of political images. It was founded in 1991, at the outset of the long French recession and continuing slide

the political within the realm of current contemporary art. So if Adi can't completely square the circle as regards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, at least she can demonstrate or exemplify a model of communication and co-existence, which could in some way deal with the pathology and contradictions at the root of it.

Like Mouffe's concept of agonism, the artists' work mentioned above is designed to evoke a particular relationship and communication between artwork and audience/participant, and also between the artwork and the artistic frame. In other words while Mouffe's hegemonic logic, which lies at the core of her concept of agonism, evokes relationships that serve to deepen democracy on a local and intimate level, it also, through a 'chain of equivalence' so fundamental to this logic, challenges State and institutional frameworks. Likewise, while Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* is an implicit part of *Documenta 11*, it also manages to critique *Documenta* through the position it takes up both geographically and conceptually. And as it manages to put itself in a critical relation to the artistic frame, the *Bataille Monument* also for example, manages to set itself up (in a manner which evokes Mouffe's hegemonic logic) as a link in a chain of equivalence with a number of groups and concerns within the ethnically mixed community of the Friedrich-Wholer Estate **(fig. 14)** where it was sited.

fig. 14. Friedrich-Wholer Estate

When we produce political art, when we refuse to acknowledge that contemporary art cannot help but be political, that by its very nature it agitates on behalf of the political, we do so primarily on the grounds of being unable to trust the questions contemporary art raises to be the most appropriate, or clearly put. We demand that contemporary art be more demonstrative and particular. We demand that what is implicit to contemporary art be made explicit. The question remains whether these demands in fact can only ever fail through closing down or limiting what contemporary art and the

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into social decay, by Gérard Paris-Clavel (graphic designer) and Marc Pataut (photographer), 'so that the signs of misery not be doubled by the misery of signs'. The goal from the start was not just to make socially engaged images, but to use them, to get them out on the street, to unfold their meanings in public confrontations, with the idea that art is political not in its frame but in its distribution" (Holmes, k-bulletin nr.3 year)

political can be. To certain artists and theorists however contemporary art may be of little consequence when there is a political imperative at stake, which in the case of current contemporary art, may be the (re)construction of a left-wing imaginary. Such may be the importance of the political project that it is perhaps of little consequence that we end up with what is so often patently bad art so long as the message is clear. Contemporary art becomes expedient in the pursuit of 'something bigger', something called the political. This may serve as a warning to Adi that whatever she does is in danger of being subsumed to the 'something bigger', and this might be alright if she can in some way make allowances for it.

Writer and critic Brian Holmes would almost certainly agree we are in pursuit of the 'something bigger'. Holmes has worked with art-activist group *Ne Pas Plier* and represents the radical-activist end of what he calls 'picture politics' (politics of representation) or, in other words, the point where the artist seeks a direct social engagement and the fight is with 'representation'. Holmes argues in favour of a specific mode of cultural production: one that very directly aids a social movement maybe best exemplified by *Ne Pas Plier* **(fig. 15)**.

fig.15. Ne Pas Plier

During the first Gulf War, *Ne Pas Plier* began making the first of a series of interventions using packing tape which they used to cordon off urban spaces. 'A transit space gets slowed-down into a public place' a public square becomes 'truly public' and so on. From the initial use of 'ordinary' packing tape, they went on to customise it for subsequent actions with the words RESISTANCEXISTENCE.

Ne Pas Plier are making public and political art through contesting 'picture politics', and the meaning of images in what seems to be the only place that matters, on the street. Art's public and political effectiveness are very clearly demarcated from art's pseudo-

public, pseudo-political concerns, as mentioned by Alexander Kluge in the introduction to this thesis. Holmes says *Ne Pas Plier* works by

> bringing together all kinds of skills, all kinds of passions, all kinds of information, giving them forms, then letting them slip away again and diffuse through society. All the little stickers like UTOPISTE DEBOUT (Upstanding Utopian) or the postcards like ATTENTION UN SENS peut en cacher un autre (Warning: One Meaning Can Hide Another) are ways to multiply these kinds of exchanges, to give as many people as possible the chance to create meaning with signs that are specifically oriented and yet open, unmanipulative – the opposite of advertising signs that seek to channel vital energy into unconscious behaviour. Culture as a way for human beings to express their solidarity with each another (Holmes, k-bulletin nr.3) **(fig. 16)**.

And while Holmes believes it is of little surprise that contemporary artists are interested in *Ne Pas Plier* given the experimental and experiential nature of their work, 'when push comes to shove', he doubts whether very many artists have the stomach for the fight so to speak. After all, *Ne Pas Plier* are proposing a very different mode of production to 'picture politics', to what Holmes brackets in terms of autonomous art.

> The interest of the contemporary art people often fades away when they get closer to *Ne Pas Plier*, because while some of the signs are light, playful and paradoxical, others are much heavier and have to be carried over time, with all the difficulties of political organization in struggles where the individual can't win, and where even the group most often doesn't. Trying to maintain the expression of solidarity over the long term and to make it effective in society without getting bogged down in institutional ruts or party politics is something you need a special taste for, I guess – it doesn't seem to fit with the culture of galleries and museums (Holmes, k-bulletin nr.3).

In other words, *Ne Pas Plier* are in it for the long haul and not just because for today's fashion conscious artist, public and political art practices are popular within the museum. Holmes is really asking what are contemporary art and artists actually committed to? Where do they stand, so to speak? A crucial question given how Mouffe's hegemonic logic and the global anti-capitalist movement demonstrates that we can all be effective in the struggle against neoliberal expansionism – we can all participate in the revolution so it becomes increasingly significant that we make it clear where we stand and what part we have to play in the struggle. Contemporary art, that slippery old whore, looks increasingly anachronistic in the face of Holmes's call for 'all hands to the pump'. The revolution is well and truly upon us and what does art do...just rubs itself raw and looks like it's enjoying it!

Ne Pas Plier answers the call and

> tries to bring social workers, visual artists, intellectuals and ordinary people into collaborations which are facilitated by the association, but whose urgency lies elsewhere. Specific capacities of conception, organization and production make *Ne Pas Plier* into a meeting point, a place where ideas and emotions and visions can condense into visual signs, then go out again to stimulate more ideas, visions and emotions (Holmes, k-bulletin nr.3).

Ne Pas Plier embody what writer Gerald Raunig claims was lacking in the so-called 'New Genre Public Art' of the 1980s but which he says:

> seems to be given in a new situation: being embedded in a larger context, being cross-connected with social movements. Joining the heterogeneous activities against economic globalisation, the old forms of intervention art are being transformed and new ones are emerging. In the context of current political movements, art is becoming public again. Around the issues and activist strands of globalisation, border regimes and migration (Raunig, *republicart Manifesto*, 2002).

By placing themselves squarely within a particular activist tradition, Holmes and *Ne Pas Plier* are marking out an economic realm that contemporary art might be 'colluding' with versus what might 'fall outside' or escape this realm. The former is treated as regressive, overbearing, institutional and lacking integrity while the latter or what might constitute the 'thing' that falls outside is treated as creative, open and possessing integrity.

fig. 16. Ne Pas Plier

Selling Out

'Going all the way with your political conclusions' is for Holmes what an artist like Hirschhorn patently fails to do. For Holmes this must invariably end up as a demonstration. Hirschhorn promises something in his work, which he doesn't deliver.

This something falls somewhere between a clear position, a strong delivery and the courage of his convictions like those perhaps of *Ne Pas Plier* and Holmes himself in sticking with things over time despite how difficult they become.

Holmes pours scorn on Hirschhorn's *Wirtschaftslandschaft Davos* **(fig. 17)** with which he won the prize for 'Young Swiss Artist' in 2001. He pours scorn on this kind of 'picture politics' in hock to the 'museum, the magazines and the market', in hock no less to 'representation'. Hirschhorn is doing little more than a sculpture of politics, a representation of political conflict at Davos, and in doing so he desecrates a historic battleground now part of anti-capitalist folklore.

fig. 17. Wirtschaftslandschaft Davos

Wirtschaftslandschaft Davos is made of the kind of low-grade materials Hirschhorn normally uses. With duct tape and plastic he builds a crude representation of the site of the annual World Economic Forum and peoples this *tableaux* with toy soldiers, houses, helicopters and trucks, all of which are enclosed by real barbed wire thus reducing the viewer to mere spectator. Holmes suggests the materials and the 'knocked-together' style Hirschhorn uses in his work evokes the "practice of excluded people who know perfectly well how to get their message across, by using whatever they find" (Holmes, *Springerin*, 2003).

Holmes accuses Hirschhorn of cynicism claiming that since counter-globalisation has become a hot subject, representing the excluded people who confronted the barbed wire at the World Economic Forum is a perfect way to become popular in a museum. Add this to the fact that *Kunsthaus Zurich* where *Wirtschaftslandschaft Davos* was shown when he won the 'Young Swiss Artist' prize is "regularly funded by the Private Banking Subsidiary of Credit Suisse, which ranks 31st on Fortune's Global 500 list" (Holmes, *Springerin*, 2003). So much for Hirschhorn's integrity and politics.

Unlike Hirschhorn, *Ne Pas Plier* do not sell out. Well, not to multinationals in any case. *Ne Pas Plier* takes money from "left-leaning people in the state, regional and municipal cultural bureaucracies" (Holmes, *Springerin*, 2003).

As well as getting involved in what Holmes calls "co-productions with various institutions which would like to promote the ideas and ideals being expressed" (Holmes, k-bulletin nr.3). It's interesting that Holmes uses a term such as 'promote' to describe these co-productions with *Ne Pas Plier* as it falls very clearly within the kind of advertising parlance they are set up to counter, subvert or undermine. Though on a more serious note it also points to the difficulty of separating out with any degree of certainty, as *Ne Pas Plier* want to, a politics of integrity, where they know exactly what will and will not possess integrity within the public and political realm. Holmes says

> We don't see this as selling out, but as an attempt to go on transforming the institutions, making them more open to the public. But watch out – the only way to win at this game is to keep sharing the subjects with people outside the institutions, and to keep giving yourself the freedom and the resources to go all the way with your political conclusions (Holmes, k-bulletin nr.3).

With the revolution pending this leaves contemporary art to the museum, magazines and market no doubt, but perhaps that's not as bad as it sounds.

A more recent and possibly more problematic work in the light of what we've been talking about is Hirschhorn's *Monument to Bataille* which was installed in the Friedrich-Wohler Housing Estate for the duration of *Documenta 11*, a predominantly Turkish-German working-class estate in Kassel. *Monument to Bataille* consisted of a library, TV studio, open-air snack bar and a sculpture resembling a large tree trunk. Like his *Wirtschaftslandschaft Davos*, the *Bataille Monument* was built of low-grade materials by people living on the estate who were paid a daily wage for their work. The TV studio was also staffed by people from the estate making short television programmes about local issues for broadcast on a local TV channel. A taxi service run by local people connected the main *Documenta* exhibition sites with the Friedrich-Wohler Estate.

Through using the rhetoric of public and community art in the manner in which it was built and staffed by local people, yet placing the work squarely within the dispassionate world of 'the museum, the magazines and the market', Hirschhorn sets up quite a complex relationship through, on the one hand, valorising a community of working-class Turkish immigrants while on the other hand, holding these same people up for public scrutiny and endless representation. Holmes says that Hirschhorn "turns a bit of ordinary life into a representation of politics" (Holmes, *Springerin*, 2003). What

concerns Holmes is the way the artist manages the work's relations to the artistic frame.

Holmes understands Hirschhorn to be playing some kind of game and Holmes I think doesn't like playing games, particularly when real people are involved. So the fact that Hirschhorn uses a quote by African-American artist David Hammons on the taxi stand seems for Holmes to set up an irreconcilable contradiction rather than an interesting incongruity calling for some reflection: This reads

> The art audience is the worst audience in the world. It's overly educated, it's conservative, it's out to criticise, not to understand and it never has any fun...So I refuse to deal with that audience, and I'll play with the street audience. That audience is much more human, and their opinion is from the heart. They don't have any reason to play games, there's nothing gained or lost (Holmes, *Springerin*, 2003).

Whether or not Hirschhorn actually claims as Holmes says, 'to have abandoned the framing structures of contemporary art, for a more authentically engaged social practice or whether Holmes understands this to be what Hirschhorn means when he uses the Hammons quote is not even the most important issue here. It is the fact that Hirschhorn didn't abandon this framing structure 'enough', neither clearly nor forcibly enough, which for Holmes amounts to bad politics.

I actually believe that not only is the *Bataille Monument* abundantly clear about all of these factors but that it is only at the moment at which it pulls back – in being even more declarative and hence risks falling outside or to the margins of contemporary art like *Ne Pas Plier* and others like them who position themselves at the margins – that this work gets really interesting. And not only that, what is most disturbing for Holmes about the *Bataille Monument* is that even as it refuses a 'strong political' position, it continues nonetheless to have the audacity to presume to 'say' something about politics.

For Hirschhorn, this was perhaps the only way to position the *Bataille Monument*, the only way to advance the project of contemporary art's politicisation. What is sacrificed for Holmes in this move is art's refusal to be declarative and unambiguous, to do something useful and not just what Holmes calls 'picture politics'. It is however Hirschhorn's refusal to be declarative and unambiguous that makes the *Bataille Monument* successful as contemporary art. Yet the outcome may amount to the same thing for Holmes as it does for Hirschhorn – contemporary art as a kind of moral arbiter of the democratic principle. Holmes says:

> Hirschhorn claims to have abandoned the framing structures of contemporary art, for a more authentically engaged social practice. But if that's the case, why the taxi, why the exposure of the site to the visitors' eyes, which turns the social project into a representation? What kind of game is he playing? (Holmes, *Springerin*, 2003).

I think the game Hirschhorn is playing is called contemporary art and that's probably okay given that he's playing it so well. My anxiety about the *Bataille Monument* may not be that different to Holmes's anxiety but just with an opposite polarity. While Holmes criticises Hirschhorn for not being clear enough in stating a political position antagonistic to the museum and market place I worry that Hirschhorn has a clear position and sense of political project which is best served by not stating it so overtly and which is why the *Bataille Monument* might also be bad (for) art and not just bad (for) politics!

I explain this using the analogy of *My Fair Lady* with a certain degree of liberty. I want to claim that the musical comedy based on George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, as well as something of the original Greek myth[6] can be transposed onto Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument*. And maybe not just the *Bataille Monument* but also the work of a number of other contemporary artists operating in the same field as Hirschhorn such as Jens Hanning, Santiago Sierra and so on.

The Plot

In the 1956 adaptation of Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the distinguished phonetician Professor Henry Higgins in a wager with his friend Colonel Pickering teaches flower girl Eliza Dolittle **(fig. 18)** to 'talk properly'. The wager demands that Higgins transform Cockney Eliza in speech, manner and dress into a Duchess in time for the night of 'the embassy Waltz'. It transpires that the night is a resounding success and Eliza is not only passed off as a Duchess but is actually taken for a Hungarian of Royal blood.

The Analogy

I make the analogy between *Pygmalion* and the *Bataille Monument* in terms of what I call 'appropriate modes of speech'. Just as Cockney Eliza acquires the 'appropriate mode of speech' to successfully pass herself off as a Duchess so too, I want to insist, does Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* carry the appropriate mode of speech to be allowed reside at the core of contemporary art – in other words, *Documenta 11*. One could argue that the very context of *Documenta 11* places the *Bataille Monument*

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[6] A sculptor creates a statue of unsurpassed beauty whom the Gods animate as Galatea.

within the artistic frame and this fact alone provides a perfectly adequate reason for discussing it without question as a contemporary work of art. While this is all very well and good and we can stop right here without having to go any further, I think that the *Bataille Monument* carries all the benevolent, inclusive and collaborative tropes we currently perceive to either fall outside or reside on the margins of contemporary art in what we variously call Civic, Public, or Community Art and is in fact one of many works currently being produced specifically to politicise contemporary art.

fig. 18. Eliza Dolittle

My question then is whether, like Mouffe's concept of agonism even when it is based on us sharing a common symbolic sphere but with different ideas as to how it should be used, work such as the *Bataille Monument* is ultimately about promoting and naturalising an idea of politics which is only deemed truly 'political' when based on a strong left-liberal precedent. And whether this might also mean the *Bataille Monument* is not 'indifferent' as Hirschhorn would like us to believe.

To refrain from discussing the *Bataille Monument* in terms of 'participation' or 'accessibility', and opting instead to discuss the work in terms of how it can 'implicate' a viewer, Hirschhorn reminds us that he is not interested in participation and in fact 'hates' communication. In other words, Hirschhorn hates what Civic, Public and Community art unambiguously valorise – and are appropriately punished for by being 'marginalised'. Hirschhorn says:

> I do not want the audience to participate in my work, because I am not an animator, teacher or social worker. Rather than participation I want to implicate the audience, I want to force the audience to confront my work, I want to give, to give first and I want to do too much, because it is only when the eyes and the brain get exhausted that there are no lies any more and you can get the truth. I want to give from myself, in an offensive and aggressive manner. I want to create space and time within my work. This is why there are often massive amounts of information. This is the exchange my work wants to propose. My work is not

about communication, I hate communication. It is about art, and I do not want to do art that has to be completed by the audience. My art does not ask for participation. I do not want to do an interactive work. I want to do an active work. To me, the most important activity that an artwork can provoke is the activity of thinking....An active work requires that I first give from myself. This is what I tried to do with the *Bataille Monument* (*Common Wealth*, 2003, 62).

While Holmes takes issue with Hirschhorn's lack of clarity about his position, ultimately I think Holmes wants art and artists to do this, wants them to declare unequivocally what is inside and what is outside or more precisely, who is inside and who is outside as I think Holmes is not really that interested in the artwork *per se* – it probably refuses to do what he wants in any case. I think he's more interested in producing statements, and in artists taking positions indistinguishable from their work, ensuring that the artist always speaks louder than the art. In fact, it may be best for Holmes if the art disappears altogether. I think what Holmes is actually most exercised by is not necessarily whether Hirschhorn is part of his revolution but more a question of who are its leaders, as we should be in no doubt that Holmes has already written his epitaph as a great revolutionary leader and it is obvious that Holmes also understands the power of Hirschhorn's charisma **(fig. 19)**:

> The charismatic leader thus came to control his audience more fully and more mystifyingly than in the older, civilised magic of the Church (Sennett, 1977, 269).

This became obvious when he discussed the *Bataille Monument* at *Tate Modern* in November 2003. At that moment I became more convinced than ever that he possessed a consummate understanding of the role of the charismatic leader – who descends on the working-class Friedrich-Wohler Estate to live and work amongst the people. And for a brief moment there is a greater sense of community, young people find expression for their ideas, have a new meeting point, and are the centre of media attention.

The problem is that charisma as Sennett says:

> deflects the masses of people from investing much feeling in social issues at all....By diverting attention from politics to politicians, secular charisma keeps people from worrying about unpleasant facts – that a war has broken out around the globe, that the oil is running out, that the city is running a deficit....They come to mind when the war is catastrophic, the oil impossibly expensive, the city broke, all too far gone to be dealt with rationally (Sennett, 1977, 276).

I wondered what Hirschhorn actually brought to the Friedrich-Wohler Estate and why he felt it necessary to valorise this working class Turkish-German community. Why did

he feel the need to represent these people, go with them to the hospital and courtroom, make sure they got paid for their work and then put them on Kassel's open TV channel?[7] Was Hirschhorn the charismatic leader to the underprivileged of Friedrich-Wohler and not only the underprivileged of Friedrich-Wohler but to the great and good of *Documenta 11*. The *Bataille Monument*, providing the kind of 'public intervention' as Artistic Director Okwui Enwezor claimed which could "probe contemporary problems and possibilities for art, politics, and society" (Wessel, 2002), but charisma deflects our attention away from politics and the political which is maybe what contemporary art should be doing, contrary to what Enwezor says. Hirschhorn the charismatic leader could deflect the masses' attention away from worrying about unpleasant facts while pretending to focus on these, whereas the actual focus was actually on Hirschhorn himself.

And what happens to the charismatic leader? As Sennett asks of the politician, how does Hirschhorn maintain his credibility, and I would add, virtue, legitimacy, and 'moral integrity' as a contemporary artist?

> How then is he to keep his constituency? Doesn't he by the very act of gaining power cross the line, betray those who put him in office as a challenger to the Establishment? For he becomes a part of the very system his supporters resent. He can deal with this threat to his 'credibility' by becoming a charismatic figure on secular terms. The successful practitioner of this status anger must in fact continually turn people's attention away from his political actions and position and instead absorb them in his moral intentions (Sennett, 1977, 279)...

in other words, his art. Sennett goes on to say:

> The existing order will continue then to sleep peacefully because his apparent anger at the Establishment is perceived wholly in terms of his impulses and motives, rather than what he does with his power. The political leader of *ressentiment* must play on all the attitudes about personality...if he is to survive (Sennett, 1977, 279).[8]

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[7] I also wondered whether the *Bataille Monument* could just as easily have been installed in a middle-class estate, given that we're all Bataille's children so to speak, and maybe even more so the middle-classes.

[8] "*Ressentiment* has two peculiarly modern features, which apply only to advanced industrial society. The first is that the petite bourgeoisie is forced to invent this Establishment of persons in an impersonal economy. When power becomes bureaucratised, as in a multinational corporation, it becomes difficult to pin down responsibility for any one act to one individual. Power becomes in advanced capitalism invisible; organisations protect themselves from accountability by their very administrative complexity. Now a sophisticated analysis could show that in fact a small network of people move at the top of this administrative order, and in fact personally do wield enormous power but the view of power is not what arouses the ire of *Ressentiment*. The establishment of persons is rather a belief that an abstract, invisible class of people have agreed to keep out of the world below through unfair means, and the term 'unfair' is the key to the myth. Social place in a bureaucracy ought to be determined by merit.

"...The *Ressentiment* is peculiar to our own times, something which can't be exported to all human history. A second modern characteristic of this *Ressentiment* is its anti-urban bias. Some research on the *Ressentiment* felt among petite

The trick for Hirschhorn is how to reassure the 'constituency' he has built around the *Bataille Monument* that he has not become a community activist or social worker nor has he sold out to the Establishment even as his popularity and power grows and is used to consolidate his position as part of the Establishment.

Being able to picture Hirschhorn as the charismatic leader makes his work ultimately more interesting as it complicates the challenge to the benevolent, albeit denied community-minded aspects of the project through bringing the disparate publics together not as equals but as connoisseur, voyeur and so on. The work takes on a more manipulative character and places Hirschhorn very much squarely in the role of protagonist, enhancing his power and prestige amongst the established order. Good for Hirschhorn.

fig. 19. Thomas Hirschhorn

I promise it's political

The curatorial pretext to the 2002 exhibition *I promise it's political* shares certain common concerns with the work of Mouffe and Hirschhorn – namely the tendency to 'conceal' definitive interests and desired outcomes in the rhetoric of participation, contingency and agency, terms which feature significantly in identifying art as contemporary and which positions contemporary art very particularly in terms of how it deals with institutionality and institutional framing.[9]

Co-curator of the exhibition, Dorothea von Hantelmann writes

> Today art seems above all aptly political when it takes up themes and discourses that are already socially tagged as political and therefore considered relevant. But what form of politics in art precedes the reading of such narratives? What does that ephemeral, individual or collective moment of perception of an artwork

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bourgeois Germans in the 1920s shows a correlation between the sense of a conspiracy against the ordinary man from above and below and a sense that the great city is the source of this evil" (Sennett, 1977, 279).

[9] Ludwig Museum, 2002.

I promise it's political presents artists from the 1960s to the present day, focusing on art as a performative, that is a situational and thus performance-like, event. It takes up and shifts the theme of the relationship between the work of art and the observer, shifting the focus and in this way poses political questions about agency and participation.

> bring forth? In what way does this moment not only produce the respective artwork, but also a social relationship, i.e. subjectivities and objectivities, and thus categories that are fundamentally and eminently social and political? Who participates in this process, and what does participation mean in this context? These productive, one could say performative moments that occur out of a specific situation, can be neither calculated nor reproduced. But in their contingency they introduce a moment of presence in which art meets society – in a space that is constituted by the exclusion of social presence. In this sense, our exhibition presents the (im) possibility of presence in art (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 99).

Considering the work that's already been done since the 1960s around the theme of 'the performative', what is so interesting about this exhibition is that von Hantelmann and her co-curator Marjorie Jongbloed not only make strong claims for its continuing relevance in terms of how the political is constituted in contemporary art, but also for the possible existence of something new and yet undiscovered, something they feel their project may be in a position to address. Von Hantelmann says

> what the artists participating in this exhibition have in common is that they address politics by questioning the relationship between the artwork and its viewer although certainly no consensus in the sense of a common political statement will result (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 103).

Though the curators are adamant that no consensus should result, one of the paradoxes about this exhibition is that they have already decided where the political is located, yet present this 'place' as value neutral, a place where the political will be discovered. What the curators are hoping to discover – or more correctly, hoping 'we' discover – is nothing other than what they have put there, what they have predetermined as the political because at the end of the day they're not entirely happy with having decided that art is invariably political. They deal with this through debunking one notion of the political only to replace it with another, namely the performative moment. Whether this is any the less prescriptive remains to be seen. While they may be more 'subtle' and 'style conscious' in how they approach the question of the political the curators collectively identify and delineate what they believe the political to be through their choice of artists and essays included in the exhibition, not least in their determination of "the performative in art as a place for the political" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 99). The kind of socially engaged work von Hantelmann and Jongbloed criticise for producing too overt and definitive a statement about the place of the political in art may really just be an argument about style.

As von Hantelmann says

> *I promise it's political* inquires into the performative in art as a place for the political. As a category of presentation, the performative within an aesthetic framework has been, above all, assigned to theatre or performance art. Our project, on the other hand, focuses on the artwork – its presentation and installation in an exhibition – as a performative, i.e. a situative and therefore performance-like, event. Whereby this 'performance' does not take place on a stage in front of spectators, but thrives on the interactivity between artwork and a vis-à-vis: a viewer, an audience, a public that is each time constituted newly, though within certain rules. *This* is the performance that is at the centre of our exhibition, as well as of my line of thought concerning its social and political significance (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 99).

Primary amongst the claims for the political in contemporary art is the 'value' of the performative versus the perceived limits of the exhibition space, which seems to me to be quite traditional in the sense that I feel we have already decided on many of these issues, for example, on the efficacy of the performative, on its ability to loosen up the material constraints of the art object and on its claim to evade a certain kind of economic expediency. This is all known to us and to some degree I think von Hantelmann and Jongbloed say as much with the inclusion of artists from the 1960s such as Öyvind Fahlström **(fig. 20)** to the present day, the exhibition being as much testimony to this tradition as it is context specific in terms of how the performative is 'active' in the work included in the exhibition. The problem as I mentioned above is that while all curators will make a proposal of some kind, in the case of *I promise it's political*, the proposal seems to contradict the very pretext to the exhibition, by choosing work which mobilises a concept of the political that is not as von Hantelmann says "socially tagged as political and therefore considered relevant" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 99).

fig. 20. Öyvind Fahlström Mao-Hope March

fig. 21. Carsten Höller

fig. 22. Jeppe Hein

fig. 23. Gonzalez-Torres

The art critic, Alice Koegel notes that the curators work with

> the underlying thesis that art is political, if it clarifies its own relationship to the means of production, not just its attitude towards them....From the observation that art invariably takes place within political conditions the curators simply came to the conclusion that art cannot help but be political. They took for granted, though, that this fact is a conscious part of the work: exceptions such as Carsten Höller's appeal to play, *Flugapparat* (Flight Apparatus, 1996), and Jeppe Hein's *Moving Benches* (2000)...seem to have been included to prove the rule (Koegel, 2002, 22).

What is interesting about Höller **(fig. 21)** and Hein **(fig. 22)** being singled out by Koegel is how this selection also singles out the difficulty in identifying what might constitute the political in contemporary art, since most of the work in the exhibition could 'fall' into this same category of exception, could be 'socially tagged as political'.

One of the exceptions, Höller's *Flugapparat* resembles a rather strange Medieval apparatus consisting of a main vertical shaft some five or six metres high, attached to which is a horizontal mechanical arm with a triangular metal attachment and harness into which a person can be placed horizontally and spun around the central axis. Von Hantelmann says that

> Carsten Höller's works destabilise the category of the subject by enforcing the idea of art as a bodily experience....They set free a situational potential which subversively points to the relativity of seemingly given aspects of human perception – such as right, left, up and down. His Flying Machine literally transports the viewer into another state of being. The body becomes permeable to certain influences, loses its contours, finds extension via the object (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 108).

What seems common to Höller and Hein's work is the demand for an actual physical encounter with the viewer. And while this is not necessarily the criteria Koegel uses to make them the exception, I do think there is a more overt participatory logic operating in these works that sets them apart from the others (maybe with the exception of Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Passport # II)*) **(fig. 23)**. Yet I would claim that this same logic operates to different degrees, more or less without exception throughout the work in the exhibition – it seems to me that the criteria Koegel uses is formed in terms of what I want to call 'degrees of legibility' – in other words, how explicitly, as in the case of Höller and Hein's work, the demands for participation are actually 'visible' or 'represented' in the work.

The other exception for Koegel is Jeppe Hein's *Invisible Moving Walls* and *Moving Benches*, which are designed to put in question what is 'normally' given within an exhibition space – walls, floors, seating and so on. In Hein's work, the institution, its structure and physical limitations come under attack. Walls move, entrances and exits appear and disappear, what is solid becomes fluid. Collaborative artists, Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset write:

> Imagine a museum signalling openness and uncertainty – rather than just reflecting itself as a prestigious monolith of concrete, stainless steel and security glass. Imagine a gradual change of art works exhibited in these rooms, artistic expressions streaming into the building like breezes of fresh air blowing through its corridors, and there would be no need for opening receptions to separate one statement from the next.
>
> Imagine a museum like this with a flow of audiences passing through at any point of time, experiencing the installation and the dismantling of art works and exhibition displays, an audience less stressful, a bit more inspired and confused as they exit the museum and enter the strict logic of everyday life once again (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 76).

When treated as an actual rather than imagined space I'm not sure how much 'openness' and 'uncertainty' Hein's work in fact signals. In practical terms, for example, does Hein need to negotiate with the other artists in the exhibition to have them agree to 'participate' in *his* work or, perhaps negotiate with the museum to be given a space apart from the other artworks? And if this is the case, does the work then become little more than a representation of an idea of 'openness' within the museum structure rather than what the curators are suggesting is an 'active' opening up of the museum structure where things are no longer as they should be or as one has come to expect them to be? Do Hein's moving walls and benches at best, momentarily surprise the unsuspecting audience or in the world of litigation in which we live, are the

audience/participants already even alerted to the 'surprise' awaiting them? Von Hantelmann says that

> Jeppe Hein's *Moving Benches* are, at first sight, an attractive place to sit down. However, as soon as you do so they suddenly start to move and glide through the room, taking the surprised viewer on a performance ride.
>
> All at once, the object no longer transports a statement on the present, but becomes a catalyst of a changing situation. The present is not represented but produced; participation is not a prerequisite but instead made visible. Within the framework of a predetermined constellation an open situation is created, a situation to which no system of conventions and representations can be applied, which identifies this system as an accumulation of heterogeneous elements that have to be continually readjusted (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 108).

While there does seem to be a more expressly political theme, if I can call it that, in the work of Höller and Hein, this is on account of their work being more participatory or interactive, more 'set-up' to 'do' something or maybe just more 'obvious' than the other work in the exhibition, as a certain kind of contemporary art is more obvious because it wants to be inclusive, have a use value, address social issues, in short, it wants to be political. But this is exactly what *I promise it's political* is not about; it's not about revisiting a kind of mid-1980's New Genre Public Art; it's not about trying to separate things out in order to say the political art is over there with the Palestinian, gay, Latin American and anti-capitalist artworks. That's a bit too easy and a bit too flat for von Hantelmann and Jongbloed. Yet the distinction they are attempting to sustain in their claim for the political and where it may reside becomes even more precarious when we look at some of the other work in the exhibition, such as the aforementioned Gonzalez-Torres *Untitled (Passport # II) (...)*, which Torres himself says

> is about interaction with the public, or a large collaboration...about the way we are defined in our culture, the way our self is constructed through many different channels. One of these channels is that little thing called 'passport' which identifies us as belonging to some type of gender, coming from some kind of country, also being born somewhere and with a date (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 72).

Gonzales-Torres's invitation to participate in dismantling and taking a souvenir of the work may well evoke something of the political for von Hantelmann and Jongbloed, the kind of non-instrumental realm in which we participate in the dematerialisation of *Passport # II* and in so doing perhaps transgress the normal economic constraints of the work by setting in motion a kind of micro-economic organic process resulting in the

viewer turning participant in the fulfilment of the work. Koegel says *Untitled (Passport # II)*

> allows art to be used like a promotional gift as you take home your 'Passport to Freedom', promoting the dissolution of art ownership in favour of democratic distribution along the way, then the problematic idea of a 'participatory', interactive show is being simultaneously set up and dismantled (Koegel, 2002, 22).

Because the audience freely acquires this work, distribution is perhaps deemed democratic through a kind of ethics of limited supply operating happily alongside a first-come-first-served basis of acquisition. In other words the audience is relied on to play their part and not take more than they feel is necessary. A notion of good practice operates around the work and can if necessary be enforced by the institution.

However, to claim as Koegel does that Gonzales-Torres's work promotes the dissolution of art ownership is not necessarily correct. Nor is the particular manner in which *Passport # II* is distributed in itself democratic. Though it does seem to evoke a certain kind of democratic model for contemporary art, which resides as I've mentioned above in some idealised non-instrumental realm free from the ravages of capitalist expansionism. As von Hantelmann and Jongbloed say,

> The works of Felix Gonzalez-Torres refer to the process as (sic) how the body is socially constructed. His *passports* are piles of small booklets, illustrated with clouds, skies and birds, which every visitor of the exhibition can take home. As a result the artwork slowly dissolves and makes its very own way. Regarding both content, as metaphor, and the formal way of production, his 'pass to freedom' shows exemplarily how his idea of freedom of choice and responsibility could be applied to life as a whole (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 107).

So while von Hantelmann and Jongbloed may well be correct in terms of what the work does, I cannot help thinking that *Passport # II* all too easily falls into the category of work they wish to disclaim, in other words what is already socially tagged as political. In fact you could argue that *Passport # II* evokes the most relevant, popular and 'socially tagged' themes such as *sans-papiers*, refugees, asylum seekers, borders and so on, those same themes which we have seen critic Brian Holmes demanding that artists take up as being the most political issues of the day. Though I'm unclear whether this makes the work more or less interesting, more or less democratic, or more or less political.

Content

I am however clear that the inverse relationship in the claim for the contingent and intangible nature of the political made by von Hantelmann and Jongbloed versus the weight of evidence needed to substantiate this claim has produced in the case of *I promise it's political* a substantial 141-page catalogue.

Over a series of five essays, cultural theorist Irit Rogoff and others, are co-opted in support of von Hantelmann and Jongbloed's project.[10]

In her essay entitled 'WE, Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations', Rogoff complements von Hantelmann and Jongbloed's position through exploring the political in terms of a potential arbitrary gathering together or 'collectivity'. Rogoff is moved to ask,

> what else we can be at that moment, what other kind of collectivity or 'WE' is possible apart from we as visitors to an exhibition, WE as people who like art, WE as members of the art world, WE as critical theorists, and WE who believe that contemporary art has a stake in cultural citizenship (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 127).

She believes that by exploring this question, it "might just alert us to a form of mutuality which cannot be recognised in the normative modes of shared beliefs, interests or kinship" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 127), in contrast to these constitutions of WE which continue to place the artwork at the centre of collectivity, of gathering together, at the centre of how meaning is produced.

According to Rogoff, if we place WE "as central to the experience of art" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 128) then we are insisting that "meaning is never produced in isolation but through 'intricate webs of connectedness'" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 128), that audiences gathered for a temporal event such as an exhibition opening produce meaning through relations with one another and not just simply "through the subjectivities they project on art works whose circuits of meaning they complete" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 127); that art works through their reproduction do not have immanent meanings "but function as fields of possibilities [...] to produce significances" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 128); and finally that "in a reflective shift from the analytical to the performative function of observation and of participation we can agree that meaning is not evacuated...but that it 'Takes Place' in the present" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 128). This taking place in the present exemplifies for Rogoff not only the

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[10] According to the biographical notes, Rogoff seems to cover just about everything, "writ[ing] extensively on contemporary art's engagement with critical theory with particular emphasis on issues of cultural difference, post colonialism and of the curatorial practice (sic). The text in this catalogue is part of a new project entitled 'Looking Away – Participations in Visual Culture' (forthcoming 2004)" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 141).

way in which we look and interact with contemporary art but also the way in which "we have inhabited the critical and the theoretical over the recent past" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 128). Rogoff sees in this shift she is encouraging us to make, the possibility of narrowing the gap so to speak between the 'general audience', the cultural consumer and the 'more critically informed' who possess some 'critical distance'. Consequently, if we acknowledge the performative potential of the exhibition space or where people gather, we can surmount the particular hegemonic order by participating in the production of new meaning and forms of collectivity. While this is all very contemporary surely the question for Rogoff must be in the order of what if the position she outlines *is* the hegemonic or dominant order vis-à-vis the prevailing participatory logic within the realm of contemporary art. And moreover, why are we gathering in the exhibition space what has brought us together if not the artwork? It's okay that once in a while there's a space where we can forego the need to 'de-nativise community', a space where we can come to see the art precisely to have the kind of 'frontal relation' Rogoff puts in question.

Rogoff gets to the art in terms of the object/viewer dichotomy she feels we have been labouring with. Rather than seeing the art exhibition as a political space in terms of the art it exhibits, Rogoff argues for this space as a 'stage' or 'space of appearance' in an Arendtian sense.[11] This is both a social space and a space which according to Arendt "does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being" (Arendt, 1989, 199). So, something has, as Rogoff says, to undergo constant renewal:

> In which a form of political action takes place that is not just ephemeral and based in speech as action but that is also founded on 'acting without a model' and on making 'its means as visible as possible'. If we can accept the space of the exhibition as the arena for such enactments...then what we have is the possibility of another political space. Instead of an occasion for the translation of various sets of politics into the realm of aesthetics and language. Instead of a series of exercises in moral navigations that take place in and through the art exhibition, we have the possibility of an actual political space *tout court* (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 133).

"The something called 'art'" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 132) becomes an open interconnective field containing "the potential to engage with it as a form of cultural

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[11] In her book *The Human Condition*, Arendt says, "The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organised. Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men – as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed – but with the disappearance or arrest of the activists themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (Arendt, 1989, 199).

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participation rather than as a form of either reification, of representation or of contemplative edification" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 132). For Rogoff, this potential engagement exemplifies philosopher, Giorgio Agamben's *Means without End* that Agamben explains:

> has its centre in the gesture and not in the image and thus it belongs essentially to the realm of ethics and politics and not simply to that of aesthetics [...] What characterises gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. The gesture in other words, opens the sphere of ethos as the more proper sphere of that which is human. But in what way is an action endured and supported?...In what way does a simple act become an event?...In the distinction between production and action; if producing is a means in view of an end and praxis is an end without means, the gesture then breaks with the false alternative between ends and means that paralyses morality and presents instead means, that, as such, evade the orbit of mediality without becoming, for this reason, ends (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 133).

Rogoff's argument is yet another call for the dematerialisation or in Rogoff's case the dissolution[12] of art in terms of what she describes above as a form of reification and so on. The artist Tino Sehgal **(fig. 24)** whom I go on to talk about exemplifies this shift when according to von Hantelmann and Jongbloed, Sehgal's work deviates from a hegemonic norm. At the end of the day however, Rogoff seems really to be substituting a notion of 'content' for 'performance'. And the 'something called art' which she champions seems no less prescriptive than the kind of work and way it positions the viewer than what she wants us to move away from, the kind of work which she says demands a 'frontal relationship' with the viewer and which she criticises for being limiting.

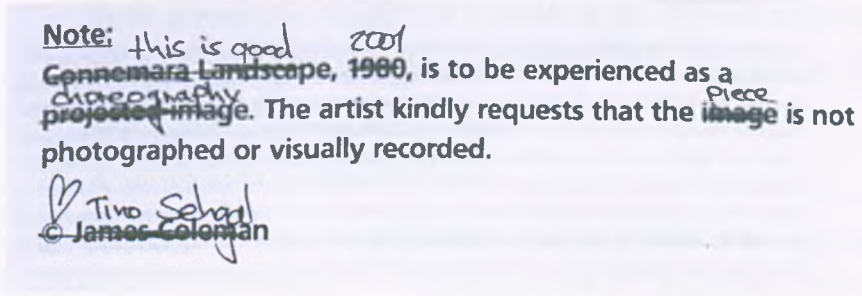

fig. 24. Tino Sehgal

[12] I use the term dissolution in preference to de-materialisation, as I understand Rogoff's project to be more about the 'dissolution' of art rather than arts 'transformation'. Because the term de-materialisation has a particular genealogy within contemporary art practice and is tied to a particular radicality and history of object making, I feel it is an

Like von Hantelmann and Jongbloed, Rogoff pretends to know the nature and location of the political within contemporary art which amounts to a space of equality and potential but which seems to be bound not to the political but to ideas of 'humanity' and 'equality'. As the philosopher Carl Schmitt has pointed out, this has nothing to do with the political but is in fact typical of liberal discourse and being typical of liberal discourse only wants to talk about abstract universal human equality. Schmitt's concept of the political seems almost to push von Hantelmann and Jongbloed's project away from it having anything in particular to do with 'the political' and more to do with what Schmitt calls universal liberal values:

> the negation of the political, which is inherent in every consistent individualism, leads necessarily to a political practice of distrust toward all conceivable political forces and forms of state and government, but never produces on its own a positive theory of state, government, and politics. As a result, there exists a liberal policy in the form of a polemical antithesis against state, church, or other institutions which restrict individual freedom...but absolutely no liberal politics, only a liberal critique of politics. The systematic theory of liberalism concerns almost solely the internal struggle against the power of the state (Schmitt, 1996, 70).

Similarly, if *I promise it's political* is yet another instance of the liberal determination of what is political, then what is *actually* political about the exhibition is being overlooked. This is perhaps why we needed to return to Schmitt. According to political philosopher Tracy B. Strong, what is so important about Schmitt's friend–enemy conjuncture is not so much the 'who is on my side' question but the claim that it is only through the friend–enemy distinction that the willingness to take responsibility for our own lives becomes an issue. Philosopher Slavoj Zîzek puts forward the argument around the more general 'deconstructive doxa' that Rogoff espouses, which

> goes something like this: the social is the field of structural undecidability, it is marked by an irreducible gap or lack, forever condemned to non-identity with itself; and 'totalitarianism' is, at its most elementary, the closure of this undecidability (Zîzek, 2001, 6).

The corollary of the deconstructive doxa is that the friend–enemy distinction is understood as totalitarian in the sense in which Zîzek describes it and which he goes on to explain: "throughout its entire career, 'totalitarianism' was an ideological notion that sustained the complex operation of 'taming free radicals', of guaranteeing the

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inappropriate term to use in relation to Rogoff's project which is not I believe part of or allied to or necessarily sympathetic to this genealogy.

liberal democratic hegemony" (Zîzek, 2001, 3). In light of this, I wonder if von Hantelmann and Jongbloed are really doing anything other than replacing one set of clichés with another by fetishising a certain idea of the political, by tying its expression to a legacy of 1960s' activism and by refusing any concrete 'results', limits, or exclusions to this so-called activism, actualities which according to Schmitt are the 'concrete reality of the political'. I wonder if they like Rogoff are continuing to 'overlook' what may in fact be political about this exhibition.

It also seems to me that we already *have* this Arendtian 'space of appearance', it's just that Rogoff merely wants to formalise it. So while Rogoff, like von Hantelmann and Jongbloed, may embrace the performative and associated terms as a possible means to explore the political within contemporary art, they, like Rogoff, cannot assume their project avoids 'closure', 'definition' and 'limits'. However also like Mouffe, with whom they have much in common, they prefer not to talk about limits in the hope of keeping something alive and open, hoping to keep something away from institutional framing, hoping to keep talking.

Returning to Carl Schmitt in order to examine how his analysis of the political carries von Hantelmann and Jongbloed's project forward may at first seem to contradict what is at stake here. Because Schmitt's concept of the political unlike Rogoff's is fundamental and irrevocable, and allows contemporary art to *be* as sectarian and unapologetic as I believe it is/needs to be – to have the courage of Richard Serra's convictions for example by treating the public as little more than 'traffic patterns'.[13] I call this potential which contemporary art has 'art's dangerousness' in order to mirror what Schmitt talks about as 'man's dangerousness' or in other words where the political is located. For Schmitt, the sum and substance of the political *is* antagonism, which[14] runs in parallel to and represents the threat or inverse to the Enlightenment project.[15]

The political, Schmitt says is "fundamental and not a relatively independent domain alongside others. It is a basic characteristic of human life" (Schmitt, 1996, 88). He goes on to say:

> The phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever present possibility of the friend-and-enemy grouping, regardless of the aspects which this possibility implies for morality, aesthetics, and economics (Schmitt, 1996, 35).

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[13] I will discuss Serra's *Tilted Arc* in the next chapter.

[14] As Leo Strauss refers to the political in the notes to Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*.

[15] This is the inverse of what political philosopher Pierre Saint-Amand describes as the concept of 'imitation' which for him is bound up with hostility, envy and vengeance.

In his commentary on Schmitt, Leo Strauss notes that for Schmitt the political prevails and acts on the 'domain of the visual':

> What is hereby said is that the understanding of the political implies a fundamental critique of at least the prevailing concept of culture...politics in this sense, Schmitt claims, *is* destiny; therefore man cannot escape politics (Schmitt, 1996, 88).

However as Leo Strauss says in an essay contained in Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*

> Schmitt is just as tolerant as the liberals, just with the opposite intention; whereas the liberal respects and tolerates all *'honest'* convictions so long as they merely acknowledge the legal order, *peace*, as sacroscant, he who affirms the political as such, respects and tolerates all *'serious'* convictions, that is, all decisions oriented to the real possibility of war. Thus the affirmation of the political as such proves to be a liberalism with the opposite polarity (Schmitt, 1996, 124).

For Schmitt, the affirmation or negation of the political is framed by a quarrel over human nature and whether man is good or evil, though Schmitt wants 'good' and 'evil' to be understood not in terms of ethics or morality but in terms of 'undangerous man' and 'dangerous man', for Schmitt insists that 'war' is not the goal or orientation of politics but a permanent possibility, which determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a specifically political behaviour.

Exploring the exhibition from Schmitt's position then, we might be forced to look for it in a more mundane, divisive, petty kind of place. A place that neither von Hantelmann, Jongbloed nor Rogoff's concept of the 'political' would necessarily indicate, in short, a more 'fundamental' and 'sectarian' place and not the 'ongoing, unrealised perspective' where so much of the writing in support of the political efficacy of the work seems to reside and which Rogoff exemplifies when she writes:

> after all [one is] always operating from a contingent position, always seemingly at fault, this is a permanent and ongoing position, since every year we become aware of a new and hitherto unrealised perspective which illuminates further internal cultural injustices (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 128).

And while I don't claim this so-called 'ongoing unrealised perspective' to be necessarily the realm of the imaginary given that I believe contemporary art is at its best when it inhabits this realm, I do however think it is a shortcoming of the claims made for the exhibition in terms of the political vis-à-vis the theory of the political that surrounds it. But perhaps my argument is already lost, for, as legal and literary theorist Stanley Fish argues,

> theory is the liberal's game (even if he or she, by my account, play it badly); and even if antiliberals occasionally win it by showing that liberalism's theoretical claims of impartiality, openness, mutual respect cannot be cashed in, they will have lost by falling in with the assumption that those are the claims that count. Liberals don't have to win the theory game in order to win; all they have to do is get antiliberals to play it (Fish, 2001, 221).

So while Schmitt may not force us to completely abandon the realm of the imaginary, he may force us to abandon even for a moment, what is endlessly open to discussion, the kind of endless 'rethinking' Rogoff advocates and in fact which she substitutes for the political. Fish again argues that there is actually no

> *Politics* of rethinking, just an assumption that rethinking is a general obligation that overrides the obligations that might come along with the political programs to which you have become attached. This assumption is not argued for; it is more like an article of faith, a faith that rethinking or revaluing or counter-appropriating will lead to a better world populated by better persons. And it is a universalising assumption because it is indifferent to outcomes, to how things turn out in the world, and concerned only to enjoin a single activity (rethinking) that is, like virtue, its own reward (Fish, 2001, 137).

The implications of Schmitt's concept of the 'political' might instead lead us to thinking about what contains or frames this exhibition and who and what are excluded from it. After all, this may be the only really interesting way to think about the particular constitution of the political in this exhibition.

The 'model' of 'politics' which Rogoff claims for what she calls the 'space of the exhibition' has all the signs of the kind of liberal pathos Schmitt talks about below, a kind of 'Means–Ends' (socially engaged) practice, a 'depoliticised' politics rooted in what Schmitt calls 'ethics (intellectuality)', and which it is hoped can evade 'economics (trade)', as according to Rogoff 'the space of the exhibition' is a space for the enactment in full sight, of what Giorgio Agamben has termed 'Means without End'.

Schmitt's critique is again pertinent to this claim as he says:

> All liberal pathos turns against repression and lack of freedom. Every encroachment, every threat to individual freedom and private property and free competition is called repression and is *eo ipso* something evil. What this liberalism still admits of state, government, and politics is confined to securing the conditions for liberty and eliminating infringements on freedom.
>
> We thus arrive at an entire system of demilitarised and depoliticised concepts (Schmitt, 1996, 71).

Self-fulfilling Prophecy

A question forming for some time now returns to von Hantelmann and Jongbloed's choice of artists versus the substantial claims made for the efficacy of their work vis-à-vis essays and commentary contained in the accompanying catalogue to the exhibition. The question I have is not so much to do with the choice of artists and whether this is a good or bad choice or whether another set of artists would have substantiated the claims made for the political more effectively. It's a question around whether the work included in the exhibition regardless of what it is should be asked to carry such a burden of expectation. Or, to put it another way, whether it should be asked to exemplify such an unequivocal correspondence between theory and practice, as the result of this demand on the work can be to reduce it, however interesting, to little more than anecdote, to displace it from the present or according to von Hantelmann, from where the work in the exhibition oscillates "between exhibiting and performing" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 97). An example is the work of the artist Tino Sehgal, which I have mentioned in relation to Rogoff's concept of the political and which is singled out by the curators as producing "the deviation of a hegemonic norm"[16] (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 109). *This is good* is a

> choreography for a museum guard who performs a given movement whenever a visitor enters the room, and then orally relates what is normally indicated on a label, the title of the work, the artist's name, place and year of production and the owner of the artwork (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 109).

I assume the hegemonic norm which Sehgal's work deviates from is the 'space' of the exhibition rather than the exhibition *per se*, in other words the institution and sponsors which host and support the exhibition and the art-going public who will invariably attend it.

Sehgal declares his politics in opposition to what he calls object related work and says:

> (most) object related work *apriori* affirms structures that I am politically sceptic of, since it mirrors, is involved in and thus promotes the historically prevalent mode of economic production, the transformation of material (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 91).

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[16] Following Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe's concept of hegemony alludes to 'an absent totality', and to the diverse attempts at recomposition and rearticulation which, in overcoming this original absence, made it possible for struggles to be given a meaning and for historical forces to be endowed with full positivity. The contexts in which the concept appear will be those of a fault (in the geological sense), of a fissure that had to be filled up, of a contingency that had to be overcome.

"'Hegemony' will not be the majestic unfolding of an identity but the response to a crisis" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, 7).

Fortunately for us, Sehgal's work is far more engaging than Sehgal's politics, which are predictably antagonistic to notions of 'structure' and the 'transformation of material'. Contrary to this, Sehgal sees dancing and singing or 'non material' artistic expressions as containing the potential to transform 'acts' over 'materials' and in so doing keep something in the present. Sehgal calls this the "simultaneity of production and deproduction instead of economics of growth" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 91).

Von Hantelmann and Jongbloed also draw on the work of philosopher Jacques Rancière to think about Sehgal's *This is good*, as Rancière claims the political to be present in "any activity that moves a body away from the place assigned to it, reverses a function, makes visible what was not meant to be seen, or makes a discourse heard where once there was only noise (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 109). He

> distinguishes the political form from what he calls *police* in French, for which 'police' in English is only an inadequate translation. This concept of *police* not only comprises the power of the state, but a broader apparatus of rules and orders (regarding different bodies) 'which defines the divisions between modes of acting, of being and of speaking....The political lies instead precisely in the subversion of these orders' (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 119).

Whether or not Sehgal produces the deviation of a hegemonic norm is difficult to prove and at the end of the day, is probably immaterial given the more substantial task of establishing the particular politics of the artist's work. Hence, the inverse relation between the implied subject of the exhibition/work versus the weight and variety of evidence needed to 'represent' this (contingency of claim versus physical proof required). The question is whether the weight and variety of evidence needed to substantiate the contingent nature of the political makes the work more or less interesting, more or less political.

Sehgal's *This is good* destabilises the processes which von Hantelmann and Jongbloed explain "characterise the museological space, the exhibited certainty about the relations between subjectivation and objectivation that enables the formation of the subject as viewer" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 109).

While that's all very well I'm not sure what is actually destabilised in the exhibition that we aren't fully expecting to be 'destabilised'. The unequivocal correspondence between theory and practice ensures there is nothing really new about this move, which has not been commodified for years now. 'Doing instability' is necessary and desirable for contemporary art, in fact is absolutely required of artists producing contemporary art. Without seeking to diminish Sehgal's work, I do want to say that this constitution of the

political is well and truly understood as such, in other words what is already theorised and tagged as political.

Put next to Schmitt, the concept of the political constituted within *I promise it's political* may ultimately suffer the same dilemma as Mouffe's radical–democratic model in terms of its failure or refusal to state what form it should take and how it will be understood institutionally. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner argue that radical pluralists such as Mouffe "privilege discourse over practices and institutions" out of a fear of essentialism and "provide little analysis of how that alliance can be achieved and sustained, around what issues it coalesces, and what forms it could take" (Best and Kellner, 1991, 203).

Brian Holmes similarly avoids taking about limits and exclusions by making institutions synonymous with faceless, bureaucratic obstacles standing in the way of a truly open and democratic polity. Holmes says the political is rare – it happens

> when outcasts stand up to say that the calculations are wrong, when they refuse the names and the places they've been given (*we're not a surplus*), to claim both a share in society and another name, which will signify their particular addition to universal equality (*we're a plus*). This is because the equality of one speaking being with any other – the fundamental presupposition of democracy – does not exist in the abstract. It only becomes universal each time it is proven, in a new language and on a newly visible stage. Equality is the groundless claim of a minority to have the rights of any other group, to be the *demos*, the people. But it is a claim whose naked truth does not suffice; it has to be put to the test, publicly verified. This is why the political always takes the form of a demonstration: a logical proof against all prevailing logic, and the mobile presence of a crowd against the fixed frames of an institution (Holmes, piet zwart institute, 2003).

But what is the institution that Holmes talks about and what has contemporary art do with any of this? And why is the political when represented in the form of a demonstration any less institutional – any less 'picture politics' as Holmes would say?

Hardt and Negri, like Holmes, take issue with the political and the aesthetic in terms of the 'representation' of 'the people', which according to them is based on "a notion of and a condition of measure" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 325).

Like Holmes's 'demonstration', Hardt and Negri propose the 'multitude' as what defies representation because it is "a multiplicity, unbounded and immeasurable. The people are 'represented' as a unity but the multitude is not representable" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 329). They write:

> If on the one side we contrast the multitude with the people, on the other side we should contrast it with the masses or the mob. The masses and the mob are the

> most often used to name an irrational and passive social force, dangerous and violent precisely because so easily manipulated. The multitude, in contrast, is an active social agent – a multiplicity that acts. The multitude is not a unity, as in the people, but, in contrast to the masses and the mob, we can see that it is organised. It is an active, self-organising agent (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 329).

And yet it is to the masses and the mob that not only Hardt and Negri but also Mouffe need to direct their attention. For here is the real monster that refuses to be tamed, given a name and organised[17].

Jockeying for Position

Finally, I am curious about the timing of the exhibition and whether this is significant in any way, whether the curators felt they needed to reaffirm the strength and value of individual agency, the power of a left-wing imaginary in the face of global events that seem beyond our control. I wondered if this is the real "deviation of a hegemonial norm" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 109).

While von Hantelmann and Jongbloed may well have found some affinity with 1960s' radicality vis-à-vis the contingency and potential of the 'performative' as a means to address today's political upheavals, they also understood that neither its politics nor activism could be transposed wholesale and indiscriminately on current contemporary events. *I promise it's political* may then 'represent' an attempt to approach current contemporary events through drawing on the spirit and nostalgia of the 1960s. By inviting us to critically consider the seeming impermeability of institutions and the immutability of objects, von Hantelmann and Jongbloed may be hoping we realise something of our own power to act, to participate, today. We could then look at this exhibition as a historical survey 'representing' various examples of the 'performative moment' within contemporary art over the last 30 years. Or we could look at it as having happened less than a year after the attack on the *Twin Towers* in New York **(fig. 25)**.

When it comes down to it, however, when we insist that 'openness' and interconnectedness' devolve to something more existential and concrete, when we

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[17] I'm interested in Hardt and Negri's distinction between the 'multitude' and the 'mob', which seems to epitomise or define some notion of 'dissent' which is common to only Hardt and Negri, Holmes, Mouffe and Rogoff. It seems to me that they advocate dissent only when it is constituted in the manner befitting the left liberal project. In other words when it is engaged in by an 'intelligent' and 'competent' multitude, in short, when it is regulated and controlled. As I say above, this is epitomised in the distinction Hardt and Negri make between the 'multitude' and the 'mob', which I also return in the opening of chapter three in order to say something about the vigilante and his identification with those same qualities which characterise the mob or what Hardt and Negri describe as that "irrational and passive social force, dangerous and violent precisely because it is so easily manipulated" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 329)

want to know more specifically what is common to the political in this exhibition, the best von Hantelmann can really say is that:

> the question is less if or if not art is political, more to the point is which *specific* context or situation – rather than another one can bring about a specific political idea. Concretely: what kind of discursive potential does the exhibition produce as a specific framework for the perception of art in an institutional space (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 101).

The short answer from von Hantelmann as to what is common to the political in this exhibition is 'the same as always', in other words 'what kind of discursive potential the exhibition produces'. *I promise it's political*, as I have already mentioned, seems to illustrate the paradox around selecting an exhibition in order to explore a certain concept or set of concerns which exist only so long as they go undetermined – only so long as we are unable to identify these concerns to be 'political'.

Maybe what is actually most political and most interesting about the exhibition is not so much what the work does or doesn't do in terms of its discursive potential, rather what the struggle about the representation of a left-wing imaginary post 9/11 does, what form(s) this can take. The staging of *I promise it's political* might in fact be just part of a larger struggle within the cultural realm – a jockeying for position so to speak, a form of internal politics being played out in public.

Critical theorist Susan Buck-Morss would in any case claim that what the work does or doesn't do no longer even matters. Buck-Morss writes "Even 'political' art is depoliticised, becoming simply another genre of contemporary practice – which has every right to *be* but not to matter" (Buck-Morss, 2003, 70).

fig.25. Hannah Beach

fig. 26. G.W. Bush

I believe this exhibition may be a call to arms by the left, a call on the responsibility and potential of individual agency, a call to redress the injustice now being done in the name of politics and the political **(fig. 26)**, from the so-called electoral fraud of the

'hanging chads' in Florida and the 'Republican Hawks' taking office in Washington to the increasing 'acceptability and sanitization of right-wing political agendas across Europe. *I promise it's political* is making a public declaration that contemporary art has not forgotten its radical potential vis-à-vis the spirit of '68 and so on. The problem is that it's a different time and well, contemporary art doesn't really matter that much or in that way anymore.

> As a genuine model for the behaviour of either persons or nations, as something you could actually follow and apply, political liberalism is hopeless. Like all projects based, supposedly, on neutral principles, it is either empty (you can't get from its abstractions to the nitty gritty of any actual real-life situation) or filled with an agenda it cannot acknowledge lest it be revealed as the limiting and exclusionary mechanism it surely is (Fish, 2001, 12).

While a crucial question for curators and artists as discussed in this chapter is what constitutes the political within current contemporary art, answers have invariably elicited some reference to the performative, the contingent, the relationship of the work to the artistic frame and so on, the problem we are faced with is that because the representation of the political in contemporary art is currently the property of those attempting to restore an eviscerated liberal-left imaginary these same people are unable to come to terms with 'the political' in its antagonistic dimension.

As Mouffe says,

> while the deliberative democrats, with their emphasis on impartiality and rational consensus, tend to formulate the ends of democratic politics in the vocabulary of Kantian moral reasoning, the second view eschews the language of universal morality and envisages democracy not as a deontological but as an 'ethical' enterprise, as the unending pursuit of the recognition of the Other (Mouffe, 2000, 129).

In attempting to avoid the antagonistic dimension of the political, or at least to control and regulate it as Hardt and Negri do in distinguishing the masses/mob (which seems to cover just about everyone) from the multitude, the current constitution of the political within contemporary art effectively de-politicises it. The attempt by the liberal-left to ensure the desired outcome, to ensure the work is legible, seems to me to attack what is 'complex' and irreducible in the work, in other words what constitutes the political in contemporary art.

The final question, then, and the one I have not yet come to a decision on, is whether contemporary art can ever be 'political', whether it can ever equal 'man's dangerousness'. While Mouffe may 'think' she is dealing with the political in its

antagonistic dimension, I wonder if she is dealing with it any more than von Hantelmann and Jongbloed, Hirschhorn, Holmes or art/activist group *Ne Pas Plier* are dealing with it.

I want to conclude this chapter with a number of observations:

- Chantal Mouffe's model of 'agonistic pluralism' has its corollary in a 'participatory logic' found in the work of Thomas Hirschhorn or Felix Gonzales-Torres for example.
  - ➢ The transformation of antagonism to agonism, enemy to adversary, is also the transformation of 'disinterested' to 'interestedness' and 'autonomous' to 'participatory'.
  - ➢ The antagonistic dimension, the condition prior to its transformation is also the condition of 'man's dangerousness' or the 'political' in Carl Schmitt's terms.
- 'Man's dangerousness' is concurrent with 'art's dangerousness'.
- 'Art's dangerousness' is art's 'disinterestedness' or art's 'autonomy'.
- The political within contemporary art is art's 'disinterestedness' or art's 'autonomy' and not in fact art's 'mutuality' or 'collectivity'.
- The current hegemonic order within contemporary art attempts to reduce the realm of contemporary art to the realm of ethics, which is challenged by art's 'disinterestedness'.
- Cultural theorists like Irit Rogoff and Brian Holmes are protecting rather than challenging the hegemonic order and meaning of liberal-democratic politics and the political within the realm of contemporary art.
- The kind of morality which advances 'man's undangerousness', man's pacifism, is the enemy of politics and the political.
- From the centre to the margins, space has been annexed by the apologists.

Contemporary art is sectarian. Good for contemporary art.

The next chapter explores how the deliberative turn in democratic theory has been taken up through participatory logic, so pervasive within the realm of contemporary art. This features the collaborative work of Böhm/Lang/Saffer amongst others.

Chapter 2: Deliberation

According to Sociologist, Steven Lukes, deliberative democracy promises 'real' democracy based on 'authentic' values. The following dichotomies are provided courtesy of Lukes so that we might appreciate what is promised by the deliberative model over what we currently entertain as democracy:

> 'private acquisition' versus 'human wholeness', 'instrumental' versus 'communicative' reason, 'claimant' versus 'civic' politics, 'distraction' versus 'attention', 'exploitation' versus 'cultivation', 'narrowly self-interested individualism' versus an 'overall philosophy of generative interdependence' (Lukes, 2003, 152).

The 'Real' Thing

Political scientist John Dryzek has noted that

> the final decade of the second millennium saw the theory of democracy take a strong deliberative turn...a renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged by competent citizens (Dryzek, 2000, 1).

In this 'turn' there's democracy – that bland rather uneventful thing that so disappoints us – and there's 'real' democracy – the thing we can all share in. Real democracy is produced within the political and cultural symbolic realm so that democracy and the democratic moment might be known to us: *'look everyone, we can all share in this...together, we can become known to one another'*. This supposed 'reality' is demonstrable through deliberation and the production of discourse, whether in the realm of politics or contemporary art. The principal characteristics of this 'real'. democracy are communicability, authenticity and participation, in other words, the kind of stuff that fastens its belief and legitimacy what sociologist Steven Lukes talks about as the kind of latent social morality that will cure our public and private ills. So deliberative democracy might just be the universal panacea of the new millennium, or at least temporary relief to the ravages of a *laissez-faire* market economy because, as Lukes says,

> Our institutions have become corrupt; 'means have wrongly been turned into ends'; and 'economic institutions have invaded other institutions (politics, religion, family, etc.) making it harder for them to do what they were originally intended to do'...Family life is troubled and impoverished, and has become the instrument for personal satisfactions. The market has become 'tyrannical' and is immune to considerations of the common good, as are corporations to the requirements of

> 'accountable democratic citizenship' and much work is meaningless despite high-tech opportunities to transform it. The regulatory state depends on 'an uninformed and undebated plebiscite of transitory and unexamined desires', political parties are mere interest coalitions embodying 'claimant politics' and the Law offers only a limited forum for public debate, restricted to the claiming and enforcement of rights and unable to examine the interdependence of choices. Education has become dominated by a cognitive paradigm of technical knowledge; it has lost its unifying, life-enabling role (Lukes, 2003, 151).

We have strayed, and it is evident!, though you could ask as Lukes asks, "...What is the latent 'coherent pattern of living together' with which this litany of ills contrasts?". What is its normative basis?

Deliberation is presumed to be located at the heart of the democratic process because it alone can overcome selfishness and help to affirm that yes, it is just as Saint-Just believed, that "the human heart advances from nature to violence, from violence to morality" (Saint-Amand, 1996, 4), because as political scientists Hibbing and Theiss-Morse also remind us, "people's perception seems to be that the common good is not debatable but rather will be apparent if selfishness can be stripped away" (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002, 9).

The argument of this chapter is that the simultaneous effect the deliberative turn has had on the political and cultural symbolic realm has been to produce deliberation on the one hand in the form of democratic theory and on the other hand in the form of contemporary art. The subsequent impact of one on the other has in effect led to a kind of rationalisation of contemporary art in the sense described by Max Weber in which rationalisation can be measured

> negatively in terms of the degree to which magical elements of thought are displaced, or positively by the extent to which ideas gain in systematic coherence and naturalistic consistency (Gerth and Mills, 1991, 51).

Friedrich Schiller refers to this as the 'disenchantment of the world'. I want also to claim this rationalisation is an attack on contemporary art's 'dangerousness' or 'disinterestedness' – in other words, what makes contemporary art complex, and political.

What I would say characterises the deliberative tendency within contemporary art, or what distinguishes this work from other art, is its concern for what I call 'outcomes' over 'effects'. The desired outcome being the 'representation' of discourse – and not any old discourse but deliberative discourse. For example, if we take as given that all contemporary art produces effects, tendencies, influences, emotions and so on, then

we cannot claim to fully know in advance of their production, in advance of the artwork so to speak, exactly how or what they will influence. The 'unknowability' of effects may in fact be similar to the unknowability of contingency, which Stanley Fish says,

> is precisely what you can't make room for; contingency is what befalls the best laid plans of mice and men – and that includes plans to take it into account or guard against its eruption (Fish, 2001, 237).

Outcomes on the other hand attempt to produce a predetermined result, an ideological position or statement that the deliberative tendency within contemporary art seems 'designed' to produce. While the distinction I make between effects and outcomes may resemble or echo Holmes critique of Hirschhorn, which I examine in Chapter one and which he talks about as the kind of 'picture politics in hock to the museum, the magazines and the market'. Unlike Holmes I don't attempt to identify the so called alternative to this in terms of a simplistic binary opposition which Holmes says is embodied by the 'demonstration' – 'real' politics in other words. To realise this, however, to predetermine the outcome, the artwork's inherent unpredictability or 'personal art coefficient' as Duchamp calls it, invariably comes under attack, in order that the artwork can be 'reduced' to something knowable. This can happen at the expense of the objecthood, spectacle or 'content' of the work. However, as already mentioned, this may result in an attack on the unknowability, unpredictability and irreducibility of the artwork to a once and for all meaning or discourse. In short, it may be an attack on the 'contingency' of the work. For the deliberative tendency within the realm of contemporary art, the artwork may serve as little more than an adjunct to a more pressing outcome, namely art's avowal that art can and will be something other than mere spectacle – mere art. In other words art can be truly participatory – in short, democratic. So what has contemporary art to do with democracy and how is it expected to make democracy demonstrable? Does contemporary art invariably move towards 'a democratic form' as part of a perceived evolutionary development, as Saint-Just has observed? Is current contemporary art in other words the 'end of art' as historian, Arthur Danto would claim? That having dispensed with master narratives, "ours is a moment, at least (and perhaps only) in art, of deep pluralism and total tolerance. Nothing is ruled out" (Danto, 1997, xiv).

It should merely remain for us to say hurrah for art, hurrah for democracy and hurrah for man's goodness towards man but this may be a little premature because art has been here before – remember Lucy Lippard:

> The framework was there to be broken out of...these energies are still out there, waiting for the artists to plug into them, potential fuel for the expansion of what

'art' can mean. The escape was temporary. Art was recaptured and sent back to its white cell, but parole is always a possibility (Lippard, 1997, xxii).

The lesson is that art may have nothing in particular to do with democracy, either 'real or imagined'. We may instead be currently witnessing a 'politicisation' of contemporary art rather than art moving towards its so-called natural abode by becoming more democratic. Since the mid-90s then, this 'politicisation' of contemporary art, if I am right in calling it that, corresponds to, and is affected by, the rise of the deliberative turn in democratic theory. The promise is for a democratic kind of contemporary art, which is inclusive, addresses local realities and promises greater participation.

Evangelising

fig.27. *Protest & Survive*

fig. 28. *democracy*

A number of exhibitions like *Protest & Survive* **(fig. 27)** and *democracy!* **(fig. 28)**, have, without explicitly naming it, looked at the deliberative 'turn' within contemporary art over the last ten years. *democracy!* was the exhibition mounted by the MA Curation students at the Royal College of Art in 2000. The exhibition identified this move to deliberation as something averse or opposed to 'mainstream' contemporary art, even something that could fulfil Lippard's dream, and finally liberate contemporary art. MA Course Director, Teresa Gleadowe says

> The curators of this exhibition have shown a determination to reflect emerging practice and to chart areas of activity which have seldom been presented in gallery exhibitions....Artists are developing projects which have little relationship with traditional studio-based practice and which involve public participation, research, conversation, exploration, shared pleasures, interests and causes. Social engagement is a common concern, but this does not necessarily mean that the work has an explicit social agenda. Most of these projects do not result in the production of art objects, and some may not easily be recognised as art at all (*democracy!*, 2000, 7).

The implication of what Gleadowe says is that we need to rethink where we find contemporary art and in what condition we find it because these 'emerging' practices may not be so obliging in terms of identifying where the art is actually happening as it is likely to be embedded in all kinds of social practices which have nothing directly to do with contemporary art.

The catalogue accompanying *democracy!* is full of references to shared experiences, social responsibility and concerns with regard to ideas about localism, site specificity and deliberation. Curator Matt Price writes, for example:

> A substantial number of practices represented in *democracy!* involve groups of artists working together, in partnership, small or large groups, or through one-off collaborative ventures. Thus the exhibition is also exploring more democratic forms of art production, in which participation, collaboration, power sharing and interaction are central tenets (*democracy!*, 2000, 45).

The kind of language Matt Price and others use in the catalogue makes me wonder if in the very substance of such seemingly benign tropes as 'localism', 'site specificity' and 'deliberation', are somehow concealed in the inherited values of radical left politics keeping faith with the dematerialised and anti-spectacular and are in effect responsible for (re)producing a kind of orthodoxy or master narrative which we thought had been consigned to a now discredited form of modernism. This most current orthodoxy, if we can call it that, is one of benevolence and makes its appeal to art's true democratic core where freedom and equality reside. And it is not only the MA Curation students who are thinking about democracy, as it is likely they have merely picked up on what is emerging in significance within the realm of contemporary art. Chantal Pontbriand, for example, founder and editor of the avant-garde Canadian contemporary art magazine, *Parachute*, enthusiastically endorses such a project and dedicates an entire issue to democracy, 'real' democracy. Pontbriand writes:

> Whether it be the activist artists...the hyper-media virtual architects and cyberspace bootleggers...all these artists in different ways, address reality in their investigation of social bonds. So many artists who are inquiring into the idea of democracy and who are reinventing not only thinking about democracy itself, that delicate negotiation of a common place, but who are also reinventing artistic practices and their dissemination in the world. Which is how it should be (Pontbriand, 2000, 7).[18]

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[18] It's not insignificant that this particular issue of *Parachute* devoted to democracy and the *democracy!* Exhibition of 2000 at the RCA uses all lower case to spell democracy, no uppercase here, no hierarchy, no privilege. Democracy is as Pontbriand says "that delicate negotiation of a common place".

The Question

The question at the core of this chapter then, is about the easy and predictable conflation of democratic theory with contemporary art, and particularly for those practices which are considered synonymous with making democracy 'real' and demonstrable.

The question is whether the insistence on making contemporary art 'equal' to democratic discourse, in the name of making democracy demonstrable, may in fact have the opposite outcome for contemporary art. That is, by attempting to produce predetermined recognisable outcomes, these efforts may in fact hinder art's ability to contribute to the democratic imaginary by producing the 'unexpected' or in other words complex mutable positions and interpretations in the same work. A second part to this question is whether the deliberative tendency is as an alternative to the economic expediency, rationalisation and instrumentality of market place liberalism, a place where art can at last be 'true' to itself once divested of the burden of 'master narratives' and short-term market interests as it contends, or whether it is responsible for the very inverse of this, for an increasing 'rationalisation' of contemporary art.

The well-known American Conservative William F. Buckley once said that he would rather be ruled by the first two thousand people listed in the Boston phone book than by the faculty of Harvard University. Despite his choice of phone book, I think I'm with Buckley on the basis that deliberation and discourse, whilst all very well and good, can frequently impede and even preclude change or, put another way, deliberation may preclude the political.

Deliberative democracy clearly has the problem that Oscar Wilde saw in socialism. It would require too many evenings **(fig. 29)**.

fig. 29. Meeting

Disbelief

As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, for Chantal Mouffe, both the shortcomings and alternatives to deliberative democracy are rooted in us wantonly ignoring the 'antagonistic' dimension of human relations and failing to build a concept of democracy around it. She attributes our renewed interest in the deliberative model to our perception of it as a means of consolidating democratic institutions by providing an alternative to the disillusionment now apparent in the aggregative model.[19] Philosopher Edward Song articulates such disillusionment in commenting that

> even as democracies spring up all over the globe, there remains a certain ambivalence or pessimism among many commentators about the future of democracy....There is a growing consensus among political theorists that even in these strongholds of democracy, liberal democratic institutions are increasingly perceived as being ineffective and illegitimate, as is evidenced by low levels of voter participation, declining measures of social capital, rising cultural and ethnic tensions, and an increasing sense of disillusionment with government (Song, 2000, 1).

Ultimately deliberative democracy restores legitimacy to the political and cultural symbolic realm and even reinvigorates market potential in the rather staid democratic enterprise. In other words deliberative democracy is also good for business because the deliberative tendency can powerfully (re)invigorate a notion of the social and in so doing present the market with previously unavailable opportunities. This is obvious in terms of current British social-housing legislation where the Labour Government since coming to power has created unprecedented opportunities for public participation. In fact Government guidance now stipulates that every Council must have a resident empowerment strategy:

> To enable tenants to be active agents in a creative process, tenants are offered opportunities and support to take part in every aspect of decision-making, however difficult or controversial, and treated as equals by Councillors, staff, consultants and others (Bird, 2002, 9).

Mouffe, however, believes the deliberative model is ultimately about turning politics into ethics so as to make it possible to reach forms of agreement through deliberation that could satisfy the opposing forces of liberal rights or, what Mouffe calls rationality and popular sovereignty. With the Labour government's policy on one side and the ideology

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[19] The aggregative model, dominant throughout Europe and North America amounts to the representation of a plurality of interests or the multi-party system of democracy as we know it. It is a system that gives voters the right to elect those who would claim to want to speak on their behalf.

of the kind of contemporary art highlighted here on the other, this is what Mouffe calls democratic legitimacy.

As we've seen, Mouffe argues that

> a well functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions. If this is missing there is a danger that democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation amongst other forms of collective identification, as is the case with identity politics. Too much emphasis on consensus and the refusal of confrontation leads to apathy and disaffection with political participation. Worse still, the result can be the crystallization of collective passions around issues which cannot be managed by the democratic process and an explosion of antagonisms that can tear up the very basis of civility (Mouffe, 2000, 104).

This is all very good for democratic theory. But we're now faced with the concrete question: Despite Mouffe's claim that the deliberative tendency is unable to come to terms with the antagonistic dimension of human relations, and despite empirical research by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse raising such doubts regarding the efficacy of deliberation, how does it devolve to the social and political realm or the realm of contemporary art?

The Players

fig. 30. *T.W.U.*, Richard Serra

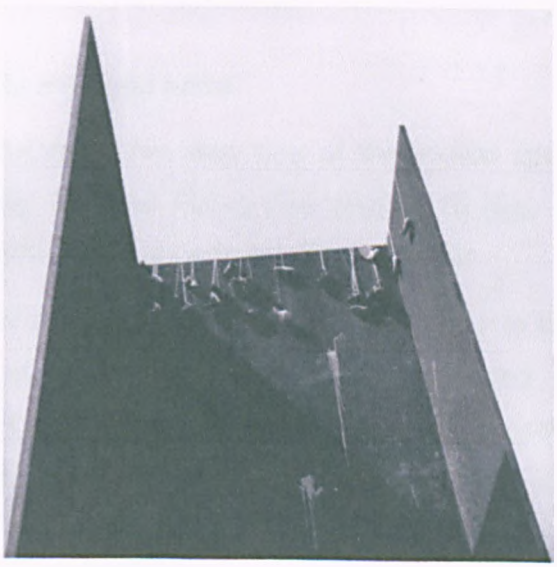

fig. 31. *Shoetree*, David Hammons

fig. 32. *Pissed Off*, David Hammons

I begin by framing some of these concerns I have within the collaborative work of Böhm/Lang/Saffer, before moving more 'centre stage' within the realm of contemporary art so to speak through revisiting the controversy surrounding the 'destruction' of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*. I also discuss David Hammons's response to another of Serra's work before it too was removed. This is his sculpture *T.W.U.*, **(fig. 30)** and Hammons's response to it in the form of two performance-related pieces from 1981 entitled *Shoetree* **(fig. 31)** and *Pissed Off* **(fig. 32)**.

Disclaimer

While the work of Böhm/Lang/Saffer might in itself be interesting to think about in relation to the deliberative tendency within contemporary art, it is even more vital that their practice be understood as standing in for or representing a strong tendency within current contemporary art.

The Böhm Factor; tales of a socially engaged artist

At a two-day conference in 2003 Kathrin Böhm was one of the invited speakers.[20] Böhm spoke about *Mobile Porch* **(fig. 33)** and *Fitting Fire Station 10* **(fig. 34)**, two collaborative projects she had done with Andreas Lang and Stefan Saffer.

Böhm related this work as a series of human-interest stories; the humour in the detail as she recounted the uniqueness of the 'individual encounter' combined with her negotiation of bureaucratic obstacles added an integrity and 'actually-happened-out-there-in-real-life' kind of feeling to the work. She explained the working methodology of Böhm/Lang/Saffers and the importance for them of the concept of 'Hanging out' which is as she makes clear in a statement from 2000:

> the informal encounter of people without a specific reason. In this encounter unique information flow is created which would not happen otherwise....Hanging

[20] Lime House Town Hall, London, 2003.

> out could be an enormous chance because things could be changed that have become too stiff. But there is also a small chance that people will not be able to accept it (Böhm/Lang/Saffer, 2000, 3).

Böhm used the project *Fitting Fire Station 10* as an example of how 'Hanging out' could be employed to good effect. This was a six-month consultation and design project with the firemen of 'Feuerwache 10' in Munich. The firemen were dissatisfied with their fire station in terms of looks, functionality and design, and as a result, various antagonisms had formed between employees, management and architects.

Hanging out for six months, Böhm /Lang/Saffer discovered how the really wanted

> something cosy for their work place...it took weeks until they discovered that they actually wanted a Bavarian bench....With the design and construction of a Bavarian bench, some bedside shelf units and a mural on the external wall of the fire station in order to make it look less like an office block, the firemen's newspaper headlines read 'Revolution in Fire Station 10' (Böhm/Lang/Saffer, 2000, 2–3).

According to Stefan Saffer, Böhm/Lang/Saffer had achieved an actual exchange between the different parties and an understanding. Firemen were involved in their own building by making proposals and designing changes, reflects Andreas.

> During this process it was especially important to listen to them at first. Thereby real problems and frustrations could be solved in a fitting manner.' Not the big intervention was important here but the short moment of standing on the side of oneself....This produced a power that allowed change. We were actively bridging with proposals (Böhm/Lang/Saffer, 2000, 2).

I was impressed with their work because this is what a lot of contemporary art doesn't do or wasn't set up to do. On the whole I found Böhm's testimony to be engaging and provocative, apart, that is, from what I want to refer to as 'the thing itself'. In other words, whatever else there is apart from her testimony. For example, if we assume that in the case of *Fitting Fire Station 10* 'the work' is in the actual specificity of Böhm/Lang/Saffer's encounter with the firemen then without proper oral or written testimony to the individual encounter and so on, 'the work' or in other words, the 'thing itself' runs the risk of being mistaken for something else, such as community work, management arbitration, opportunism and so on or perhaps ends up being not much of anything else, for example, in that it's neither very interesting as contemporary art nor very useful as community work, in other words, something that Böhm/Lang/Saffer did not intend it to be. This leads me to believe that maybe the real work of the piece is

right here in Böhm's testimony at the conference and that the business in Riehm, the site of *Fitting Fire Station 10*, is merely the pretext for the real work.[21]

If for a moment we accept that the work is in fact Böhm's testimony to the work in Riehm then the most interesting question must be 'what is this work about?'. A substantial part of what we witnessed at the conference that day was testimony to the moral integrity of the artist and the significance of her encounter with the 'Other' – in this instance, the firemen of Riehm or in the case of *Mobile Porch*, the people of North Kensington and the Westway Flyover in London. The problem however is that the plea in the work for integrity, shared values and so on is not necessarily in the work but needs to be made on behalf of the work and it is this 'plea' that in fact becomes the work. If Böhm's testimony is at the moment of delivery 'the work' or 'the thing itself', it seems to be primarily about the recovery of contemporary art's moral dimension. And if this is actually the case, then her testimony really has to be the work because the recovery of contemporary art's moral dimension is too important a project to be left to the vagaries and irreducibility of the artwork. Böhm must step in, must make the work before us, with us and for us.

Böhm may be attempting to recover a moral dimension for contemporary art because, apart from it being good for business, under a New Labour administration, the assumption is that people want this kind of art, for by its very nature it is a doctrine built around inclusion. It seems that whether within the realm of politics or contemporary art, the answer to our current problems can be resolved through deliberation. In effect what Böhm is trying to recover through this work is mirrored in what Chantal Mouffe claims deliberative democracy is attempting to do on behalf of liberal democracy: "to reach a consensus that would be deeper than a 'mere agreement on procedures', a consensus that could qualify as moral" (Mouffe, 2000, 83). Dryzek (2000) tells us that for supporters of the deliberative turn, persuasion is favoured over coercion, manipulation and deception. This is how freedom and equality are expressed in the world of deliberative democracy.

It ultimately makes the system more accountable, though political theorists Hibbing and Theiss-Morse add a cautionary note to this general admiration of deliberative democracy:

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[21] While there is a well-documented set of problems around the recuperation of the 'original moment' in the history of Performance art, the problems Böhm's work throws up are I believe of a slightly different order, because Böhm is intending to ensure that proper and consensual meaning is derived from her actions. She is also attempting to ensure that this 'meaning' is reproduced and disseminated verbatim or intact so to speak. Böhm wants to ensure the proper representation of the work she is doing. While there may be many similarities in the history of performance vis-à-vis the 'original moment', I believe there is a fundamental difference in the tradition of performance which attacked certain notions of representation and reproducibility. Though may or may not have attempted to impede the elaboration of meaning

> Deliberation has become the concept de jour of political theorists and in some cases has taken on nearly religious overtones. Exhortations to deliberate seem to be everywhere. All problems are the result of a 'failure to communicate' and if something is wrong with a democratic polity, insufficient deliberation must have been the cause (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002, 172).

Given this, I wonder though how much we should really care whether the firemen of Riehm had their say, felt included, participated in the process of making contemporary art. Did Böhm/Lang/Saffer listen to the firemen enough? Was consensus arrived at? What did this mean? Does it matter? Do we really care?

If the actual purpose of the work is to recover art's moral dimension, it is equally a way to consolidate and where possible increase the artist's share of the lucrative funding opportunities available under the current Labour administration – a prospect obviously enhanced through the projected purpose of Böhm's testimony – thus making democracy demonstrable. What is demonstrated after all is the sharing of a significant and meaningful encounter with reasonable people – the honest, simple firemen of Riehm on the one hand and the audience of well adjusted artists and administrators on the other. This leads me to believe that contrary to the kind of marketplace 'instrumentality' which Böhm/Lang/Saffer's concept of 'Hanging Out' might claim to challenge, their work significantly is also about art's exchange and market value. That is, within the realm of politics or contemporary art it is the deliberative tendency that is instrumental and political in the sense that it is predominantly concerned with replacing the political with a moral realm.

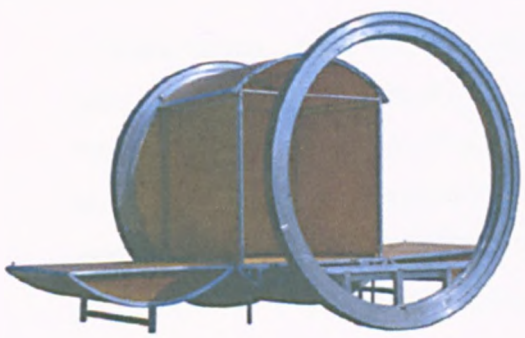

fig. 33. *Mobile Porch*

fig. 34. *Fitting Fire Station 10*,

These core issues in their practice are encapsulated by the project *Lay Out* **(fig. 35)**, 'an unprecedented research project', resulting from Böhm/Lang's collaboration with London's Gasworks Gallery, which formed part of the gallery's organisational strategy. *Lay Out* took place on site during July and August 2002 and resulted in a catalogue of

proposals, which demonstrated various strategies for the development of the organisation in the short, medium and longer term. *Lay Out* came to fruition in 2004 with the opening of a refurbished, new-look Gasworks.

> This process began with a project funded by London Arts and was delivered by marketing consultancy firm *The Write Thing*. The research brief for *The Write Thing* asked the consultants to look at Gasworks' press and publicity campaigns and begin to address the issue of repeat audiences to a diverse range of exhibitions. This research was particularly to focus on black and ethnic minority audiences. The results from this brief were unexpected and opened up new areas of interest and discussion particularly in relation to our local context and Gasworks building and how this serves our audiences....In order to further research these two areas of interest, Gasworks Gallery invited art/architecture team Kathrin Böhm and Andreas Lang to develop a project: *Lay Out*. Böhm and Lang were asked to undertake this research due to their working philosophy which includes an interest in the existing dynamics between formal and informal structures, a willingness to let the meaning and relevance of their projects develop as they progress, and a firm commitment to collaboration (Böhm and Lang, gasworks, 2003–04).

While we're not told what was unexpected from the results of this initial work done by marketing consultancy firm *The Write Thing*, it seemed that any further research would require the services of art/architecture team Böhm/Lang (and sometimes Saffer). The perception was that a marketing firm could not hope to be wholly sensitive to the needs of artists. Enter Böhm/Lang:

> If relationships and exchange are based on the intersection of interests and need, we propose to describe Gasworks as a Space of Issues and a Space of Resources. The intention of this proposal is to stimulate an internal discussion about the nature and valuable characteristics of Gasworks in order to make them recognisable to a wider public. The proposal doesn't imply practical translations (Böhm and Lang, gasworks, 2003–04).

In keeping with their preferred way of working, *Lay Out* involved a sustained period of 'on-the-ground', empirical research or 'Hanging Out' with Böhm/Lang in residence at Gasworks for five weeks between June and September 2002.

During this period they hosted a number of *Open Offices*, which provided an opportunity for members of the local community to find out about and contribute to the

project. They also hosted a series of *Platforms*,[22] which were an opportunity for invited contributors to visit the project and discuss its implications within a wider context.

These *Open Offices* and *Platforms* also provided the content for a well-constructed text and image database containing all the research that constitutes *Lay Out* and which led to the catalogue of proposals.[23]

What becomes evident from examining the numerous *Platforms*, *Open Offices*, *Proposals*, *Moments* and other archival material found in Böhm/Lang's database is that Gasworks needed to be 'opened up' both literally and conceptually and while it's somewhat unclear what this promises, you are left in no doubt that being 'opened up' is indeed a good thing. But what exactly Böhm/Lang are promising to 'open up', to what end, and how this might be achieved? Is there a difference between the 'opening up' of something in order to allow for some 'other thing' to happen and the 'opening up' of something in order to make observable what is in any case happening? In other words does the 'opening up' need to be observable in recognised terms of deliberation in order to say it has been 'opened up'? And finally, as in the case of *Lay Out*, is this being proposed in the form of discourse?

For Böhm/Lang, what seems to be indicative of having something 'opened up' is framed by their question, "How do you create situations to be creative?" (Böhm and Lang, gasworks, 2003–04).The assumption is made that creativity, like democracy (vis-à-vis the deliberative model), is demonstrable. This is a very New Labour Cultural Policy theme as the then Culture Secretary, Chris Smith reminded us in a speech to the Annual Dinner of the Royal Academy:

> Cultural activity is not some elitist exercise that takes place in reverential temples aimed at the predilections of the cognoscenti. The opportunity to create and to enjoy must be fostered for all (Wallinger and Warnock, 200, 172).

But then it should come as no surprise that Böhm/Lang seem to parrot New Labour speak or vice versa and that they prosper under such Cultural Policy initiatives as Böhm herself cites this as one of the reasons for her choosing to live in London, so as to avail herself of the opportunities for funding public space projects due to the New Labour.

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[22] This is a deliberate reference I believe to *Documenta 11* and is designed to bring a certain gravitas and intellectual cachet to the project.

[23] In order to process and present *Lay Out*, Böhm and Lang have been working with e-2 and *Red Leader Industries* to develop a website which outlines a number of ideas and strategies for the development of the Gasworks in the short, medium and longer term. It also operates a comprehensive archive of the contributions made during the *Open Offices* and *Platforms* (www.gasworks.org.uk/shows/layout/index.htm).

Reading through the archive of *Lay Out*, what is interesting is that any possibility of this 'opening-up' or 'something' happening as art goes largely unexplored.

Böhm/Lang say that

> The relationship between the public and Gasworks does not have to be built on a common interest in art but on a common interest in issues/subjects, which are part of people's everyday life and are also addressed within contemporary art practice (Böhm and Lang, gasworks, 2003–04).

In more concrete terms the problem seems to be how Gasworks can be 'opened up' in order that it can be 'packaged' – given exposure – and yet retain and develop those qualities Böhm/Lang have decided it already possesses and which makes Gasworks unique. For example, when they first embarked on *Lay Out*, Böhm/Lang recall that

> At the beginning of the project Fiona [Boundy – Gallery Director] handed us the key to Gasworks so we could come and go whenever we liked – *Issue* – Trust and Access – *Idea* – Should be maintained in the future (Key / Gasworks-08/06/2002,13:05pm–*Moments, 2003*).

And while Böhm/Lang are interested in Gasworks as a context for their work, what they are most interested in is to think about Gasworks, regardless of its identity and specificity, as a place for social relations which can in some way be included in what we call art, perhaps what Nicolas Bourriaud, author of *Relational Aesthetics* calls a relationist theory of art. Bourriaud says as part of this theory that

> inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its 'environment', its 'field' (Bourdieu), but also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice (Bourriaud, 2002, 22).

So, Gasworks has the opportunity to be 'something else' whose normative dimension is not predicated on rigid/formal structures, insidious economic demands, erosion of authentic social relations and integrity.

For Böhm/Lang, the answer is to:

> Open up the space and make it a playground. The idea of playing in a space and enjoying the rediscovery of playing. Be open for input. It would be amazing if a space like this was open for local interests. Provide a platform for expression where others are allowed to say things and to express their ideas. Giving opportunities to discuss issues just for their sake, without a reason, e.g. Hans Ulrich Obrist's 'non-conference', which was based on the idea of coffee breaks and informal get-togethers during conferences, where the essential information gets exchanged (Böhm and Lang, gasworks, 2003–04).

Having said all this, having imagined what an 'opened up' Gasworks might look like, the plans for the space produced by Böhm/Lang belie the actual detail and amount of work which went into *Lay Out*, belies the 'unprecedented nature of the research project', belies the 'something else' which Gasworks has the opportunity to become.

Despite the open and transparent process they embark on, and despite claiming their proposal does not imply practical translations because its intention is to stimulate an internal discussion about the nature and valuable characteristics of Gasworks (so as to make them recognisable to a wider public), Böhm/Lang do end up producing a rather solid, conventional design proposal for Gasworks that could also have been produced by any good design team with/without extensive public consultation (though it has to be said that this criticism is based solely on looking at the drawings for the renovation of the space included in the database).

fig. 35. *Lay Out*

My fault, because I was never going to find it, was to look for the 'something' different, or 'something' specific in these plans, in Böhm/Lang's proposals without maybe realising that the 'something' might actually be in the very transparency of the proposal and how Böhm/Lang arrive at this point. In other words, I wondered if Gasworks and *Lay Out* were not being used as the context within which 'something' informal could be introduced to a rather formal design and architectural language and by osmosis hopefully to the actual physical structure itself by 'opening up' this work, this process to scrutiny. To supervise public participation vis-à-vis *Platforms*, *Open Offices*, *Moments*, etc., this activity could somehow stand in for or epitomise a model of social relations and good practice which Gasworks could be encouraged to subsume institutionally, curatorially and so on, particularly if, as Böhm/Lang say, these qualities already exist as part of how Gasworks has developed into a unique and interesting place.

In this vein, Böhm/Lang believe that "Architecture is too much defined by the concept of product, what humans do has to do with energy. How can you make architecture that supports this energy?" (Böhm and Lang, gasworks, 2003–04).

The question I continue to be left with however is whether Gasworks has been 'opened up', and what is specific to this 'opening up' or whether the project's discursive

potential is fully realised and *Lay Out* is deemed a success merely by 'opening' the doors to the public of a refurbished Gasworks.

Nice Idea

I tend to agree with Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, echoing Wilde's critique of socialism, that it is "virtually impossible to avoid the suspicion that deliberation will work if at all, only in parlour room discourse or in small salons of academic conference" (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002, 172), as it seems far too much of real politics is about winning and losing, which at the end of the day but without being able to acknowledge it, is exactly what artists like Böhm/Lang may be involved in. As social scientist Jon Elster says, "Politics is concerned with substantive decision-making, and is to that extent instrumental" (Bohman and Rehg, 2002, 19); this is the kind of instrumentalisation that Böhm/Lang are deeply involved in because politics and art are instrumental in a manner in which deliberative democracy and certain forms of contemporary art seem to abhor. In fact, the political interests of Böhm/Lang may be closer to the kind of rational choice model which Dryzek discusses in opposition to the deliberative model. In other words, what represents a capitalist or market-driven determination of politics and political interests as distinct from a shared, deliberative notion of these interests.[24] And while exponents of these deliberative tendencies like Böhm/Lang may lay claim theoretically to some kind of non-instrumental realm not subject to the vagaries of market forces, what they may really be describing is merely an instrumentality of a slightly different tone. Exponents of deliberative democracy it seems have a shared enemy, and a common goal – the elimination of politics?

> Deliberative theorists are in general agreement on at least this: the political process involves more than self-interested competition governed by bargaining and aggregative mechanisms. But rejection of the rational-choice model leaves the further question unanswered. What positively speaking, differentiates political behaviour from market behaviour (Bohman and Rehg, 2002, xiii).

The conflation of democratic theory with contemporary art and the manner and extent to which this has been naturalised – democratic theory producing contemporary art

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[24] "Rational choice theory examines what happens when *homo economicus* takes leave of the market place to pursue his advantage through politics. *Homo economicus* is an instrumentally rational egoist, concerned only with maximising a set of predefined elements in a utility function (which might include income, wealth, pleasant leisure time, etc) As the opposite of public spirit, egoism might be thought to cause problems for politics. Still, rational choice modelling can proceed without the egoism assumption, taking an 'anything goes' approach to the specification of an actor's utility. This utility can therefore include public-spirited as well as narrowly self-interested concerns. What is indispensable to the whole rational choice enterprise, however, is that an actor's preferences, utility function, or goals are not changed in the course of social and political interaction, which otherwise could not be modelled in purely strategic terms. This invariance puts rational choice theory on a collision course with deliberative democracy, whose defining feature is preference change through deliberation". (Dryzek, 2000, 32)

producing democratic theory – producing in other words a tautological certainty, returns us to the problem raised in the opening pages of this chapter.

This is a question of whether the deliberative tendency within contemporary art attacks some notion of 'content' in its pursuit of particular outcomes. This is slightly ironic given that we've been led to believe that 'real' democracy, within the realm of politics and contemporary art, is so much concerned *with* 'content', with the substantive over the symbolic, since, as Dryzek notes regarding the deliberative tendency, it espouses a "renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged by competent citizens" (Dryzek, 2000, 1).

However, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, who are not that keen on deliberation, tend to think otherwise.

> We agree that citizens will have a different attitude toward decisions adopted after open deliberation of conflicting moral claims. We just happen to think that often their attitude will become more negative rather than more positive (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002, 196).

In other words, while you may get people sitting around a table, you don't necessarily get a better or more substantive result. In fact, research suggests that people may actually become more entrenched in their views, and issues become less negotiable or transparent. In short, less 'opened up'. We can only assume for example that in the case of Böhm/Lang/Saffers's *Fitting Fire Station 10*, that following due deliberation, a 'Bavarian bench' was a good result for the firemen of Riehm, and not merely a way to finish the process and get rid of the artists.

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse citing the work of political scientist Michael Morrell say:

> participatory procedures 'require participants to open themselves up in ways with which they may not be comfortable' and 'can create an atmosphere of disconnection and dislike. Rather than bringing citizens together, these types of structures of participation can only exacerbate already present divisions' (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002, 200).

So, the net result of deliberation for politics and for art could in actual fact be 'bad politics' and 'bad art'. Bad politics because the deliberative model is predicated on the belief that if only ordinary people would get more involved in 'politics' then we would have a more truly authentic democracy. Bad art because we attempt to make art out of morality and mistake morality for art.

Democracy, Serra-style

We have seen that for those types of contemporary art practice such as Böhm/Lang/Saffer amongst others, deliberative democracy is democracy 'made visible'. In other words democracy, which can be seen to be working, can be 'represented'; this 'making observable' of deliberative democracy is central to the credibility of this model being democratic. Hence I make the move between the *form* of the practice and the deliberative project since, as I have argued, it is the form – the 'making observable' in recognised ways – or in other words the outcome rather than the effects that are crucial to such practices, even though this is the exact inverse of how such practices are usually explained. Hence the deliberative tendency within contemporary art, contrary to its claims, is employed instrumentally – to verify the unverifiable. Given this, the increasingly naturalised and seemingly easy conjunction between contemporary art and democratic theory is contestable on the very grounds used, for example, to accuse Richard Serra's much maligned *Tilted Arc* or *T.W.U.*, of being undemocratic. *Tilted Arc* was never designed to 'disappear' either in terms of duration or material. And even though it may be context specific, *Tilted Arc's* 'form' is antithetical to the deliberative model. Yet, if we agree that deliberative democracy is concerned with the production of discourse, then despite its form, *Tilted Arc* epitomises the deliberative tendency within contemporary art in a manner in which few other contemporary art practices can claim.

On the other hand if *Tilted Arc* were to be understood as a strategic development in the creation of a public sphere of critical dissension as Serra himself claims, then *Tilted Arc* also conforms to another political model and can be taken up through a kind of ethical particularism or rational choice theory – what Dryzek accuses of being anti-democratic and the abode of liberal extremists, though Serra would probably consider himself anything but a liberal extremist.

And while I'm not interested in Rational Choice Theory *per se*, I am interested in what *Tilted Arc* can embody in terms of a kind of 'ethical particularism' which can challenge the deliberative model's current 'monopoly' within contemporary art of being somehow more adept at producing discourse and deliberation on the grounds that it is more inclusive rather than self-regarding.

Philosopher Jonathan Dancy says: "Particularism claims that generalism is the cause of many ill-judged and unnecessary attempts to fit what we are to say here to what we have said on another occasion" (Dancy, 1993, 64). He goes on to say:

> The primary focus of particularism is the particular case, not surprisingly. This means that one's main duty, in moral judgement, is to look really closely at the

> case before one. Our first question is not 'which other cases does this one best resemble?', but rather 'what is the nature of the case before us?' (Dancy, 1993, 63).

I want to offer a rejection of the universalisability implicit in the deliberative project and which is made explicit in Böhm/Lang/Saffer's practice for example. These are artists who are primarily concerned with art's rehabilitation – recovering art's moral dimension. In doing so they attempt to prise this complex set of conditions apart in order to point to the integrity of art and artist. In doing so they rehearse what I want to describe as an Adornian 'moment' – when art is freed from heteronomous control – not as reified object but as event.

Not Adorno!

> A pure productive force such as that of the aesthetic, once freed from heteronomous control, is objectively the counterimage of enchained forces, but it is also the paradigm of fateful, self-interested doings. Art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance; unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity (Adorno, 2003, 226).

While my position may have echoes of an Adornian Modernist notion of autonomy I want to claim a position vis-à-vis my critique of Serra which differs fundamentally from Adorno, in as much as I do not advocate freeing the aesthetic from what Adorno calls 'heteronomous control'. Art's commodification is for me a given, and in fact it is within the very instrumentality of contemporary art that I propose a possible point of resistance to its growing moral integrity, in other words, a kind of 'ethical particularism', as I've mentioned above. It may in fact be the very presumption that contemporary art is 'democratic' in so far as it is bound to the creation of some non-instrumental realm, that actually circumscribes what contemporary art can be, that exercises a kind of 'heteronomous control' over contemporary art.

In addition to what Jonathan Dancy says, I think of particularism as requiring what the philosopher Charles Taylor also calls 'inspired adhoccary', which Stanley Fish describes as an understanding:

> that the solutions to particular problems will be found by regarding each solution-of-crisis as an opportunity for improvisation and not as an occasion for the application of rules and principles (although the invoking and the recharacterising of rules and principles will often be components of the improvisation). Any solution devised in this manner is likely to be temporary – that is what ad hoc means – and when a new set of problems has outstripped its efficacy, it will be time to improvise again (Fish, 2001, 63).

So contrary to how *Tilted Arc* is often understood as autonomous, an accusation which conveniently consigns *Tilted Arc* to a much maligned tradition of monumental public sculpture, I think about *Tilted Arc* as embodying some sense of what I want to take from Jonathan Dancy's concept of ethical particularism.

A Brief History of *Tilted Arc*

What should really come as a surprise about Serra is that he was commissioned in the first place to install a permanent piece of work outside a Federal Building. When we look at his obvious political leanings and his stated desire to expose the oppressive nature of the state, maybe the biggest surprise is that it took over three years of *Tilted Arc* being on site before there was any noticeable resistance to it.

Harriet Senie describes how

> Serra in 1979 imagined a public sphere of critical dissension. He intended to challenge symbolically government authority and its impositions on personal freedom. A concept of the public sphere like Wodiczko's or Serra's views works like Calder or those concerned with providing seating and other urban amenities as celebrating existing economic power structures responsible for social ills (gentrification and therefore homelessness) and the curtailment of individual freedom (Senie, 2002, 103).

Serra was commissioned by the General Services Administration (GSA) in 1979 to build an urban sculpture for permanent installation at 26 Federal Plaza Manhattan. Donald Thalacker, the GSA project manager said to Serra "You get one chance in your lifetime to build one permanent work for one federal building" (The Destruction of *Tilted Arc*, 1991, 4). In 1981, *Tilted Arc* was installed in the Federal Plaza; Serra was congratulated for his "contribution to the cultural heritage of the United States" (The Destruction of *Tilted Arc*, 1991, 5), and everyone was happy. Well, everyone it seemed apart from Chief Judge Edward D. Re of the Court of International Trade, whose offices were located at number 1 Federal Plaza. Judge Re wrote letters to the GSA in an attempt to stop *Tilted Arc's* installation. No further complaints were received until 1984 when Judge Re again began writing to the GSA and in January 1985, when William Diamond, whom Serra points out was a Reagan appointee, became regional administrator for the GSA, an appointment that was to prove fatal for *Tilted Arc*. Diamond favoured *Tilted Arc's* relocation and began a publicity campaign to this end. He also called for a public hearing to decide on its fate. This was held on 6 March 1985 at the Court of International Trade, 1 Federal Plaza, and ran until 9 March, such was the volume of testimony given in support of *Tilted Arc*. Altogether some 122 people spoke in favour of *Tilted Arc* remaining in Federal Plaza with 58 people wanting its

removal. Diamond appointed himself Chairman of the hearing and according to Serra also chose as two of the four remaining panellists

> his own staff members....He [Diamond] assembled what was in effect a vigilante group, without legal status, to overturn a binding contract that had been concluded three years earlier. In judicial terms, the hearing was a sham, a kangaroo court. It was a mockery of due process (The Destruction of *Tilted Arc*, 1991, 7).

After the hearing and despite many more people having spoken in support for rather than against *Tilted Arc*, Diamond recommended to Dwight Ink, the acting administrator of the GSA that *Tilted Arc* be removed because the public opposed it. Following an extensive campaign in magazines and newspapers for and against its removal, a 'relocation review panel' was formed on the recommendation of Ink. The panel met on 15 December 1987, visited Federal Plaza, and met with Serra. Having listened to Serra regarding the site-specific nature of the work, the panel recommended against its removal. The GSA ignored the panel's recommendation and pressed on in its search for an alternative site for *Tilted Arc*. Serra, concerned that the GSA would not respect the contract they had with him, and despite the 'relocation review panel', took the case to court in 1986 and attempted to sue the American Government for some thirty million dollars for violating his First and Fifth Amendment rights. On 31 August 1987 Judge Pollack of the District Court "dismissed all charges...and the contract claim as being outside his jurisdiction and striking down the constitutional questions for lack of merit" (The Destruction of *Tilted Arc*, 1991, 13). Serra's appeal on 15 December 1987 was dismissed on 27 May 1988 and finally under cover of darkness, on the night of 15 March 1989, Federal workers cut *Tilted Arc* into three pieces and removed it from Federal Plaza to a Federal storage warehouse.

Serra said at the time

> The governmental decree to remove and thereby destroy *Tilted Arc* is the direct outcome of a cynical Republican cultural policy that supports art only as a commodity. Relocation would, in fact, transform *Tilted Arc* into an exchange commodity in that it would annihilate the site-specific aspect of the work. *Tilted Arc* would become exactly what it was intended not to be: a mobile, marketable product (The Destruction of *Tilted Arc*, 1991, 5).

Serra gets Politics

In 1979, just two years before *Tilted Arc* was installed, Serra did an interview about his films with New York University Professor of Cinema Studies, Annette Michelson. At the time he was working with Clara Weyergraf[25] on what was probably his most political film – *Stahlwerk* – which grew out of a brief period spent in Thyssen, a steel mill in Germany's Ruhr valley where Serra was overseeing the building of a piece of work for *Documenta 6* **(fig. 36)**.

fig. 36. *Stahlwerk*

Weyergraf, who at that point seemed the more politically astute, suggested to Serra that before he set about working on his sculpture in Thyssen, he should take some time to get to know the workers. *Stahlwerk* grew out of the gallery (Galerie m, which Weyergraf worked for at the time) wanting to document the making of the sculpture so they sent a German camera crew to do the shooting. However Weyergraf wasn't happy and said they only shot the workers as heroic, happy Germans:

> They shot beautiful images of the mill, and when the workers appeared, it was in such a way that they seemed heroic. You can manipulate everything with a camera. They looked like what the cameraman wanted them to look like – heroes, big, happy German workers (Foster, 2000, 46).

With the effect of his work in Thyssen and the then political climate in Germany, Bader-Meinhof **(fig. 37)** being recently incarcerated not half an hour from where Serra worked and which he passed on the way to Thyssen every morning, Serra seemed to undergo a kind of politicisation during his time with Weyergraf in Germany. Even though he had the experience of working in steel mills in his youth, Serra said he still believed the idealistic notions that had been fostered in him. He said "I think that the way conventional values are propagandised to the working class in this country is an example of our more covert repression" (Foster, 2000, 46), a repression Serra hoped

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[25] Art historian and soon to be partner of Serra.

to lay bare in the making of *Titled Arc*. (Weyergraf would have preferred Serra not to have taken on *Tilted Arc* or any other public commissions as she found they primarily served corporate interests and very little else.) Serra's and Weyergraf's Marxist rhetoric and identification with the working classes against the 'bosses' comes across in the making and discussion of *Stahlwerk* and seems to spell out pretty clearly where they stood politically. Yet the range of Serra's work at the time belies the rather bland left-wing rhetoric in his interview with Annette Michelson.

fig. 37. wanted posters for members of Red Army Faction

This raises one of the more interesting questions around *Tilted Arc*: namely, whether it was in fact completely self-serving as it is sometimes portrayed and secondly, if it was so self-serving, how can *Tilted Arc* at the same time be said to be democratic? In short, what made *Tilted Arc* unsuitable for the Federal Plaza and made its removal inevitable? A certain school of thought seemed to be of the opinion that the buildings adjacent to *Tilted Arc* should instead have been removed. In an article in the *Village Voice*, architecture critic, Michael Sorkin described the Federal Plaza as a space so ugly, it would have disgraced the Ministry of Truth in an East Bloc Capital. Unsurprisingly, *Tilted Arc* took on a number of references to the Berlin Wall; both sculpture and wall were removed in the same year.

Tilted Arc was, I believe, rightly removed if it failed to properly 'represent' democracy. Those artists, government officials and members of the public were right to use the controversy, which I believe they did, in order to argue on behalf of their own particular problems, concerns and so on, as, regardless of the particular group or problem, everything could be 'mopped up' by *Tilted Arc* and what it came to 'represent' – in effect, the perceived existence of a more general democratic deficit – for example in the manner *Tilted Arc* was chosen, or in its claims for being 'context specific'. *Tilted Arc* seemed for many at that moment in time to set up what Dryzek describes as a competing account of politics which, he says

> emphasises instead the strategic pursuit of goals and interests on the part of individuals and other actors. Situations are strategic when the outcome of an

> actor's choice depends on the choice(s) made by another actor or actors also pursuing goals and interests. This competing account is widely held by those who treat politics as a contest in which actors compete for advantage (Dryzek, 2000, 31).

The actors in the case of *Tilted Arc* were servants of the Federal Government and by invitation Richard Serra. As for the public – well, they would just have to live with it, wouldn't they.

You could also argue that the mere fact of *Tilted Arc* was a triumph for democracy and democratic theory. Even if some 'notional' democracy was seen to have lost, it also won. It won whatever the outcome because at the end of the day, it actually mattered little what happened to *Tilted Arc*. You could in fact say everybody won. Serra and Weyergraf won because *Tilted Arc* created a 'public sphere of critical dissension'. Art and artists won because they could use *Tilted Arc* to talk about their First Amendment Rights and how their livelihoods were under attack (this was at a time when the NEA budget was being severely cut). Big Government won because they responded to the will of the people and removed the 120-foot long by 10-foot high Cor-ten steel sculpture costing in the region of $175,000. In fact, in retrospect, the rusting 'Arc' could only ever be a triumph for democracy.

Senie says:

> But although the spectacle of controversy functions as a highly successful mask, it also reveals deeply rooted hostilities, the fault lines in the fibre of society. Controversy provides an acceptable vehicle for venting opinions that polite discourse otherwise discourages. In the case of *Tilted Arc*, it reveals an apparently widespread mutual rage between the contemporary art world and its audience, and within the art world it permitted an extensive diatribe against the tenets of modernism allegedly represented by Serra's work. Controversy attracts prejudice, just as public art focuses local discontents. That is why the words of controversy and the arguments they frame are particularly revealing. They are the real subjects that need addressing because the objects (or situations) that prompt them are, for the most part unique. If not, we would be mired in controversy all the time....The real threat to democracy, however, was not Serra's sculpture but the process by which it was removed, and the way a simple spectacle so easily obscured a host of complex realities. The legacy of the *Tilted Arc* controversy that continues to haunt us is an invisible one: that of the undocumented self-censorship in artists and art agencies alike (Senie, 2002, 153).

While this storm of controversy was brewing and Serra was promising never to live or work in America again, the same year as *Tilted Arc's* removal, Serra installed *Fin* (1989) **(fig. 38)** in the lobby of the North American headquarters of the Swiss Bank Corporation in midtown Manhattan and saw no conflict of interest. The most interesting thing about *Fin* is the almost complete contrast it offered to *Tilted Arc*. If at its simplest, *Tilted Arc* was designed as Serra said to upset pedestrian movement, *Fin* it seems was designed to improve it. Serra wrote about *Fin*:

> It is my intention to place a sculpture in this room which augments the existing architectural character. The sculpture which has been conceived for the space is derived from the conditions and architectural measure of the space. The placement of the sculpture is based on the utility of the room, i.e., the room will remain open and accessible, allowing for an easy flow of pedestrian movement from the fountain and into the adjoining hallways and meeting areas (Senie, 2002, 124).

In contrast to *Tilted Arc*, *Fin* looked compliant in the extreme. Even as Serra's supporters and critics were gearing up to extol his First Amendment rights, Serra, it seemed, was busy sleeping with the enemies of democracy – either 'big Government' in the case of *Tilted Arc* or 'big bosses' in the case of *Fin.* The same people in other words who were probably responsible according to Serra and Weyergraf for enslaving the working classes. I make this point because what is both most interesting and most difficult about Serra is his seeming lack of a clear political/ideological position – in contrast to so-called deliberative artists such as the aforementioned Kathrin Böhm and so on.

The ambiguity around Serra's position, which *Tilted Arc* seemed only to compound, was mirrored in the difficulty the then newly established 'Arts Censorship Project and People for the American Way' had in supporting *Tilted Arc*. The 'Arts Censorship Project' and the publication *Artsave* was set up in 1991 by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to counter the attacks against contemporary art, most notoriously against the work of Andres Serrano **(fig. 39)** and Robert Mapplethorpe **(fig. 40)** by the Christian right, as attacks on art became increasingly common. However,

> the *Tilted Arc* controversy was complicated not only by the difficulty of finding art-world and political support for an abstract work by an established white male artist but also the problematic and changing concept of pubic art and its funding (Senie 2002, 106).

Serra however saw no need to acknowledge this ideological difficulty in his work in direct contrast to the work, which carries a deliberative tendency within current contemporary art.

fig. 38. *Fin*

fig. 39. *Piss Christ*

fig. 40. *Self Portrait*

This begs the question of when the work carries the kind of overt politics of deliberative democracy, is it about identifying the artist as a card-carrying Democrat, in identifying the work as democratic, deliberative, participatory and so on? Does the rhetoric that precedes and frames the work leave us in no doubt of how and what we're meant to witness and experience, how we're meant to read the work? Or, is it the viewer/participant who reads this into the work and the work is, so to speak, just the work?

Risky Business

The belief that art can somehow produce change is to believe that art possesses an ability to produce effects beyond itself and its own materiality so to speak. If for a moment we accept this, as we have seen in the previous chapter, there can be no prior assurance that the effects will either be beneficial, correctly experienced or understood, as art always runs the risk of being misunderstood. In short, as the deliberative tendency within contemporary art demonstrates, art needs to be guided to the target – *Look, you're participating...this is good!* – and then perhaps, it's really not that interesting as art. The deliberative tendency within contemporary art attempts to eliminate or at the very least 'manage' the risk of being misunderstood if we take its *raison d'etre* to be a determination to 'change things', to make something clear as beneficial, participatory and inclusive. If on the other hand the deliberative tendency does manage to eliminate the risk of contemporary art being misunderstood, it also eliminates any risk *per se* from contemporary art, and not only the risk of being misunderstood, but the risk of the work being used to support a conflicting set of beliefs, ideas and so on. *Tilted Arc* posed such a risk during its brief physical existence and you could even say, continues to pose a risk so long after its removal. The risk

which *Tilted Arc* poses is that, like all 'half-decent' works of art, it points to the simultaneous existence of complex, mutable positions in the same work, both democratic and undemocratic, deliberative and wilfully egocentric. In short, *Tilted Arc* refuses a once and for all meaning whether this is or is not a democratic meaning. Serra's seeming indifference – an accusation levelled at *Tilted Arc* in particular and numerous other works by Serra in general – begs the question whether the artwork in trying to 'improve' democracy, which I believe *Tilted Arc* was attempting to do, can become in the eyes of the public anti-democratic in the manner in which the vigilante becomes anti-democratic in attempting to 'improve' democracy.

It seems that with the deliberative tendency, the 'imposition' of discourse on an indifferent public has become the shared goal of the agents of democracy. The claims made on its behalf however, continue to go largely unsubstantiated. In other words, an increase in democracy being thought of as dependent on and equivalent to an increase in our 'participation' in civil society is a question of belief rather than fact – that contemporary art can embody some kind of transformative potential, can engender some kind of individual or collective change is in as much need of verification as the claim that the deliberative model can 'improve' democracy through discourse.

In the final analysis however, the problem with Serra's *Tilted Arc* could merely be, as I've already mentioned, one of form. Both literally and ideologically, the form is deemed inappropriate to the proper functioning and efficacy of discourse. With its sweeping form and precipitous tilt, *Tilted Arc* could be neither 'used' nor ignored. Senie said that

> Serra upset the conventional balance of power between art and its audience, a balance that is basic to the viewing experience, especially in an urban space. There was no way to escape *Tilted Arc*; it determined viewers' experience of the immediate environment. Apparently perceiving that their freedom was threatened, people became profoundly uneasy, if not enraged. In that basic inversion of power, Serra's sculpture easily came to represent other aspects of the democratic process run amok, came to epitomise, in fact, the pervasive experience of having no control, of being a victim, that so defines our times (Senie, 2002, 151).

A real sense of 'lost opportunity' comes across through the manner in which the debate around *Tilted Arc* devolved into petty fighting, bickering and manipulation, and in the case of William Diamond, abuse of the democratic process. However one could also claim that this *is* exactly what constitutes democratic discourse. This *is* the public sphere and the model Dryzek sets out for us is the stuff of academics and seminar groups.

Senie considers the manner in which *Tilted Arc* was removed to be the real threat to democracy – William Diamond, GSA regional administrator, acting according to Serra as leader of a 'vigilante group'.

In fact, one could argue that for left-leaning liberals such as Senie, the removal of *Tilted Arc* allowed them the opportunity to press for more democracy for contemporary art, in the form of accountability from artists on the one hand (responsible art) and from administrators (proper deliberation over art, art to be taken seriously and so on) on the other. Or in other words what may actually be inimical to the complexity of contemporary art.

The Exception

Tilted Arc could in fact be treated as the kind of 'exception' that Carl Schmitt, whom we encountered in chapter one, talks about where 'democracy takes on its real meaning'. A political system according to Schmitt is authentically democratic to the extent that it is open to periodic 'emergencies' in which the people can swing into action as an independent semi-legislative power. As philosopher Gopal Balakrishnan summarises in his commentary on Schmitt, the argument here is that "demonstrations, gigantic rallies and general strikes are events which keep alive, and in motion, the original constitution of the people". Consequently, "democracy takes on its real meaning in the exceptional situation" (Balakrishnan, 2000, 263).

If *Tilted Arc* could be understood under these circumstances, as the exception, as complex, and 'unique', rather than it being wilfully arrogant and neglectful of the public, could we also claim it to be democratic, not in terms of the deliberative turn – and not even in terms of an 'agonistic' model but as the kind of exception that Schmitt argues for?

Art critic Douglas Crimp says *Tilted Arc*,

> ...situated at the very centre of the mechanisms of state power, conveyed the truth of our social condition as a society constructed upon the principle of egotism, the needs of each individual coming into conflict with those of all other individuals. The function of the state was thus revealed as the defence of private property...of the conflict between individuals, and Serra's achievement became 'the redefinition of the site of the work of art as the site of political struggle' (Senie, 2002, 82).

The exceptional circumstances and condition of *Tilted Arc* reveals the true nature of the democratic process that led to its installation in Federal Plaza in the first place. Though the question remains whether art historian TJ Clarke whom Senie cites in her

book, was correct in thinking that "the public is a presence or a fantasy within the work or its mode of production, and why we wish to sustain and even elaborate this fantasy of public within contemporary art" (Senie, 2002, 54)

What is so interesting and contentious about a work like *Tilted Arc* is that it seems to underline how democratic theory and artistic practice are not natural bedfellows. Hence the consistent and continued attacks on *Tilted Arc* by left-wing theorists who attempt to consign it to a debunked modernist wasteland by framing it as bad modernism or a modernist monument *par excellence*.

And Finally

Even with the growing deliberative tendency and the perceived inequality and selfishness of *Tilted Arc*, it manages to remain even today a complex and intriguing piece of work. One of the most interesting questions that it raises is the already well-rehearsed question of art's function and use value. Whilst *Tilted Arc* may have been accused by Suzi Gablik of being 'awash with the spirit of bad modernism', of having given less than adequate consideration to the public, it did succeed in provoking discourse, though possibly the wrong kind of discourse. *Tilted Arc*, during the course of its five years of existence, became an obstacle and perhaps failed to give due deference to democratic discourse. And despite its due deference to context, *Tilted Arc* still refused to 'disappear'; it retained its material objecthood and hence became obstacle and obstinate. Only one course of action remained – by refusing to yield, *Tilted Arc* had to be removed.

And finally, while Serra may have accused U.S. Government official, William Diamond, of leading a vigilante group dedicated to *Tilted Arc's* 'destruction', I think, if there was actually any form of vigilantism at work within the *Tilted Arc* controversy, it was in fact *Tilted Arc* itself rather than government official, and this is also, I think, why *Tilted Arc* was so successful a piece of work because it somehow 'escaped' into the public realm without being made safe – *Tilted Arc* remained antagonistic in other words.

So in its obstinacy and even with its removal, *Tilted Arc* continues to challenge the efficacy and claims of the deliberative tendency within contemporary art. In other words Serra may have gone on record as saying art is not democratic, and, it is not for the people and "I've never felt and I don't feel now, that art needs any justification outside of itself." Yet Serra the idealist was actually trying to 'improve' democracy by using *Tilted Arc* in the way he did by creating 'a public sphere of critical dissension'. Crucially perhaps, *Tilted Arc* demonstrates that deliberative democracy like any other ideology has its limits in terms of what is included and excluded.

Hammons and Serra: the artists!

T.W.U., another of Serra's 'failed' public sculptures, was named after the Transport Workers Union. *T.W.U.* was a vertical sculpture composed of three pieces of almost three-inch thick steel plate, 36 feet high x 12 feet wide. Like *Tilted Arc*, it was made of Cor-Ten steel. *T.W.U.* was privately sponsored and sited near Federal Plaza in 1980. In 1981 David Hammons used *T.W.U.*, to make two performance-related works called *Shoetree* and *Pissed Off*.

The Plot

Serra **(fig. 41)**, White, Colonialist, responsible for insensitive *Tilted Arc* and equally insensitive *T.W.U.*; Hammons **(fig. 42)**, Black, Colonised, reacts with *Shoetree* and *Pissed Off*, 're-territorializes' insensitive *T.W.U.* in the name of the people. *The End.*

fig. 41. Richard Serra

fig. 42. David Hammons

It's a Black and White Thing

If David Hammons didn't exist we'd probably have invented him by now. PS1 Director, Alanna Heiss sums up why:

> David Hammons is an artist who has, for the most part, shown his work outside mainstream art galleries and museums, the spaces to which most artists aspire. For Hammons, this is a deliberate choice influenced by aesthetic and moral principles. His is a voice of the African American community and he relies upon Harlem both experientially – as the source of inspiration for his works – and practically, for materials, such as African American hair, Night Train Express wine bottles and gnawed barbecue bones. This community is generally excluded from the art world, but for Hammons it is both a source of energy and his most important audience (Cannon and Finkelpearl, 1992, 8).

Ideologically perhaps, it is Harlem, the African American community and so on (despite growing up in Springfield, Illinois – in other words, nowhere in particular) which

Hammons calls upon. However I think Hammons's most important audience is white, middle class and liberal. Hammons lives in Harlem and uses a 'beat-them-at-their-own-game' strategy; he also possess the ability to talk the talk of an artist who eschews institutional demands on his work.

> ...I like doing stuff better on the street, because the art becomes just one of the objects that's in the path of your everyday existence. It's what you move through, and it doesn't have any seniority over anything else (Hammons, 1986).

However, it is just such an approach that makes Hammons highly marketable as a contemporary and not surprisingly, 'White Cube' artist. Serra was born in 1939, four years earlier than Hammons. Like Hammons, Serra works on the street. Unlike Hammons, however, Serra is white, does not live in Harlem, and is no longer just so marketable as a contemporary artist. Serra's work currently belongs to a largely discredited modernist tradition of abstract and monumental sculpture, in other words the kind of stuff that fails to take account of anything other than its own material abstraction. Serra, it seems, doesn't think much about audiences, and is adamant that if people are to be considered in his work they should only be considered insofar as they might affect its planning in terms of patterns of movement and so on. Other than that, neither their taste nor needs matter. In short, the public should neither be consulted, nor have any say in the work:

> I don't have any assumptions of humanistic values that art needs to serve. If you are conceiving a piece for a public place, a place and space that people walk through, one has to consider traffic flow, but not necessarily worry about the indigenous community and get caught up in the politics of the site. There are a lot of ways in which one could complicate the problem for oneself. I'm not going to concern myself with what 'they' consider to be adequate, appropriate solutions (Senie, 2002, 41).

Serra goes on to say

> Placing pieces in an urban context is not synonymous with an interest in a large scale audience even though the work will be seen by many people who wouldn't otherwise look at art (Senie, 2002, 41).

The same year *Tilted Arc* was installed in Federal Plaza, Hammons 're-territorialized' *T.W.U.* in two performance-related pieces of work – by throwing twenty-five pairs of shoes over the top of the sculpture (*Shoetree*) and urinating against it for which he was almost arrested (*Pissed Off*). In 're-territorializing' *T.W.U.*, Hammons clearly expressed the public's indignation for this work. It was as Hammons recalled, nothing less than "a Harlem gesture against an uptown macho work" (Senie, 2002, 83).

T.W.U. suffered a similar fate as *Tilted Arc*, by being removed in 1982, and relocated to Hamburg, Germany – perhaps a more fitting environment for large-scale abstract steel sculpture.[26]

Mere Rhetoric

Because Hammons is black and from Harlem doesn't make him more interesting as an artist. Perhaps you just have to expect more rhetoric and ideological baggage. Nor is Hammons necessarily representing 'black, race, exclusion issues' and so on, as Alanna Heiss likes to believe he is, just as Serra is not necessarily representing a dystopian corporate view of the world because he is white and makes large abstract steel sculptures.

Yet what is so interesting about Hammons is that he seems to personify the paradox at the core of Chantal Mouffe's criticism of deliberative democracy as she urges us to adopt a view of democracy that would not present it as the rational, universal solution to the problem of political order nor attempt to deny its ultimately ungrounded status by making it appear as the outcome of a rational choice.

What Hammons and Mouffe have in common is that they are both in the business of 'taming politics' as Stanley Fish would say, as it seems that Hammons, like Mouffe, wants to claim a kind of apolitical space from where to observe and talk about what is *de facto* excluded from the public realm, what is contingent to it and ultimately what is political.

Fish says "the idea of recognising something for what it is rather than what it appears to be presupposes the apolitical space whose availability Mouffe denies" (Fish, 2001, 236).

So while we are left in little doubt that Hammons represents the 'Other', or what falls outside the deliberative or rational consensus of the Habermasian or Rawlsian solution to the problem of political order, we are also left in no doubt that Hammons represents the 'Other' who is obviously on the side of the right and the good and with whom we want to communicate. So while Mouffe may criticise the deliberative model for ignoring the antagonistic dimension of human relations, we could also accuse Mouffe of doing the very same thing. This is also the kind of 'Mouffian' move made within contemporary art which allows Hammons's work to be celebrated for the specificity with which it deals

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[26] I don't know about that, though, as only a few years earlier the German CDU (Christian Democrats) were actually campaigning for the removal of *Terminal*, another of Serra's sculptures installed after *Documenta VI* in the town of Bochum. Trouble seemed to follow Serra around. In 1977 the Bochum branch of the German CDU campaigned using the proposed removal of Serra's *Terminal* as an election issue. Maybe Germany isn't such a good place for large-scale abstract steel sculpture after all.

with certain issues, and just as vehemently celebrated for how elusive and 'mobile' it is in its ability to escape definitive meaning. The apolitical space becomes an outlet for man's passions, both agonistic and contingent and at the same time a space that we can point to which is visible, framed and ultimately controlled.

David & Goliath

In 1982 *T.W.U.* was removed from Franklin Street and West Broadway in New York two years after its installation. In 1989 *Tilted Arc* was 'destroyed'.

In a 14-minute video entitled, *TWU Richard Serra: An Unsolicited Video by Michel Auder* **(fig. 43 a–g)**, the French video artist Michel Auder recorded the installation and de-installation of *T.W.U.*:

> Before *Tilted Arc* there was *T.W.U.* On a beautiful morning in 1980, Auder awoke to the sudden sound of construction. Eager to find out what was going on, he rushed out of his apartment with camera in hand. He arrived in time to catch the installation of *T.W.U.*, a monumental work by Serra being installed at Franklin Street and West Broadway.
>
> The footage captures Serra and dealer Leo Castelli amongst a crowd of by-standers observing the crew as they hoist and mount the final slab of steel. Two years later, Auder is awoken by similar sounds. Again, camera in hand he witnesses the de-installation of *T.W.U.* with its bolts being removed from the final slab which is then lowered onto a flatbed.

fig. 43 a–g. Video Stills, *T.W.U.*, Michel Auder

> Although the circumstances leading to the work's dismantling are unclear, a prominent layer of flyers plastered to the work's exterior is telling of the work's ultimate fate as a degraded and forgotten monument alienated from the positivist spirit surrounding its installation (Auder, 1980–82).

I wondered: What had alienated *T.W.U.*? What was promised and not delivered? Maybe we just live in a resentful world I thought, a world where Goliath continues to be no match for David. So when Hammons pisses on Serra's *T.W.U.*, or throws a bunch of shoes over the top of it, he may look like he's doing something radical, doing

something for the man on the street, but in fact Hammons could merely be acknowledging our current affirmative/positive attitude to the underdog, to failure, and contempt for big-balled impersonal abstract works of art like Serra's *T.W.U.* So, while Hammons leaves you with some images of him pissing against *T.W.U.* or throwing shoes over the top of it you kind of feel Mr Cool, black, Harlem man is doing little more than making a statement about Mr Corporate lackey, white man. Hammons is choosing the easiest and safest target for his 'Harlem gesture', and perhaps the only radical part of this is Hammons running the risk of getting arrested. He seems to understand something of this when he sets himself up as the simple shepherd David (to use a Biblical analogy), attempting to vanquish the Philistine Serra's Goliath **(fig. 44)**. The attitude Hammons assumes is due in no small part to the rhetoric and ideology of 'real' or deliberative democracy and Serra's negligence in showing it due deference. So, in common with the Biblical tale David knew he had God or 'Right' on his side as Hammons does when he slings piss and old shoes at Serra's metal giant.

fig. 44. *David and Goliath*

As David said to King Saul before going and slaying Goliath "I will go against this heathen man who defies the armies of the living God" (I Samuel chapters 16–18: David and Goliath). That 'heathen man' can today be conjured in the shape of Richard Serra. The armies of God, that endlessly worthy disenfranchised underprivileged public. As expected, David vanquishes Goliath and prophetically in the case of Hammons, replaces Saul as King. That's how the story ends. Long live Hammons. Long live the King.

Conclusion

> ...An Environment Protection Agency economist, asked 'What about the theory that human life is priceless?', answered, 'We have no data to support that' (Lukes, 2003, 151).

If we take Mouffe's claim seriously, that ultimate moral disagreements are for the most part irreconcilable, then the question for deliberative democracy and its cultural symbolic representation, contemporary art, must be of the order of 'what is the normative basis of this project and how significant and strategic might the concept of 'failure' be to its realisation?'. I use the term 'failure' rather than 'limits' for example because I feel a lot of discursive practices within the realm of contemporary art, while they set themselves up both in opposition to and in the shadow of capitalist hegemony and demonstrate their resistance in novel and temporal ways, also express a kind of double failure on the one hand to do anything in the face of Globalisation and to do anything on the other hand because this is merely art after all.

I ask this because what seems to be more and more obvious today is that outside the confines of the seminar room where everything is negotiable amongst free and equal citizens, democracy's deliberative project is rendered 'thin' and insubstantial. Why then is the deliberative project perceived as the rightful provider of authentic democracy? Might it in actual fact be our way of celebrating weakness and human frailty? In other words, is the deliberative tendency within contemporary art chiefly concerned with venerating or memorialising failure? This is certainly suggested in the 'morality play' featuring actor David Hammons who, in a consummate performance as Mr Cool, disenfranchised 'Other' gets the better of actor Richard Serra cast in the part of Mr Corporate, 'out-of-touch-with-the-real-world', Whitey.

While Hibbing and Theiss-Morse may produce a substantial body of evidence to suggest that deliberation is not necessarily the panacea that many of us hold it up to be in terms of concrete achievements, I wonder if that's not what even matter's most. What matters, ironically, at the end of the day, is the manner in which democracy is 'represented' as discursive, even-handed, inclusive and so on. Ironic because this is the very thing that deliberation claims to counter within contemporary art – mere representation, 'picture politics' as Brian Holmes has called it. So while the deliberative tendency attacks 'representation' in search of a more authentic encounter, 'representation' is precisely the business these artists such as Böhm/Lang/Saffer and even Hammons are engaged in.

It's All Gone to Shit

So, contrary to the claims made by democratic theorists that the deliberative project will deliver more representative and legitimate democracy, this may not actually be the case, regardless of whether deliberation is examined within the realm of politics or its cultural symbolic order, contemporary art. While pretending to challenge certain modernist orthodoxies, deliberation itself becomes one, albeit an orthodoxy of

benevolence and inclusivity and may in actual fact be a deeply conservative attack on the complexity of contemporary art. I say conservative because there is a question around its intentions and whether the deliberative tendency within contemporary art limits what contemporary art can be while in fact professing to do the opposite by attempting to say loud and clear that politics and the political are without doubt the property of the left....What is it then, that they are so certain about? What is it that's latent in the present? It's community isn't it? It's there waiting to be discovered. As Lukes puts it:

> But what all these resonant phrases avoid is the hard question of the limits of feasible consensus in a democratic society. On what should democratic citizens be expected to agree? As things stand, 'we' already differ, not only about what is 'significant', but about what 'depth' and 'richness' consists in (Lukes, 2003, 152).

This leads to the question of community because what is articulated in this quotation is the issue of the unity of the political body, which claims a democratic arrangement, a unity that is indicatively presumed by Mouffe, Böhm/Lang/Saffer and Hammons. This unity that democracy presupposes is what the next chapter examines.

Chapter 3: Effectivity

Following on from the previous chapter in which I explored the deliberative turn and how it devolves to the realm of contemporary art – where participation and discourse are privileged over or substituted for content – in this chapter I want to look at the de-centred expression of community which arises out of and properly reflects the participatory logic at the core of the deliberative model within contemporary art. In short, I look at the 'effectivity' of deliberation within contemporary art. The primary claim I explore in this chapter can be summarised as follows: within the realm of contemporary art, the 'representation' or 'expression' of community in its de-centred, non-exclusive 'becoming' is central to the very project of contemporary art within democratic liberalism.

The problem developed in this chapter is that in the desire to exemplify the 'qualities' or 'values' seen to be intrinsic to this model, contemporary art in fact mirrors the very myth, authority and hegemonic order it so vehemently opposes. In short, as we have seen reflected in the participatory logic within a deliberative model of democracy, the expression of community in its de-centred contemporaneity and non-exclusivity may in fact be as exclusionary as community in its homogeneity and orthodoxy. The pre-eminent characteristic of this expression is an inherent 'call to participate' or what I have described in the first chapter as a 'participatory logic' that the work carries and which is on the whole treated as benign when expressed within the realm of contemporary art.

I explore what the inverse of deliberation, in terms of a 'call to participate' might be and in particular whether this seemingly benign invitation could be treated in its negative form as a 'call to arms', so to speak, a call to a certain kind of vigilantism or what might represent the spectre or 'threat' to community in its non-exclusivity and contemporaneity. Put another way, I explore whether the vigilante can stand in for or personify the untransformed, undemocratised agon – in other words, antagonism. To develop this characterisation, I ascribe the term vigilantism to those 'temporary incursions into the public domain', which frequently take the form of the artist as protagonist or the public as participant, in other words, what frequently characterises participatory art practice within a deliberative model. On the other hand I also understand the vigilante to be embedded in and take the form of the 'work' so to speak, as for example, Serra's *Tilted Arc*, which I discussed in the previous chapter. And finally, I use the term vigilante because of its association with reactionary causes and its continued power to evoke the image of the ignorant uneducated mob, to use the language of Hardt and Negri, in obvious contrast to the discreet, educated and reasonably minded social agent that is the multitude, the public, or in other words,

those involved with and normally invited to participate within the realm of contemporary art. The leading characteristics of the multitude are "the philosophical and artistic elements in all of us, the practices of working on the flesh and dealing with its irreducible multiplicities, the powers of unbounded invention" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 335).

I define vigilantism as the inverse of anarchism – if anarchism is concerned with overthrowing the law, vigilantism is concerned with 'improving' the law. Vigilantism is man's passion, a strong and insistent belief, intolerant and demanding of attention.

This characterisation, rightly to my mind, problematises the so-called open and discursive nature of participatory art practice as much as it does the theoretical ground supporting it. And I'm particularly thinking of Chantal Mouffe and Irit Rogoff in this regard whose work as we have seen has been increasingly co-opted to the realm of contemporary art. The concept of vigilantism ultimately raises questions about limits and exclusions that are either conveniently blurred or simply not addressed in Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism for example and around ideas of collectivity in so much participatory art practice within the realm of current contemporary art.

The Profile

The enduring and ever present vigilante reappeared in the public sphere as recently as 2000. In the opening pages of Zygmunt Bauman's *In Search of Politics*, he discusses the furore surrounding the release from prison of convicted paedophile Sidney Cooke **(fig. 45)**, and his subsequent return home. He paraphrases *Guardian* writer Decca Aitkenhead's reporting of the protest in the town of Yeovil where, as Bauman says,

> She found the variegated crowd of grandmothers, teenagers, and businesswomen who had seldom, if ever, expressed any previous wish to engage in a public action had now laid protracted siege to the local police station, being not even sure that Cooke did indeed hide in the besieged building....People who had all their lives steered clear of public protests now came, and stayed, and shouted 'Kill the bastard', and were prepared to keep vigil for as long as it took (Bauman, 2000, 9).

It quickly becomes obvious that the language used to describe the protestors particularises them as the 'taking-the-law-into-their-own-hands' kind of mob, unlike other kinds of protest groups, associations or communities who might predicate their actions on some other model of collectivity or participation. In short, these are the intolerant kind, the kind not to be associated with, well, not publicly in any case. At least writer Kelly D. Hine understands that things are not quite so clear cut and feels we need to recognise what she calls a 'justified vigilantism', in other words, 'extra-

judicial self-help' in order as she says, "to allow juries to interpose openly their common sense judgement as to whether the actions of the accused were in fact beneficial to society" (Hine, 1998, 1228). Hine, you could say, in contrast to the image of the mob put forward by Aitkenhead, promotes a more positive understanding of the term vigilante, which is actually etymologically closer to its Latin roots, signifying watchfulness and liveliness, terms not out of place within contemporary notions of community/collectivity. To begin to understand how the vigilante is constituted within the realm of contemporary art, I have used the following five elements which characterise how vigilantism operates within the social and political realm as listed in *The American University Law Review* article 'An economic analysis of the law of extra-judicial self-help or why can't Dick shoot Henry for stealing Jane's truck?'

According to Kelly D. Hine, five characteristics of vigilantism are;

Minimal planning, preparation or premeditation

Private agents acting in a voluntary capacity

Activity undertaken without the state's authority or support

Force is either used or threatened

A reaction to the real or perceived transgression of institutional norms

While it may seem somewhat speculative, I want to take Hein's definition of vigilantism and co-opt this to the realm of contemporary art in order to say something about a certain kind of strength or forcefulness which art embodies and which I believe that this forcefulness is currently under attack by an equally forceful tendency but with an opposite polarity in the form of the participatory logic within contemporary art. The concept of vigilantism allows me describe these forces acting on contemporary art in a quasi-Nietzschian manner, that is, as negative and positive terms depending on how they are found or deployed within the work so to speak. So, for example, when looked at within the context of the participatory logic carried by certain kinds of contemporary art, a negative and conservative vigilantism masquerades as the affirmative, inclusive and natural characteristics of a participatory logic. While on the other hand, what might be seen by artists and critical theorists invested in the 'democratisation' of contemporary art as negative characteristics of contemporary art ... as 'private enterprise' in other words (another way of describing vigilantism), I propose the inverse of this to be the case and in fact treat arts embeddedness in market capitalism as a positive force which ultimately provides a defence against its so called democratisation.

In its negative constitution then, the force of the vigilante to 'improve the law' is brought to bear on contemporary art. The 'Law' in this case is art's unassailable, unquestionable deliberative democratic core, or put another way, were it to be 'allowed' evolve and develop without the disruptive interest of the marketplace then art would consolidate around some democratic form so to speak.

What are in fact, random individual challenges to contemporary art then, masquerade as the spontaneous and natural movement within contemporary art which the participatory logic is claimed to be by the small but insistent number of left wing zealots working to democratise art. So, in this negative constitution, *Minimal planning, preparation or premeditation becomes Spontaneity and organic nature of a participatory logic within the realm of contemporary art. And Private agents acting in a voluntary capacity becomes 'Public' freely participating in the work.* For art's democratisation to be seen to be natural, it is crucial the illusion is created that the public is freely participating in the work, not just looking but participating, and by participating are involved in the creation and ownership of the work. However, it is merely a handful of private agents in the business of coercing the public into some semblance of participation in some activity, some thing that can be claimed as participatory and by extension, democratic. As I have already mentioned the something doesn't really matter so long as the public seem to be present and participating. This fact alone agitates on behalf of arts democratisation. Another aspect of this activity and one which has been highlighted by art critic and apologist Brian Holmes amongst others when he talks about *Ne Pas Plier's* relationship to the State and institutions, is the distinction that is made at every opportunity to distinguish between a kind of Vichy-like collaboration by artists as distinct from the real collaborative work being done underground and without the State's support and for which Holmes reminds us most artists lack the stomach as it requires the kind of staying power which artists don't really have given that most of them don't seem to know what they stand for. So, *Activity undertaken without the state's authority or support becomes* - Diverse range of new and emergent participatory art practices (against arts authority/autonomy). Holmes spurious kind of morality views any form of institutionality and State sponsored activity as morally repugnant. For Holmes art at its most 'authentic' comes in the form of the demonstration. This kind of morality which seeks to identify the place of the right and the good is used by apologists such as Holmes as a kind of weapon with which to attack and harangue what is not clearly enough motivated or positioned within the realm of contemporary art. So, *Force is either used or threatened* becomes moral authority of participatory logic – on the side of the right and the good. Finally, it is encumbent on the kind of art and artist which Holmes champions to be seen to

side with and visualise in some form *a kind of reaction to the real or perceived transgression of institutional norms.* After all this is the democratic revolution and you are either with it or against it - *Ne Pas Plier* make posters and banners for use in demonstrations, while collaborative artists Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla provide large pieces of chalk for demonstrators to write their own message on the street. So, *A reaction to the real or perceived transgression of institutional norms* becomes Contemporary art's (natural) democratic core.

The positive expression of vigilantism is symptomatic of contemporary arts embeddedness in market capitalism and might read as follows; Contemporary art is not beholden to any particular ideological position and so whatever means are at art's disposal will be used to produce art and put it within the market place. This might read in a positive sense as *a Minimal planning, preparation or premeditation.* That means, planning, minimal or otherwise, preparation and premeditation. (in other words, whatever forces are at arts disposal). And given that contemporary art needs to answer to nothing in particular, in other words, if there is not a democratic core which art is answerable to in terms of how artists conceive of, produce and position their work, then *Private agents acting in a voluntary capacity* might become something like Public free to participate/engage with the work (a matter of expediency). In other words, who really cares how many people are seen to participate in the work so long as the work is circulating within the public domain. Again the positive constitution of vigilantism is not burdened by any need to clarify where support might be coming from as Holmes is burdened with this need for clarification on behalf of groups such as *Ne Pas Plier* and whether art and artist are properly positioned as belonging to the right and the good. Though Holmes does remind us that while he is against State support, he does feel it is OK to accept it from like-minded leftwing organisations. This is a little like the dilemma an artist acquaintance and recent Quaker convert had when it came to accepting Arts Council sponsorship which like most sponsorship for the arts today is in part Lottery funded and as we know, Quakers are against the Lottery and gambling in all its forms ... a bad day for our Quaker convert then. So, *Activity undertaken without the state's authority or support* might become something like; who cares ... take the money, take the support wherever its is available, in other words, Activity undertaken with or without the state's support, with or without public support.

Ultimately, it seems to me what Holmes and those agents involved in the democratisation of art are challenged by is art's authority and autonomy. Art's force and seeming 'disregard' for the public is epitomised for Holmes by an artist like

Hirschhorn and his work *Monument to Bataille*, an artist who comes so close to being an artist of substance, but one who ultimately chooses the marketplace and whose work succeeds in amounting to little more than what Holmes calls picture politics. So for people like Holmes, the belligerent market driven concerns of contemporary art's authority and autonomy is equal to *Force either used or threatened*, which is why 'vigilantism' is an appropriate term to be used here. And finally, what must be most frustrating for Holmes and his cohorts is that despite their best efforts to democratise art, art remains inherently political beyond such deliberative democratic determinations and as such will accommodate and absorb any challenge which Holmes *et al* can throw at it and will likewise also develop and evolve in ways which run counter to their insistence that art be democratic. So, *Reaction to the real or perceived transgression of institutional norms* – a certain vigilantism in the terms I am taking up here – might then become Contemporary art's political core.

fig. 45. Sydney Cooke

Like Bauman, political philosopher, Adrian Little also briefly examines vigilantism and blames 'orthodox political communitarianism' for producing it, for closing down a space of diversity for the expression of a range of political viewpoints. Little explains:[27]

> As the political sphere becomes closed off to ordinary participation, the antagonisms and conflicts that should characterise political engagement are channelled into private passions. The upshot of this privatism can be witnessed in vigilantism, whereby people, dissatisfied with the response of politicians to their feelings or the inability of the political arena to countenance their concerns, take the law into their own hands. The danger of orthodox political communitarianism is in providing justification for such measures. It tries to depoliticise the political and, as a result, discourages proper political debate. As an example of these privatistic trends was the moral panic over paedophiles that swept the UK in the summer of 2000. Here we saw widespread vigilantism as a

[27] "Orthodox political communitarianism can be criticised for the definition of community that it employs as a foundation as well as the means of achieving that goal. Arguably we need to address the importance of diversity and the idea of individuals as members of a multiplicity of communities that sometimes overlap with and at other times contradict each other. The dominant orthodoxy within communitarianism, however tends to invoke a conception of a homogeneous community that is devoid of the kinds of confrontation that diversity makes inevitable" (Little, 2002, 60).

> response to the failure of politics. In the political vacuum and the absence of public debate, violence was committed against wrongly suspected individuals with the most instructive case being the almost laughable attack on a paediatrician who the assailants could not differentiate from a paedophile (Little, 2002, 142).

And as we learnt in the previous chapter from Hannah Arendt, antagonisms and conflicts that are channelled into private passions are unfit to enter the marketplace. The normative basis of Little's claims are loosely based on an Aristotelian model of the public sphere where values such as friendship, volunteerism and mutuality are privileged and prevail. Under current deliberative theoretical models, public participation is encouraged as the very embodiment of democratic practice while vigilantism might amount to the very embodiment of its failure. Another way to look at this is that while public participation is seen to be desirable and good, and ensures proper political debate and representation, the assumption is made that this will be conducted by reasonably minded individuals with a shared interest rather than that this will be regulated and conducted to ensure it is exactly what takes place, to ensure that private passions are kept in check. (Local Councils and Housing Associations now produce, as a matter of course, 'a not for the public' list of residents who are to be monitored or no longer even 'welcome' at public meetings and resident Forums; the list is normally compiled of those residents who have in the past taken issue with Council or Housing Association policy.) In other words, vigilantism is not merely as Little says a result of the political sphere being closed off to proper participation, rather that what we currently deem to be proper participation results in vigilantism. Little has not really considered the possibility that the vigilante may not actually be interested in 'talking' and it seems that Little wants to simplify things, wants to put democracy, albeit, radical democracy on one side and the absence of it which seemingly produces vigilantism on the other. Likewise within the realm of contemporary art, when participation is put on one side and the absence of it on the other without taking into consideration that participation can only be pointed to within the realm of contemporary art through being regulated and policed. When contemporary art is not policed or politicised from 'outside' and 'within' it also carries an incitement to forms of vigilantism.

So while we may be witnessing a politicisation of art by artists, curators and theorists from 'within' the realm of contemporary art there is a kind of tautological echo in the corresponding force which is brought to bear from some notional 'outside' growing out of and directly related to the logic of participation, and the regulating power of democracy. The promise that contemporary art can be transformed in the manner in which it is believed that democracy can be transformed – by 'real' people reclaiming it

as their own, as it was always meant to be (Athenian model and so on) – provides a very powerful impetus to 'act' against art as deliberative democracy and the logic of participation acts against it by attempting to 'improve' contemporary art.

The outstanding threat within the social and political realm as it is within the realm of contemporary art is the threat of unregulated activity, which we have seen, is implicit in the very promise of participation and is endlessly toyed with by artists for example, like Kathrin Böhm in the previous chapter who valorises some notion of 'play' and 'hanging-out'. The question is whether such unregulated activity, whatever this might be, could constitute a democratic public sphere and if so, what we should demand of contemporary art under these terms.

Suppose we agree with Little that vigilantism is produced when "the political sphere becomes closed off to ordinary participation" (Little, 2002, 142) and becomes a threat to community. Does community in its contemporaneity or radicality then, as distinct from community in its orthodoxy and homogeneity, guard against the failure of politics, guard against vigilantism and ensure 'things' remain democratic? And if so how does this devolve to the realm of contemporary art?

A converse set of questions arise as to whether vigilantism 'occurs' at exactly the point at which politics manages to intervene in the public sphere, when 'private passions' intervene in a benign albeit democratic notion of community or contemporary art.

The non-instrumental form of community is expressed in terms of values of friendship, trust, voluntary action, benign intentions and co-operation, values which Little and a substantial number of current contemporary artists believe are "unlikely to be challenged with concerted vehemence (except perhaps by the most extreme of individualists)" (Little, 2002, 18). Could the political, the antagonistic within contemporary art as I have already asked at the beginning of this chapter, then be personified as the vigilante and if so what does this say about the realm of contemporary art? Does the participatory logic within current contemporary art ultimately leave people feeling emasculated?

Common Wealth

Tate Modern curator Jessica Morgan takes participation and associated values very seriously. Morgan says

> an essential aim of the exhibition is to question the capacity of art to define the collective or communal in opposition to the much-vaunted autonomy of the artistic experience. Given that many artists no longer consider themselves as makers of objects for contemplation but instigators of processes in which the

> audience is central, it is necessary to establish what potential communality can be achieved (*Common Wealth*, 2003, 16).

In *Common Wealth*, Morgan discusses the pretext of the exhibition in terms of wanting to examine 'participation' and 'commonality' albeit in quite different terms to the kind of participation and commonality that might describe a vigilante act (and not merely whether it constitutes a legal or illegal act). *Common Wealth*, according to Morgan,

> explores the meanings and implications of the words common and wealth including ideas about the potential use-value of art, how it might contribute to a shared public prosperity, and what common ground is offered by architecture and museum galleries. To use a statement by Hirschhorn, the artists in *Common Wealth* are interested in making art politically rather than making political art. Their work seeks to bridge the individual and the communal, by developing local practices that remain critically aware of the global situation...the exhibition presents around 15 large-scale installations, many of which are interactive and encourage visitor participation, as a way of exploring the meanings, implications and politics of the words 'common' and 'wealth' (*Common Wealth*, 2003, 11).

Inadvertently one of the most interesting works in *Common Wealth* was Carsten Höller's *Frisbee House* **(fig. 46 a–b)**. Inadvertently because *Frisbee House* revealed without intending to, the construction and limits of participation vis-à-vis Morgan's understanding of it and how it should be represented in *Common Wealth* and also revealed how this construction has been politicised in order to impart certain values as given to contemporary art.

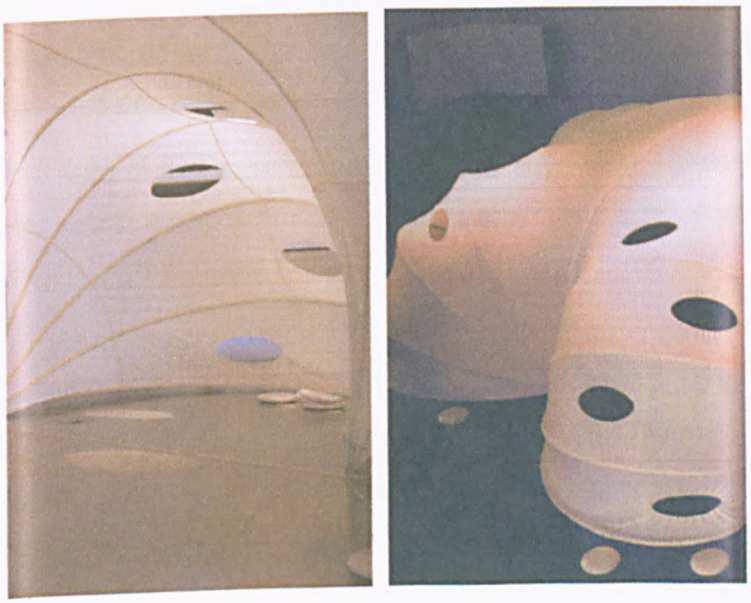

fig. 46 a–b. *Frisbee House*

By far the most interesting thing about *Frisbee House* and the thing which seemed designed to test Höller's and Morgan's understanding about the kind of contemporary art which is predicated on its ability to create communal experiments where the visitor determines the rules, was that *Frisbee House* was forced to 'close' temporarily due to excessive public participation, and not only forced to 'close' but needed to be policed by museum staff for the remainder of the exhibition.

Morgan says about Höller's work and *Frisbee House*:

> Höller's work for *Common Wealth* suggests a series of social experiments undertaken to examine the limits or constraints of the communal and the individual. *Frisbee House*, for example, a large white tent construction, resembles a mid-twentieth-century modernist structure of the sort associated with utopian architectural movements. The fabric form can be entered and inside are Frisbees that can be thrown either inside the tent or, through the porthole-like openings in its surface, to unseen 'participants' on the exterior. Höller's game suggests a negotiated exchange between players while aesthetically mapping a diagram or model of material flux, an osmotic flow through the membrane of *Frisbee House*. The unexpected, uncontrollable or even potentially hostile nature of this exchange, moreover, reflects the inevitable friction of the communal that is both the desire to communicate and differentiate (*Common Wealth*, 2003, 31).

When the public's engagement with *Frisbee* exceeded what was 'required' to affirm the premise of the exhibition *Common Wealth*, which Morgan describes in terms of wanting to examine participation and commonality, I feel her examination was severely tested and found wanting vis-à-vis any more imaginative solution that could have avoided the closure of *Frisbee House* particularly when she seems to endorse in Höller's work - the unexpected, uncontrollable or even potentially hostile nature of the exchange between communal and individual.

In the light of the work's 'closure', Morgan's rather effusive and open-ended notion of participation along with her appraisal of Höller's work seems naïve and idealistic, the stuff of theory perhaps.

The actuality was that *Frisbee House* closed – the invitation to participate was rescinded or at the very least suspended until proper policing of Höller's work could be put in place. In short, *Frisbee House* 'failed' a brief but robust examination conjured by some kind of contingent circumstances – which are endlessly valorised within the realm of contemporary art but which found *Frisbee House* wanting – by rendering it impotent and unable to accommodate the 'changing circumstances' other than to enforce on the public the limits and exclusions of the institution.

And while Morgan invariably goes on to invoke Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of community, *'being-with'*, *'being-in-common'* or *'being-with-each-other'*, which I will address in more detail a little later in the chapter and which she believes challenges the "post-Socialist rise of a strongly individualising consumer-rights culture" (*Common Wealth*, 2003, 16), Morgan's words ring a little hollow in the midst of the closure and remind us, if we were ever in any doubt, that the work in *Common Wealth* is at the end of the day about representation, albeit the representation of participation.

So why should I care so much that *Frisbee House* got trashed? Was this not merely an accident which has nothing to do with the exhibition proper...or in a Schmittian sense of the political, does it represent the exceptional case and hence become the potential site of the emergence of the political? Does it not at that very moment point to some notion of the contingent nature of community which is embodied in the closure and subsequent policing of Höller's *Frisbee House*, as well as point out that Morgan's curatorial approach to the concept of participation is more than adequately set up to evade any of the more difficult questions which arise around the 'unexpected' closure of Höller's work?

For Morgan, as it is for Rogoff in chapter one, 'community' or 'collectivity' is constituted where the 'fog' of heterogeneity is sufficiently thick and outcomes sufficiently clear to obscure and endlessly displace the political.

Question

To recap then, the question at the core of this chapter is whether vigilantism represents a form of 'negative participation' or the inverse of the participatory logic within the realm of contemporary art – the unregulated, antagonistic dimension and potential of contemporary art – or whether the 'call to participate', depending how it is formed, might in itself be indicative of a move towards 'improving the law' so to speak, a conservative move towards a rationalisation of contemporary art. Or whether the concept of the vigilante when treated as the unregulated and antagonistic dimension of contemporary art might also suggest a way or place within which to 'resist' the 'participatory' logic at work within the realm of contemporary art. Put in somewhat 'Mouffian' terms – whether antagonism can forego the necessary 'conversion' to agonism and deliberation, but yet occur within the law, albeit a strong law. What would this mean for contemporary art and could the concept of vigilante for example epitomise a kind of ethical particularism which I touched upon briefly in chapter two, and in which contemporary art can conceal itself from 'politicisation'? And finally could *Tilted Arc* embody some of these characteristics of the vigilante within contemporary art?

I want to frame these questions and give them some additional weight or substance by setting them against the background of Pierre Saint-Amand's exploration of the inverse of the principle of sociability, or in other words, the concept of 'imitation' which Saint-Amand says is

> the affective drive par excellence of sociability....Imitation propels human beings toward their neighbours. The mimetic impulse is responsible for initiating social contact through effects of sympathy and pity, and the desire to gather together...it consequently envisages human reciprocity as essentially directed toward the good. A natural inclination inspires us to seek out the company of others and leads us to want to share our happiness with them (Saint-Amand, 1996, 4).

Saint-Amand reveals the inverse and ambivalent character of imitation is its negative reciprocity or a, 'You have what I want!' form of resentment.

With this in mind, I want to explore whether the seemingly benign and increasingly naturalised disposition of a participatory logic within the realm of contemporary art can likewise be made to reveal its 'ambivalent character' by thinking about it through the concept of vigilantism or what could constitute 'negative participation' within the realm of contemporary art. This is a particularly difficult task, when as Sennett reminds us:

> The reigning belief today is that closeness between persons is a moral good. The reigning aspiration today is to develop individual personality through experiences of closeness and warmth with others. The reigning myth today is that the evils of society can all be understood as evils of impersonality, alienation and coldness. The sum of these three is an ideology of intimacy (Sennett, 1977, 259).

Not so Close

This model of community however has a paradox at its core which is generated by attempts to make the same out of difference and, where possible, to erase or exclude it. Sennett says an ideology of intimacy is "a celebration of the ghetto" (Sennett, 1977, 259), a celebration that claims the more 'intimate' the community, the more 'local' the politics, the more involvement with and control over its own destiny people can have, and ultimately, the more democratic the society will be. As I mentioned in chapter two, one only has to look at current New Labour Government policy and the unprecedented opportunities now available for 'local participation', which in fact leads to a depoliticisation of the public sphere – perhaps an ideal breeding ground for vigilantism.

Sennett says

> the celebration of territorial community against the evils of impersonal, capitalist urbanism quite comfortably fits into the larger system, because it leads to a logic

> of local defence against the outside world, rather than a challenge to the workings of that world. When a community fights city hall on these terms, it fights to be left alone, to be exempted or shielded from the political process rather than to challenge the political process itself. And this is why the emotional logic of community, beginning as a resistance to the evils of modern capitalism, winds up a bizarre kind of depoliticised withdrawal; the system remains intact, but maybe we can get it to leave our piece of turf untouched (Sennett 1977, 295).

Sennett traces the origin of this desire as far as the crisis in public culture in the 19th century, which "taught us to think about the harshness, constraints, and difficulties which are the essence of the human condition in society as overwhelming" (Sennett 1977, 260).

Personality

When 'personality' entered the public realm, Sennett says; "it prepared the ground for the modern erasure of the *res publica*" (Sennett 1977, 126). According to Sennett, an 'intimate society' – a society based on closeness, based on the development and disclosure of personality is not necessarily the most 'virtuous' path to follow as regards human relations. The desire for closeness he believes masks a more profound need for security, rest and permanence. A desire to deal only with what is familiar, with what is already known. And we can deal with this 'essence' as silent passive spectators, as popular belief seems to suggest that if we are to challenge it, or, as Sennett says, if we are to become enmeshed in it, then we do so at the expense of 'developing ourselves', developing our personalities. The development of personality today Sennett claims is

> the development of the personality of a refugee. Our fundamental ambivalence toward aggressive behaviour comes out of this refugee mentality: aggression may be a necessity in human affairs but we have come to think it an abhorrent personal trait (Sennett 1977, 260).

So, contrary to popular belief, impersonality and anonymity may not necessarily constitute the twin evils of contemporary society after all.

The kind of 'depoliticised withdrawal' which Sennett says occurs when the concept of 'community' devolves almost exclusively to the 'local' and 'familiar' as a defence against 'impersonal, capitalist urbanism', has its corollary within the realm of contemporary art where 'community', which is considered the property, by right, of those practices which carry a participatory logic such as Böhm/Lang/Saffer, invariably evoked the local and familiar in order to valorise some notion of 'play' or 'Hanging Out' and which likewise over time ensures their 'depoliticised withdrawal' from the realm of contemporary art. This happens through a form of encounter with the public which is

based on close observation of community-based participation strategies developed under the New Labour Government; their practice in short 'apes' a highly regulated and depoliticised form of democracy.

The Answer

Since Sennett, like Schmitt, deals, as he says in the 'real world', he is keen to underline that we must attempt to make the larger world habitable. He believes we could be doing more, and in fact, he says we have no choice but to try to make it habitable; the reason is that given the terms of personality, which have developed in the modern period, the experience of other people's personalities in an intimate communal territory, is itself a destructive process.

> Modern community seems to be about fraternity in a dead, hostile world; it is in fact all too often an experience of fratricide....Furthermore these terms of personality that govern face-to-face relationships in a community are likely to cut down the desire of people to experience those jolts, which might occur in a more unfamiliar terrain. These jolts are necessary to a human being to give him that sense of tentativeness about his own beliefs that every civilised person must have (Sennett 1977, 296).

Nancy Boy

Contemporary artists take flight to the relative security of Nancy's unbounded universe by invoking his *being-in-common* and *being-with* in order to forget their own impotence when faced with the flesh of the multitude and what may be possible for contemporary art.

Artists take flight because Nancy has enabled us, as Rogoff says

> to detach 'singularity' from individuality and the politics of autonomous selves....Nancy breaks down the 'with' of 'with itself' to another, less inward, more plural set of links. He is doing so in the names of a complex and very contemporary politics of what he calls the places, groups, or authorities (...Bosnian Serbs, Tutsis, Hutus, Tamil Tigers, Casamnce, ETA Militia, Roma of Slovenia...) that constitute the theatre of bloody conflicts among identities as well as what is at stake in these conflicts (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 127).

And yet, what are we dealing with as artists if not what Rogoff calls 'the politics of autonomous selves'? For as we have already seen with Rogoff as regards contemporary art, the problem is in the order of how to constitute an alternative form of mutuality that is not solely concerned with or bound by a 'frontal relationship' with the

art object, though Rogoff is unable to get very far away from it given that at the very least a reason is needed to collect in a space designated for an encounter with contemporary art, and, well, Rogoff doesn't really have one it seems.

In conversation with Chantal Pontbriand, like Rogoff, Nancy stresses that he doesn't like to use the term community without certain precautions because he says

> It has come to connote very much the 'exclusive community'...that is why I prefer to speak of *being-in-common* or *being-with*. These are heavy expressions, I know. Their density avoids the seduction of the word 'community'. It also shows that we are missing a word (as a word is missing between 'subject' and 'singular' for example)....I have tried to think not what is called 'a community' but being-with insofar as it is constitutive of being itself (or being-self, if you prefer): that is, insofar as one cannot conceive a subject, a 'self' preceding a relation with others. Being-with-the-others is originally present in 'being-itself'. 'I' am, from the very outset, 'with' (near) those who precede my birth and those who follow my death (Pontbriand, 2000, 15).

But does the de-centred community of Rogoff and Nancy also provide a kind of contemporary version of orthodox or *Gemeinschaft* community when it devolves to the realm of contemporary art? In other words, the same concept of community which Little says leads to a depoliticised public sphere and the danger of vigilantism as political engagement is channelled into private passions.

Participatory artist Rikrit Tiravanija, whom I have already mentioned and wish to discuss in more detail here, is the living embodiment of Nancy's *being-in-common* or *being-with*. Tiravanija's work, which is embodied through his 'cooking', could even be thought of as an expression of the love that Nancy claims transcends the 'reign of interiority and identity'. In short, between the work of Tiravanija and Nancy we can explore this 'shared' desire to challenge our understanding of community in terms of its exclusivity, institutional hierarchy and fixed identity – to 'oppose' the 'myth of community' – 'the will to realise an essence'.

Before addressing these questions however, I want to briefly outline the main characteristics of radical as distinct from orthodox concept of community.

The most fundamental distinction that can be drawn between the *Radical* and *Orthodox* positions is that the former treats the state (and I would add institutionality and objecthood perhaps within the realm of contemporary art) as a potential enemy whilst the latter treats the state as a potential collaborator or partner.

A second and equally decisive distinction can be drawn in terms of those who are for and against community as founded on non-instrumentalist principles such as

"friendship, voluntarism, sharing, mutualism and co-operation" (Little, 2002, 26) in a kind of contemporary interpretation of the Aristotelian *polis*.[28]

While Little remains attached to a version of Aristotelian virtue and how it can be developed in non-economic spheres of life, this can only be done by separating the concept of community from that of association or protecting community from the base values of the market place. Little says

> Communities are not the same as associations because the latter often operate within markets and economic relations....Communities on the other hand are formed on the basis of certain principles and shared values which frequently contradict the pursuit of growth and accumulation, the maximisation of profit, ruthless competition, and so on. And since these are the values of market mechanisms it is within the economic sphere that they should remain. Principles of community on the contrary may interfere with markets and distort their operation. If we limit the market sphere and develop a broader domain in which friendship, voluntarism, sharing, mutualism and co-operation are the dominant values then we can say that a process of promoting community is under way (Little, 2002, 25).

A third distinction is in terms of the Orthodox call for a return to "localised jurisdiction as an embodiment of communitarianism" (Little, 2002, 26) which, according to Little, promotes "increasingly authoritarian and exclusionary means of maintaining the community" (Little, 2002, 26) which radicals reject in favour of wanting to take on "the issues of inclusion and exclusion (and the multiplicity of forms that they take) that are glossed over in much communitarian analysis" (Little, 2002, 26).

In the light of these distinctions what is unclear is what has happened to an initial distinction, which Little initially makes between association and community or the difference between the former, based on instrumental principles, with the latter based on non-instrumental principles. For if, for example, Little's radical theory (which draws quite heavily on Mouffe) extends to a renewal of politics and increase in democracy, then it must be assumed that this is in terms of association or society in its instrumentality and must include market place values and economic imperatives. Otherwise, where this same 'value' is limited or excluded from the radical community thesis then the potential for conflict and difference is reduced if not excluded and the political is delimited to a kind of Habermasian consensual realm. For the radical as well

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[28] While there are clear differences between virtues associated with the Aristotelian *polis* and the kind of community Little describes above, he does say that "the resurgence of the public sphere must return to Aristotelian thinking for inspiration, especially when concerned with virtues such as the promotion of happiness, virtue and the common good" (Little, 2002, 13).

as for the orthodox position, the problem seems to be similar in terms of how they manage, contain or, for the orthodox project, reduce difference. This is an accusation normally directed against the orthodox position and which 'sets them apart' from the radicals or so it is claimed. The radical position however tolerates conflicting views of the common good only by evacuating the political. Little says

> Radical approaches to community reject the homogeneity imagined within orthodox communitarianism. By arguing for the rightful existence of a multiplicity of communities, all with valid claims for recognition and respect, radical communitarianism challenges the social policy agenda. Where the orthodox approach to community simplifies policy choices by underestimating the impact of respect for social diversity, the equation becomes more complicated in the eyes of radicals as they try to envisage policy for a complex world. A radical understanding of difference implies a politics in which conflict and antagonism are likely to remain a feature of debate. Rather than policy which unites and harmonises 'the community', radicals search for means of enabling people to express difference and challenge accepted orthodoxies (Little, 2002, 141).

Social Romantics

While I have discussed both positive and negative constitutions of vigilantism, I want to return to Tiravanija and the paradox he presents in relation to whether the contemporary representation and expression of community in its non-instrumentality – *being-in-common* or *being-with* – which is deemed meaningful and desirable through embodying the values of friendship and volunteerism that we as democratic citizens embrace also embodies the very insularity and so-called regressive tendencies which we as democratic citizens wish to reject from any contemporary definition of community, in other words, the very logic of orthodox community. The paradox stems from whether this very logic is actually generated through the development of community in its non-instrumentality – or in other words, through protecting/representing community as Tiravanija does from the ravages and expediency of global capitalism. In other words, whether the very instrumentality of 'association' as distinct from community is the same condition that keeps any definition 'open', fluid and heterogeneous.

In short, I wonder what differentiates this kind of collectivity/mutuality from the orthodox or *Gemeinschaft* logic of social romantics.

fig. 47. *Demo Station no. 1*

Rirkrit Tiravanija

It's maybe no surprise we celebrate someone like Tiravanija. Generally speaking, art press coverage of Tiravanija's work falls into something of a pattern, which typically follows a mantra-like recitation of Tiravanija's origins before citing the number of cities he currently divides his time between. It seems important for his work that these biographical details are known to us and not merely left to chance. In a review of Tiravanija's *Demo Station no. 4* **(fig. 47)**, Jill Martinez Krygowski, writes:

> if you had to sum up the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija in one word, it would be simply 'participation'. Born in Argentina and raised in Thailand, Ethiopia, and Canada, Rirkrit was educated in the US and now spends time between New York and Berlin. As a result, the 42 year old son of a Thai diplomat is constantly adjusting to different situations, customs and languages resulting in a deep love of interaction (Krygowski, 2003).

It's important we know about him in this way as Tiravanija's work and work in general which carries a participatory logic also carries by default a predisposition towards a particular mode of address which requires the viewer to first and foremost address the work through the artist as ethical being whose concerns *vis-à-vis* the work's openness, accessibility, inclusivity and so on are read from the person of Tiravanija (which is itself plain for the viewer to see). This mode of address seems to be required of Tiravanija's work and bears a strong similarity to the mode of address which becomes naturalised in what Sennett describes as the 'intimate society' – 'personality', in other words – the form of encounter and disclosure he blames for the demise of the public realm.

Tiravanija's work suggests that it is not what you see that is important but what takes place between people. Buck-Morss describes this shift towards 'knowing' Tiravanija, and notes that the

> troubling displacement from the epistemologically defined object of art to the ontologically defined being of the 'artist' signals the neutralisation of artistic protest within a globally commercialised, self-contained and self-absorbed art world. Artists have adopted various coping strategies to keep critical practice

> alive. One strategy is for the artist to use her or his socio-ontological identity – as Chicano, as woman, as African-American – as the content of art, and to render aesthetic experience socially critical in this way. Another is to make the artist's corporeal self the site of art, often in ways that are physically painful or abject. A third strategy is performance art, dissolving the artist's *being* into an *action* that disappears. As a consequence of all of these forms, in which the body of the artist is paramount and not the body of the work, the history of contemporary art becomes a biography of practices. 'Self-portrait', that once demanded the material, epistemological task of self-recognition, is replaced by various modes of self-exposure (Buck-Morss, 2003, 70).

The implications of this 'displacement' from the epistemologically defined object of art to the ontologically defined being of the 'artist' is currently most prevalent in those practices which carry a participatory logic within the realm of contemporary art. Critical practice is kept alive though not as the object of art and not in terms of 'effectivity' but in a much-mutated form of the person of the artist and the ethics of this 'self-exposure'. The increasingly 'depoliticised withdrawal' within the realm of contemporary art by those practices which carry a participatory logic and the obvious collapse in the belief that contemporary can be effective in any way is epitomised in an anecdote by the writer John Keane in his biography *Disturbing the Peace* of the then President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel **(fig. 48)**.

fig. 48. Vaclav Havel

During a conversation between Karel Hvîzdala and Havel, Havel (the artist, dissident politician and President) takes issue with Milan Kundera by defending his actions and others like him (mostly artists and intellectuals who formed and were co-signatories of *Charter 77*) during the Soviet occupation. Kundera expressed his

> (a priori scepticism) regarding civil actions that have no immediate hope of being effective, and which therefore may appear to be no more than an attempt by their authors to show how wonderful they are (Keane, 1990, 173).

In the *Unbearable Lightness of Being* there's a scene in which Tomás's son asks his father to sign a petition in support of political prisoners; the father refuses to sign, and justifies his decision in the following way:

> The petition will not help the political prisoners, and as a matter of fact that's not why it was drawn up in the first place. Above all, it's a way for the authors to draw attention to themselves and to reassure themselves that they can still have an impact on history, whereas in fact they're doing this in a situation in which they've found they've lost everything, and are in fact risking nothing at all by circulating the petition (Keane, 1990, 173).

Susan Buck-Morss seems to concur with Kundera in relation to contemporary artists and perhaps their similar sense of loss in terms of contemporary art's effectivity. Buck-Morss is talking about art's freedom and says

> Today's art is 'free', because it obeys no laws of judgement, taste or relevance, submitting only to the decisionism of the artist, who can be scandalous, playful, boring, shocking, or whatever – modes of *being* that have no social or cognitive effect. Even 'good' art cannot escape trivialisation in this insipid environment. Even 'political' art is depoliticised, becoming simply another genre of contemporary practice – which has every right to *be*, but not to matter (Buck-Morss, 2003, 70).

Tiravanija's practice, as Buck-Morss says, renders aesthetic experience socially critical through the artist using his socio-ontological identity – as the content of art, where criticality is (re)defined as little more than striking the correct demeanour, which Tiravanija invariably does through his eclectic ethnicity, and ability to raise 'tough' questions about the market-expedient world of contemporary art.

The implications of Buck-Morss's contention however returns me to the negative form of the vigilante as invested in the person of Tiravanija – in other words, the troubling displacement Buck-Morss identifies which "signals the neutralisation of artistic protest within a globally commercialised, self-contained and self-absorbed art world" (Buck-Morss, 2003, 70). I agree with Buck-Morss that this is indeed a troubling displacement given that one of its consequences is that the body of the artist rather than the body of the work becomes paramount. My concern with this, which is perhaps slightly different to Buck-Morss's concern and which I've already discussed in the previous chapter, is that a kind of ethical posturing vis-à-vis Böhm's or Tiravanija's practices *becomes* the work. I blame contemporary art's legacy of so-called 'radicality' for producing this monstrous body of contemporary art(ists), for its attempt to keep 'critical practice' alive and counter 'the neutralisation of so called artistic protest'. This is nothing more than a byword for a moralising form of humanitarianism which contemporary art is expected to service – and which Tiravanija, one of its vigilantes, enforces through his dedication to keeping art clean. While Buck-Morss is troubled by this shift toward the body of the artist rather than the body of the work, she should ask herself where else can art go

when Debord will continue to turn in his grave so long as the revolution goes unrealised.

The answer for Buck-Morss: art(ists) become fugitive.

inSITE2000

What struck Buck-Morss as symptomatic of the work in *inSITE2000*, the San Diego/Tijuana bi-national show that she helped curate along with Ivo Mesquita, Osvaldo Sánchez and Sally Yard, was what she describes as a "gesture of disappearance" (Buck-Morss, 2003, 70).

She recalls that

> in a surprising number of projects, the artistic gesture was disappearance. Rather than disrupting traffic flows, they joined them; rather than mapping new urban landscapes they blended in; rather than interrupting the syntax of everyday life they sequestered their art within it. The politics of this gesture is not to confront power, not to criticise commodity culture, not to represent submerged identities, but to move so fully into the social field as to be imperceptible for a moment within it – before vanishing in the trans-urban flow (Buck-Morss, 2003, 71).

Though on a pragmatic level I doubt if very much disappeared or escaped the curator's gaze as it is patently obvious that the profile of many of the artists included in *inSITE2000* such as Carlos Amorales **(fig. 49)**, Mark Dion **(fig. 50)**, Alfredo Jaar **(fig. 51)** and Krzysztof Wodiczko **(fig. 52)**, in addition to the fully illustrated bilingual book *Fugitive Sites* (the organisers see *Fugitive Sites* as a continuation of the process of *inSITE2000*), would seem to belie the "gesture of disappearance" which struck her as symptomatic of the work.[29]

fig. 49. Carlos Amorales

fig. 50. Mark Dion

[29] Edited by Osvaldo Sanchez, *Fugitive Sites* is a continuation of the process of *inSITE2000*. Besides documenting artists' projects, the book includes texts by an outstanding group of critics, sociologists, anthropologists and others who participated in the *inSITE2000 conversations* series, including: Mary Jane Jacob, David Harvey, Masao Miyoshi,

fig. 51. Alfredo Jaar

fig. 52. Krzysztof Wodiczko

The artists would have gone about their work in the knowledge that whatever the strategy deployed, whatever they did, however trivial the gesture, this would be identified, catalogued and recorded in detail. Buck-Morss's "gesture of disappearance" is in fact infantilised by being tied to a notion of representation within the realm of contemporary art and cannot or dare not escape this logic, as the price of 'escape' might be to suffer the indignity of really 'disappearing'. Buck-Morss however is in thrall to the "gesture of disappearance" and claims a "dialectical reversal" was performed by which much of the work in *inSITE2000*.

In a curatorial postscript to *inSITE200* Buck-Morss talks in some detail about the artists' work:

> When artworks disappear within the specificity of a social site, a protective complicity comes into being. Local publics harbour artists as fugitives, aliens (escapees) from the art world....Some 'successful' projects exist as rumour only. Others seek venues secluded from tourist gazes. Children create their art-garden in a backyard that tour buses cannot reach...an artist hides out as a housepainter in Maclovio Rojas, where the homes turn into artworks. No one goes to see them. Out of respect for the community. And the artist? Solidarity...Amateur artists from a bordertown are brought into the conceptual project of the 'professional'; a gallery exhibition features the local mountain they have painted, each is unique. The 'professional' specialises in mass production (Buck-Morss, 2003, 83).

However when Buck-Morss describes the "gesture of disappearance" running through *inSITE2000* which for her "seemed to anticipate the post-September 11 brave-new-world of surveillance", she is also describing a return to the kind of *Gemeinschaft* or "myth of community" I have already mentioned, which Sennett says arouses:

> a passion for fantasised intimate disclosures between people. Myths of an absence of community, like those of the soulless or vicious crowd, serve the

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George Yúdice, David Avalos, Sally Yard, Gerardo Estrada, Osvaldo Sánchez, David Joselit, Judith Barry, Nelson Brissac, Serge Guilbaut, Néstor Garcia Canclini, Ivo Mesquita and Susan Buck-Morss.

> function of goading men to seek out community in terms of a created common self. The more the myth of empty impersonality, in popular forms, becomes the common sense of a society, the more will that populace feel morally justified in destroying the essence of urbanity, which is that men can act together, without the compulsion to be the same (Sennett, 1977, 255).

And while Buck-Morss may describe the "gesture of disappearance" as almost visionary in its appeal, is it not in fact deeply nostalgic in the manner Lippard's vision was romantic for the energies and community gathered in the pursuit of setting art free. In short, nostalgic for some form of *Gemeinschaft* community or what would be invariably treated by Rogoff as repressive and insular.

If it is the case that so many contemporary artists want to 'return' to this vision of community, the question is why.

Sennett has the answer when he says:

> The culture of the 19th Century capital cities set in motion a powerful weapon against change. When the mask became the face, when appearance became indices of personality, self-distance was lost. What freedoms have people when they are as they appear? How can they engage in those acts of self-criticism and change, which depend on self-distance? *Belief* is too loaded. The culture of bourgeois urban life undermined the freedom of too many bourgeois radicals. This culture robbed dialectical ideology of its dialectic, by accustoming people to think of their rhetorical positions, their ideas stated in public, as disclosures of themselves psychologically. The people on the left increasingly found themselves in the position of defending personal integrity, commitment, and authenticity, in defiance of changing material conditions. They exchanged dialectic for the sense of belonging to a *radical community*, a Movement. Again, we arrive at the same *inward-looking language* which typifies the Dreyfus Affair, rigidity for the sake of feeling bound up in a group, a defiance of the dissonances of history for the sake of community (Sennett, 1977, 255) (*italics* – my emphasis).[30]

While Sennett's text examines the destructive influences of the 'intimate society' vis-à-vis the Dreyfus Affair **(fig. 53)**, if for a moment we substitute the terms *moral integrity* for *Belief*, *contemporary art* for *radical movement* and *democratic theory* for *inward-*

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[30] "The Dreyfus Affair has been called 'a double drama of detection and ideological conflict'. The detection was basically a spy story: Was a certain army officer, the Jewish captain Alfred Dreyfus, conspiring with the Italians and Germans against France? If he was not, then who had made him appear to be a spy, and why had they done so? As each stage in this spy-story detection unfolds, a conflict unfolds about what the evidence means. The longer the affair goes on, however, the less the parties involved are concerned with what the evidence tells about an act of espionage, the more they are concerned with using the evidence to define two communities in conflict. At a certain moment the line is crossed when the spy story loses any interest other than as fuel for community via confrontation. That moment occurs in January 1898" (Sennett, 1977, 255).

looking language then we could co-opt Sennett's text written over a quarter of a century ago to the realm of contemporary art, given that it anticipates many of the problems which contemporary art has in terms of constituting a notion of community based on a logic of participation. And while we have already spoken about many of these problems, the most interesting development in Sennett's text is in relation to how the 'intimate society' has affected the left, how it has pushed and continues to push the left into defending 'personal integrity, commitment, authenticity, in defiance of changing material conditions'. *Documenta 11* exemplifies how contemporary art has wholeheartedly embraced rather than attempted to deal with this dilemma.

fig. 53. The Dreyfus Affair, Poster

The real 'fugitive' however, the fugitive who performs his own "gesture of disappearance" does not hide out in Tijuana however, but becomes immersed in the prevailing economic conditions, becomes complicit with the powers-that-be, and hides out in full public view. Only then, in the words of Buck-Morss, does "a protective complicity comes into being" (Buck-Morss, 2003, 83), though not from the glare of commodity culture but rather the stifling demand for 'integrity', 'authenticity', 'locality' and as Sennett says, "a passion for fantasised intimate disclosures" (Sennett, 1977, 255), or in other words, more of the same.

Documenta 11

If the disassembling of community in its homogeneity and exclusivity is as Chantal Pontbriand claims at the heart of the most influential artistic practices of the day then *Documenta 11* may rank as the most community conscious *Documenta* and represent something like a near full maturing of contemporary art within democratic liberalism – where, as Danto says, we find a place of plurality and tolerance. *Documenta 11* in other words may be the most contemporary event in the history of *Documenta*; contemporary art may have realised its full potential.

fig. 54. Okwui Enwezor

Okwui Enwezor **(fig. 54)**, Artistic Director of *Documenta 11*, says 'collaboration' is at the heart of the exhibition.

> Collaborations not only highlight the larger scope of *Documenta 11's* intellectual project based on the principle of shared research interests, they inscribe within *Documenta 11's* exhibition project a critical interdisciplinary methodology that is to be distinguished from Interdisciplinarity as a form of exhibitionism....The framework within which this takes place has both political and aesthetic objectives. But rather than consume the concerns of art and artists into the narrow terrain of Western institutional aesthetic discourses that are part of the current crisis, we have conceived of this project as part of the production of a common public sphere....The public sphere imagined by these collaborations of multifaceted Platforms in which artists, intellectuals, communities, audiences, practices, voices, situations, actions come together to examine and analyse the predicaments and transformations that form part of the deeply inflected historical procedures and processes of our time.
>
> If there is a politics of a kind to be deduced from the above, it is a politics of nonambiguity, and the idea that all discourses, all critical models (be they artistic or social, intellectual or pragmatic, interpretive or historical) emerge from a location or situation, even when they are not defined or restricted by it (Enwezor et al, 2001, 11).

If *Documenta 11* represents a near full maturing of contemporary art within democratic liberalism, then it may also be that contemporary art within democratic liberalism is neither the site of nor a radical (convincing, forceful and so on) representation of politics or community in its contemporaneity despite the EU-like enlargement of *Documenta 11* and the move towards "the production of a common public sphere" (Enwezor et al, 2001, 11). On the contrary, contemporary art may serve most appropriately and perhaps most interestingly as a place of pilgrimage for any number of unrealised left-wing ambitions, a site of assurance and certainty in the midst of a complex de-centred, heterogeneous world – a realm where we are safe in the knowledge that the old enemies not only prevail but continue to threaten the values and integrity held in perpetuity at the core of contemporary art by the self-appointed artist vigilantes. In this sense *Documenta 11* both consolidates and validates a particular understanding of community in its de-centredness.

And in keeping with the spirit of democratic-liberalism everything must, as I have said before, be negotiable. The sovereign power and authority of the artist and artwork are replaced by a sometimes *interesting* and almost certainly *endless* examination and dialogue around the concept of community/place/mobility/site. Put another way what may well have to be censured and evacuated from the realm of contemporary art are what Stanley Fish calls 'strong beliefs and convictions'.

In its very contemporaneity then, art may fail to be contemporary in the manner in which it aspires to be, in its drive toward the production of knowledge, through a gesture of open contestation, debate and transparent processes of research.

Like the project of radical pluralism, *Documenta 11* may really be as I have already mentioned in chapter one about 'taming politics'. Stanley Fish says:

> The process of taming unfolds in two (impossible) steps: first, the step of recognising 'domination and violence' for what they really are – a recognition you perform from a distance; whatever they are, they are not you – and, second, the step of 'the establishment of a set of institutions through which they can be limited and tested'. That step is taken the moment you imagine it, for if you assume that domination and violence can be isolated long enough to become the objects of institutional manipulation, they have already been limited, if only in your mind. When Mouffe ends her book by naming as our task the creation of 'the conditions under which...aggressive forces can be defused and...a pluralist democratic order made possible', she has joined the ranks of those who, in her own accusing words, seek to 'negate the political' and 'make it disappear' (Fish, 2001, 236).

When Mouffe called on artists at a recent conference to develop an agonistic art practice I wondered what this might be and whether the practice of one of the more polemical artists in *Documenta 11*, Danish artist Jens Haaning, might be considered agonistic in the manner in which Mouffe was demanding. Haaning's practice reflects upon already existing forms (rather than making new ones), and he rejects his practice being described as deliberately polemical though he does concede that it might be confrontational.

Haaning says

> Maybe the biggest value of what some of my colleagues and I are doing, by inventing forms that are floating more smoothly over the borders of the art institutions, is to question the way the art world is participating in society due to its self-perception. Rather than making new forms, we are reflecting upon and turning to already existing forms, thereby questioning how we understand our

> culture and its history. Or to make it more direct – my artistic praxis is not based on an intention to make a direct inter-human interaction but motivated in an ambition to question the western imperialistic capitalistic society constructions and values and its interaction with other cultures (Haaning, 2003, 141).

While Haaning's 'questioning' is all very noble and good the problem for Haaning if we are to take Buck-Morss's 'troubling displacement' seriously is that this 'questioning' will invariably lead to the valorisation of more 'direct inter-human interaction' through attempting to frame certain forms of sociability that are either seen to escape the effects of a kind of destructive economic expediency or are a consequence of such expediency. In other words Haaning will only ever represent what he already believes to be right about contemporary art, that it is a place for him to ask questions, even questions towards the field itself. Haaning's practice becomes part of what Buck-Morss calls a 'biography of practices'.

Haaning's material stems from marginal or peripheral identities, and in particular, immigrants, refugees, the mentally ill and so on. In *Arab Joke* from 2002 **(fig. 55)**, Haaning uses the red-light area of Geneva to display posters, which juxtapose an image of a semi-naked woman (which in Haaning's view might offend Moslem sensibilities) in conjunction with a joke written in Arabic. Haaning saw this work as particularly challenging given its proximity in time to the *September 11* attack on the World Trade centre.[31]

fig. 55. *Arab Joke*

fig. 56. *Turkish Jokes*

fig. 57. *Ma'lesh*

For *Documenta 11*, Haaning reproduced a work entitled *Turkish Jokes*, which he first showed in Oslo in 1994 **(fig. 56)**. *Turkish Jokes* was installed in the Turkish area of central Oslo and consisted of a tape-recording of jokes, told by Turks in their native

[31] The poster carried the following joke written in Arabic – A Grain of Wheat. When Guha lost his mind, he started to believe that he was a grain of wheat. His biggest fear was that a chicken would eat him. His wife became tired and persuaded him to see a doctor, which he did. The doctor sent him to a mental hospital. After a short while, it seemed as Guha had recovered and regained his sanity. His wife fetched him from the hospital and walked him back home. On the way home, Guha saw some chickens walking on the road. He became very frightened and tried to hide behind his wife. The wife could not understand what had got into him as they had just left the hospital and shouted at him: "What the hell do you think you are doing? Don't you understand that you're not a grain of wheat anymore?" Guha replied in anguish, "It doesn't matter what I think! The important thing is whether these bloody chickens understand that I am not a grain of wheat" (www.goodwatergallery.com/GW/Artists/Haaning/jh-arabic-jokes.htm).

language, which was then played through a loudspeaker attached to a lamppost. A similar work from 1996 entitled *Turkish Mercedes*, was based in Kreutzberg, Berlin; a Mercedes Benz with Turkish license plates and loudspeakers on the roof, broadcast jokes in Turkish.

Finally, *'Ma'lesh'*, from 2002 **(fig. 57)**, was a giant 3 x 7 metre illuminated sign depicting the Algerian Arabic expression Ma'lesh (Who cares?). The sign was designed for a housing estate in a suburb of the French city of Besancon, but was rejected or in Haaning's words, 'censored' by the local authorities. The work took place in the heat of an electoral campaign.

While Haaning himself claims he has never operated with the term 'provocation', he does say he is interested in establishing a 'confrontation'. "A confrontation with some of the facts, which are part of the construction we live in" (Haaning, 2003, 9). He goes on to say

> I have made quite a few projects which have involved immigrants in the Western society, and this is the topic in our society that I am most concerned with, but not only because of the social and political implications. Seen from an existential point of view, the immigrants are put in a very difficult situation, and I will go so far as to say that the immigrants in the society I live in, are the ones who are under the biggest pressure from the divergences in the culture. Some of the moves I make challenge the social role of art and art institutions (Haaning, 2003, 143).

And while Haaning may not shirk the violence and contradictions which Mouffe demands we take account of in a properly democratic society, the 'confrontations' which Haaning produces within the realm of contemporary art are never in any real danger of becoming uncontrollable since 'confrontation' is explored within the given, carefully circumscribed and all important context of art, as it is for Mouffe within the given, carefully circumscribed and all important context of democratic theory and where in either context, strong beliefs or opinions are excluded or relegated to a place devoid of any real threat.

The context, whether it be contemporary art or democratic theory, provides comprehensibility for certain actions which may be potentially incomprehensible within another context, which may be described as vigilantism, terrorism, or just plain chaos. The context moreover declares order and limits to what is potentially chaotic. For example the extreme anxiety generated over a 48-hour period following the discovery of a bomb by Vauxhall Bridge in the mid-1990s was because it was unattributed to any group, organisation or faction, in other words, the authorities were unable to 'interpret'

the intentionality of this act and so the context and meaning could not be understood. Once it was 'claimed' as initially suspected by the IRA or its sibling Real IRA, then the nature of the act could be clearly interpreted and the chaos subsided.

Relationality

Writer Nicolas Bourriaud says that Haanings work

> enters the theoretical framework of relational aesthetics, since it first evolves in the inter-human field, producing social relations and negotiations before any other aesthetic considerations. But what is important is that Haaning never considers the universe of human relations as an innocent space. Far from some of the well-wishing social and cultural caricatures which are all too often associated with 'relational' practices, Haaning takes the contradictions and the violence of social space into account. Sometimes he even stages them in unbearable situations, forming a team of workers to produce real weapons (*Weapon Production*, 1995) or, in a more subtle fashion, proposing to turn a bankrupt factory located next to the site of a concentration camp into a holiday resort (*Das Faserstoff Project*, 1998). Nazism, Taylorism, leisure industry: a similar root? Not every community is good (Haaning, 2003, 103).

The key to Bourriaud's interpretation of Haaning's work and the power he invests it with are due I believe to Bourriaud understanding that his work functions as he says 'in real time'.

Bourriaud says that Haanings work demands "our participation, not from a theoretical point of view (as the notion of 'participation' implied in 60s Happenings), but in order to verify the concrete hypothesis they materialise" (Haaning, 2003, 104).

The act of verification – which happens in real time and requires our participation happens at the expense of the work so to speak and in common with a number of other practices I've already spoken about – carries the weakness in Haaning's practice and Bourriaud's theoretical claims for it and returns us to my own nascent hypothesis which posits contemporary art's capacity for confrontation, for politics and for democracy in contemporary art's ability to retain its 'shape' so to speak, to continue to place the 'aesthetic' and whatever this might constitute as distinct from the political (which Schmitt says is fundamental in any case and not a separate category) at the core of contemporary art as regards what makes contemporary art complex and ultimately confrontational, political and democratic. The personification of this hypothesis is the character of the vigilante – man's passion, strong and insistent belief, or put another way, vigilantism is 'private enterprise'.

Haaning's seeming limitless ability to produce work in the form of generalised statements drawing on the spectre of colonialism, global capitalism, American hegemony and so on ensures that he is fêted for his work. The political activist, turned kindergarten teacher, turned artist uses a strategy not unlike the current darling of the Left, author and film producer, Michael Moore.[32] In short, Haaning and Moore choose very large targets, reduce what is complex and ambiguous to a simple, clear context and invariably preach to the converted. Haaning says:

> I have a problem with the fact that the art field in Western Europe – where I live and do most of my projects – is dominated by a white upper-class culture for rich people which among other things confirms the belief that the white western culture is in charge of the world. One of the qualities of the art world that makes me stay in is the fact that I am welcome to 'speak' even though I do not come with solutions but mainly am posing questions to the topics I am interested in. The art field is one of the cultural structures where questioning and criticisms are welcome. Even questions and critic (sic) towards the field itself (Haaning, 2003, 142).

Despite claims to the contrary, Haaning's work posits itself as 'an agent for social change'. It *is* clearly provocative. It is saying despite the spectacle and market for art, contemporary art can do something else too – can pose difficult moral and ethical questions. But while Haaning's work may be confrontational and even take "the contradictions and the violence of social space into account" (Haaning, 2003, 104) **(fig. 58)**, the 'politics' of his work are nonetheless unambiguously flagged up as being on the side of the right and the good. So, we are safe in the knowledge that he really does care about these people and that no real harm is going to come to them. And let's face it, Haaning wants to insult Turks and Arabs about as much as an artist like Santiago Sierra[33] wants to hurt the refugees he has paid to carry, to hide and so on. And like Sierra's work, Haaning's is also *so* 'political' yet *so* predictable.

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[32] Author of *Stupid White Men* and documentaries *Roger & Me*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Film critic Richard Schickel labelled Moore the very definition of the unreliable narrator.

[33] The Lisson Gallery, Sierra's agents in the UK, write: Originally from Spain, but now based in Mexico, Sierra has become well known for his controversial video work and installations which highlight the problematical nature of a capitalist economy. His past projects are remarkably diverse; in an earlier work he used petrol to set fire to a gallery on its opening night and in New York he hired someone to live behind a wall at P.S.1 Gallery for 15 days, 24 hours a day. The tasks Sierra selects are usually repetitive, pointless and absurd. For his solo exhibition at the IKON Gallery earlier this year Sierra paid an Irish street vagrant in Birmingham's New Street to say "My participation in this piece could generate a profit of 72,000 dollars. I am being paid five pounds." While this appears highly exploitative, the beggar in the video, and many other of Sierra's participants are willing victims and paid at least as much as the local average wage. For the inaugural exhibition at Lisson Gallery's new gallery, 29 Bell Street, Sierra produced the installation 'Space closed by corrugated metal' 2002. His work could be seen as merely reflecting the harsh reality of a market economy where everyone has their price, but much of his work has a powerful minimalist aesthetic and a poetic simplicity that transforms its political rhetoric into something more subtle and indeterminate. It can also be seen in the tradition of Arte Povera and the socially-engaged process artists of the 1970s. Santiago Sierra has exhibited extensively all over the world. Recent projects include Venice Biennale (2001), ARS 01 at KIASMA, Helsinki (2001), KunstWerke, Berlin and PS1, New York (2000).

fig. 58. *Weapon Production*

Both Haaning's and Sierra's practices are from the outset agonistic and 'safe'. And as Bourriaud says, Haaning's projects, "demand our participation to verify the concrete hypothesis they materialise". Haaning, like Sierra we might say, is a radical pluralist *par excellence*.

We obviously need artists/radical pluralists of the calibre of Haaning and Sierra when Enwezor alerts us to the fact that 'we' are again living in turbulent times for humanity and art.

He says

> Almost fifty years after its founding, *Documenta* finds itself confronted once again with the spectres of yet another turbulent time of unceasing cultural, social, and political frictions, transitions, transformations, fissures, and global institutional consolidations.....How do we make sense of these rapid changes and transformations, which call upon all practitioners for new, inventive models of enabling trans-disciplinary action within the contemporary global public sphere? The challenge of making a meaningful articulation of the possibilities of contemporary art in such a climate, as well as the disciplinary, spatial, temporal, and historical pressures to which it has been subjected, represent the diagnostic, deliberative process out of which the full measure of *Documenta 11* has been engaged (Enwezor et al, 2001, 11).

Is contemporary art up to it then? Up to the challenge Enwezor sets it? Yes, contemporary art is up to it so long as we assume it's on the side of the right and the good and that the challenge for contemporary art is best met by dressing up as Indians and rushing around in search of the wagons you assume have already formed a circle, in anticipation of your attack.

What I'm really trying to say is that while the world will always be confronted with the spectres of yet another turbulent time and so on, the world will likewise always produce a certain kind of contemporary art which continues in its claim to counter these 'spectres', to be relevant and critical. More often than not however, this is precisely no more and no less than what you expect contemporary art to be in its critical, resistant form. What you expect it to look like, to do and to say...what after all is contemporary

art resisting...we presume capitalist hegemony and some other such monsters...or maybe contemporary art is really just resisting its own impulse and instinct to succeed, to win on its own terms so to speak.

The plot goes as follows: Contemporary art fights against nasty repressive capitalism by resuscitating the spectre of mealy-mouthed socialism. Contemporary art fails heroically, fearless contemporary art, the end.

So, while contemporary art is not really expected to 'do' anything about the 'spectres of yet another turbulent time and so on...', it is expected to strike the correct demeanour, which is why the political must ultimately be evacuated from the realm of contemporary art because the political is notoriously unpredictable. So when contemporary art pretends to be bad as it does in the work of Haaning it is actually being good and we understand it is being good; contemporary art is doing exactly what we expect it to do. Good for contemporary art – or maybe not.

Pompous, conceited art – always at the vanguard of the struggle? When artists and their apologists repeatedly insist on positioning contemporary art and what is most 'authentic' to this realm in opposition to what is seen to constitute a 'dominant order', when everything points to contemporary art being part and parcel of the dominant order even with all its resentment, peripheral vision and siege mentality...this *is* the dominant order. We obviously overestimate contemporary art and what it can do.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I return to Haaning's work through reintroducing the concept of the vigilante or what I began this chapter with, i.e. outlining what might represent the inverse of the kind of participatory logic which increasingly pervades the realm of contemporary art and threatens to transform it in significant and enduring ways. For while it may be agreed that only certain works of contemporary art carry the kind of logic which invites the public to participate, such can be the 'success' of their participation that the public in turn demand the production of this logic within the realm of contemporary art as a whole. It demands that contemporary art take 'the people' into account and demonstrably so.

We could also treat these 'potential' though emasculated acts of vigilantism as irregular yet largely unrealised (due to their regulation within the social and political realm and the realm of contemporary art) expressions of an 'immanent will to power' which according to Nietzsche animates all life and which 'slave morality' only superficially disguises, or alternately, the moment in which potentially at least, the political is given expression.

Nietzsche asks

> Suppose the abused, oppressed, suffering, unfree, those uncertain of themselves and weary should moralise: what would their moral evaluations have in common? Probably a pessimistic mistrust of the entire situation of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man together with his situation. The slave is suspicious of the virtues of the powerful: he is sceptical and mistrustful, *keenly* mistrustful, of everything 'good' that is honoured amongst them. On the other hand, those qualities which serve to make easier the existence of the suffering will be brought into prominence and flooded with light: here it is that pity, the kind and helpful hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, friendliness, come into honour – for here these are the most useful qualities and virtually the only means of enduring the burden of existence. Slave morality is essentially the morality of utility (Nietzsche, 1996, 197).

In other words, what Nietzsche highlights about these unrealised acts of vigilantism are their immanently aggressive and violent potential should they go unregulated. In the realm of contemporary art unlike the social and political realm we are clear what things are and the value they have, particularly when this has anything to do with the social and political realm.

This point is perhaps illustrated by an anecdote about Michael Pflager, the pastor of the Roman Catholic St Sabina Church on Chicago's South Side.

> Pflager...has been a regular fixture in the media for self-described acts of social justice, and what some consider vigilantism. His Church is located in one of the most economically challenged areas of the city and his members are primarily African American. According to published reports, many people consider him a hero....Barrelling into a drug paraphernalia shop in the south suburb of Harvey, Pflager and a group of nearly 50 angry parishioners held a demonstration inside the shop to stop the sale of contraband. Pflager was arrested for his actions.
>
> On other occasions, the South Side Priest has used spray paint to cover up billboards put up by alcohol and tobacco companies in mainly African American communities. And on still other occasions, Pflager paid prostitutes for their time so that parishioners could share the gospel (*Free Republic*, 2001).

'If this were art', we could be reading a description of work by Jens Haaning, or Santiago Sierra rather than the adventures of a South Side priest in Chicago's tabloid press. While Pflager's actions may fall outside the realm of contemporary art we can see how they are copied and are parodied by artists like Haaning, Sierra and so on. The difference between Pflager and Haaning or Sierra however is that it is unclear, as

I've mentioned above, whether Pflager is a hero or vigilante. There is no such confusion within the realm of contemporary art even if the so-called 'challenge' at the more adversarial end of it where Haaning and Sierra position themselves is exactly that.

Is it Legal?

According to writer Vincent Pécoil, in Haaning's *Weapon Production*, where "the limit between what is lawful and what is 'outside the law' stops being a metaphor, art truly operates on the border between what is allowed and what is not" (Haaning, 2003, 7). But because it's art, almost anything is allowed. Haaning claims the intention of *Weapon Production* "was to put up a model for self-liberation and self-reflection" (Haaning, 2003, 7). He discusses with Pécoil the existential importance of the illegal act yet assumes in the case of *Weapon Production* this act will remain within the law even if *Weapon Production* "stops being a metaphor" (Haaning, 2003, 9), as Pécoil believes it does. According to writer Harald Fricke, "His is the opposite of participatorial approaches, which are precisely about having the audience participate in the process of the work" (Haaning, 2003, 123).

Haaning says

> If you do something illegal, you are stepping out of the frame given by the society you are surrounded by, and since this frame is quite important for your identity and how you understand yourself, an illegal act can be a very important existential act. When I have installed something in a museum which dealt with the aspect of illegality, the intention was to put up a model for self-liberation and self-reflection. I will not recommend illegal activities, but I would like to support the idea of questioning the structures that individuals are participating in on all levels, from the laws that we have agreed to follow in society to the conventions we are following and building up in our more intimate human relations....The way I see it the Bader-Meinhoff – though they have caused a lot of blood-sheds and wounds especially in the West German society – has been extremely important for many peoples' (sic) self-definition and some societies' development. Their activities have for example had a positive influence on the German society by putting up a model which has questioned the whole of society and how we organise our co-existents (sic) (Haaning, 2003, 144).[34]

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[34] "The Baader-Meinhof Gang came into existence on 2 April 1968, when Andreas Baader and his girlfriend, Gudrun Ensslin, firebombed Frankfurt's Kaufhaus Schneider department store, or it came into being two years later when the famed left-wing journalist Ulrike Meinhof helped to break Baader out of prison custody in Berlin, on 14 May 1970. The name Baader-Meinhof Gang certainly didn't come into usage until, of course, after Meinhof helped Baader escape from custody and the German press was looking for a suitable moniker to attach to the group. The group never used the term

It is without doubt interesting to bring these 'disenfranchised' young people from Hundige, a suburb of Copenhagen into the museum. In fact it must be challenging for any museum to have in residence young people familiar with the construction and use of lethal weapons. And while Haaning obviously appreciates the existential importance of an illegal act, it is only ever undertaken it must be assumed by the artist and within the context and terms of reference the artist sets out as in the case of *Weapon Production*.[35]

This is most likely committed in Haaning staging this event. However, the challenge Haaning has set up is potentially more complex than that as he needed to deal with any number of unforeseen consequences if called upon to do so and not least the public's (negative) reaction. Far more pressing is the possible further occurrence of an 'illegal' act which could not have been foreseen at the outset of the work. What for example would Haaning have done if the young people of Hundige decided literally to take-the-law-into-their-own-hands and test the weapons they had constructed on themselves, and/or others in the museum? What if they simply ran amok? Suffice it to say nothing unforeseen happened during their stay in the museum and most likely *Weapon Production* proved to be an inspiring "model of self-liberation and self-reflection" (Haaning, 2003, 103). "His is the opposite of participatorial approaches, which are precisely about having the audience participate in the process of the work" (Harald Fricke, Berlin. 'Under A foreign Flag', cited in Haaning, 2003).

Vincent Pécoil says

> As catalytic agents, Haaning's works confront the viewer with realities that can potentially change his perception of his cultural and social environment, and make him question his own prejudices, his perceptual habits and thought patterns. In this sense his art is critical, but it is never a form of agit-prop; the

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to describe themselves (they called themselves the Red Army Faction). Liberals and moderates would never call them a 'Gang' (bande), but were instead careful to refer to them as a 'Group' (gruppe). Conservative Germans were equally careful to do the exact opposite" (www.baader-meinhof.com/terminology/terms/bmterm.html).

"It wasn't just about killing Americans, and killing pigs, at least not at first. It was about attacking the illegitimate state that these pawns served. It was about scraping the bucolic soil and exposing the fascist, Nazi-tainted bedrock that the modern West German state was propped upon. It was about war on the forces of reaction. It was about Revolution.

The Baader-Meinhof Gang certainly didn't expect to win their war by themselves. They assumed an epic proletarian backlash would be the Revolution's true engine. They assumed their wave of terror would force the state to respond with brutal, reflexive anger. They assumed that West German civil liberties and civil rights would be quashed as the state turned the clock back 25 years. They assumed that the proletarian West Germans would react in horror as the true nature of their own government was revealed. They assumed that factory workers, bakers, and miners, would be inspired to smash their own oppressors. They assumed that they would be the vanguard of a movement where millions of Germans brought Revolution home. They assumed a lot" (Huffman, Richard. *The Gun Speaks* (extract from forthcoming book), (www.baader-meinhof.com/gun/)).

[35] Regarding *Weapon Production*, writer, Harald Fricke says "Already the Weapon Production project initiated by Haaning in 1995 was 'anything but art,' to use Ad Reinhardt's words. Young people from Copenhagen's Hundige quarter were producing different kinds of weapons in a workshop furnished by Haaning at Portalen Kunsthalle. The weapons they produced were the same models that are used by gangs fighting in the streets. The arsenal ranged from slingshots and tube bombs to cable batons.

> works never propose ideological counter-contents against existing representations, they contain no messages or slogans. Thus their functioning, in relation to 'political' art, could be compared to the difference between ethics and morality. The former evaluates an action for its capacity to increase or strengthen life, while the latter utters slogans and norms that can actually hinder it. Pieces like *Middelburg Summer 1996* or *Foreigners Free – Biel Swimming Pool* did more than simply test the limits of their field [art], they were more than purely formal exercises [a form of institutional critique]. They also exposed the cultural other bursting into the economic and social reality, instead of just giving a [counter]-representation of it (Haaning, 2003, 8).

While Haaning's work may be critical in how it confronts the viewer with his own prejudices and so on, I wonder to what extent it really does this. It is revealing in Haaning's interview with Hou Hanru to discover where his work is being directed, how it is being received and who his real constituency are and ultimately, how he is never in any real danger of confrontation. Confident of his audience, Haaning can vindicate the violence inflicted on 1970s' Germany by the Bader-Meinhof 'Revolutionaries'. And those people who might consider Bader-Meinhof to be 'Terrorists' are not part of Haaning's constituency in any case. Haaning knows whom he is speaking to and is undoubtedly preaching to the converted – which begs the questions: exactly who is being challenged or where is the challenge in Haaning's work or what if Buck-Morss is right and it no longer even matters? Haaning can do the hell what he likes.

Private passions, which were dealt with under Hobbes by a strong sovereign, threaten community in its contemporaneity and heterogeneity. Vigilantism sits squarely at the centre of what threatens community in its non-exclusivity and becoming. Perhaps only within the realm of contemporary art can it be imagined that community would find a safe haven away from the scrutiny and discord of the political. Only within the realm of contemporary art could community hope to become all that it dreams of becoming, yet if Carl Schmitt is correct in thinking that the political is not merely a domain or realm, but is fundamental to our very being in the world, then not even within the realm of contemporary art are we spared the 'messiness' and consequences of the political, man's passion or 'dangerousness'.

Community becomes a realm of non-instrumental gain, sufficiently vague in terms of meaning, yet highly charged in terms of emotion.

The vigilante threat to contemporary art ultimately makes contemporary art accountable to the same extent that its barely acknowledged siblings, civic and public art are accountable (re contemporary art: simply substitute civic and public for site and

context specific) and represents the fulfilment or playing out to its conclusion, a barely disguised morality that increasingly pervades the realm of contemporary art.

Contemporary art then, resplendent as only the Emperor could be in his new clothes, demonstrates that the 'agon' can be well and truly democratised – Bad for art – Bad for contemporary art.

On the other hand if we were willing to find a way to revoke this demand we have made incumbent on contemporary art then the vigilante threat becomes significantly more productive and critical as it is directed away from the realm of contemporary art and towards a critically constituted public sphere where contemporary art remains antagonistic, where the State and institutions are required to 'contain' and 'police' it and where the public – well, they're just required to find ways to live with it, or not.

Conclusion

> It is adherence to theory of some sort that upsets the apple cart, and causes us to abandon our initial particularist intuitions. Of course, if the theory concerned were good, intuition would have to yield (Dancy, 1993, 62).

However as I have tried to show in the preceding chapters, the theories that are at issue here are not necessarily good ones in that they are not necessarily good for contemporary art. In other words, it must be patently obvious to the reader by now that I am unhappy with the deliberative turn in democratic theory and how it devolves to the realm of contemporary art. And while I'm unhappy for a number of reasons, most particularly I would say, I'm unhappy with the attempt to particularise what is contingent and generalise what is political within the realm of contemporary art. The extreme example of this tendency – the example that defines the deliberative tendency within contemporary art and the one upon which the work of Hirschhorn, Haaning, Tiravanija and so on are ultimately founded – is the multicultural benevolence fest that is *STIR*.

STIR derived what little substance it has on the tried and tested success of Tiravanija and, like Tiravanija, claims an equally exotic pedigree. *STIR* was about taking people into account, about engagement with people.

STIR was the work of Malaysian artists, Yak Beow Seah & Chong Boon Pok and was open to the public at the Unit 2 Gallery for seven days, between 12 noon and 3pm daily, when soup was prepared and served for free.[36]

STIR exemplifies how contemporary art having almost completely lost its enigmatic character is reduced to the expression of what Fish calls 'neutral principles' vis-à-vis civic virtue and amateur ethnography. Like Fish says about neutral principles, contemporary art, having "no traction or bite of its own" becomes "an unoccupied vessel waiting to be filled by whoever gets to it first" (Fish, 2001, 7) – universal humanity (anti-racists, anti-capitalists, anti-imperialists, anti-sexist, pro-democracy), whatever.

Description

Nearest the entrance to the Unit 2 Gallery and visible from the street, a makeshift area was constructed for heating and serving soup. A long table, also makeshift, occupied the main area of the space, while at the other end of the gallery a slide projector

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[36] Because of its proximity and the way it opens on to the street, the Unit 2 Gallery was at times mistaken for a 'real restaurant where one had to pay and where something other than soup could be ordered.

showed images of the artists, their friends and family, talking, laughing and eating together.

Bigging it Up

10 June 2004 – the European and local elections fell on the same day as the discussion with Nico de Oliveira and the two Malaysian artists.[37] I wanted to put the elections into some kind of relationship with that afternoon's discussion – maybe in the way the elections seem for so many people to represent the failure of politics, the failure to really listen and engage with people. The Malaysian artists' work could maybe represent something contrary to this – something that could actually take people into account.

The discussion with Nico and the two artists took place on the penultimate day of what was considered by the organisers and Gallery to be a highly successful exhibition.

I was thinking about a way to address the work and whether it was possible to discuss how *STIR* could be considered to have succeeded or failed or if in asking this I was maybe 'limiting' myself to a 'frontal relation' with the work. I wondered whether work 'like this' refuses a question on such terms, as whatever 'happens' so to speak is deemed constitutive of the work. I obviously needed to think in 'relational' terms, or as Rogoff says, "against the grain of ideological mobilisations that are grounded in the pursuit of an end, of a conclusion, of a resolution" (*I promise it's political*, 2002, 127).

My question to Yak Beow Seah & Chong Boon Pok, namely, the central question of this thesis was whether their work and work 'like' *STIR's*, while it might be about moving us away from a frontal relation with the artwork, might also be moving us towards an increasing rationalisation of contemporary art vis-à-vis contemporary art's 'democratisation', where at best, everything is subject to a tyranny of openness, inclusiveness and tolerance.

As I have shown, in this situation contemporary art becomes about the 'representation' of democracy rather than being in and of itself 'democratic', which raises a very particular agenda, set of concerns, approach to contemporary art and position of the artist within this. In sum, it has nothing in particular to do with democracy.

One of the most interesting and most taken for granted things about *STIR* was the manner in which the artists presupposed audience complicity in conforming to certain social norms in terms of their participation. In other words, the audience would sit, eat,

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[37] Nico de Oliveira is a writer, director of the Museum Of Installation and also teaches fine art at London Metropolitan University. The Unit 2 Gallery is part of London Metropolitan University and is located on Whitechapel High Street opposite Whitechapel Art Gallery.

talk and so on, while on the other hand would just as willingly put these same social norms in question through being invited to eat soup and even bring/make their own food within the (albeit reconfigured) space of the gallery, the assumption being that certain social norms, moral and ethical obligations would prevail whilst others would be 'transgressed', thus ensuring the proper predetermined outcome.

STIR exemplifies the implicit demand of 'neutral principles' that moral judgements be universalizable. However, Jonathan Dancy rejects this kind of generalism, which he claims encourages "a tendency not to look hard enough at the details of the case before one, quite apart from any over-simplistic tendency to rely on a few rules of dubious provenance" (Dancy, 1993, 64).

The danger of this kind of generalism according to Dancy is in the sort of *looking away* it encourages which in terms of contemporary art, might amount to the displacement of the viewers' attention away from the work and towards a universalisable set of moral claims which the work supposedly carries.

The significance of *STIR* might be in the manner in which so-called 'neutral principles', or universalisable moral judgements are found to carry a substantive agenda while 'pretending' not to, by 'acting' as though the agenda which the participatory logic carried within the realm of contemporary art is natural to contemporary art. Fish says that among liberal theorists, there is a claim

> that abstractions like fairness, impartiality, mutual respect, and reasonableness can be defined in ways not hostage to any partisan agenda...it is within the space afforded by neutral principles, or so we are told, that substantive agendas can make their case without prior advantage or disadvantage, with the result that the best argument will win. But what the example of fairness – and you could substitute impartiality or neutrality or any other formal universal and it would turn out the same – shows is that there are no neutral principles, only so called principles that are already informed by the substantive content to which they are rhetorically opposed...this is what makes neutral principles so useful politically and rhetorically and gives them the capacity to do bad things. It is because they don't have the constraining power claimed for them (they neither rule out nor mandate anything) and yet have the *name* of constraints (people think that when you invoke fairness you call for something determinate and determinable) that neutral principles can make an argument look as though it has a support higher or deeper than the support provided by its own substantive trust (Fish, 2001, 3).

And because it is precisely within the realm of contemporary art that 'principles' such as fairness, impartiality, mutual respect and reasonableness are deemed to reside that

democratic theory increasingly turns to contemporary art to make democracy demonstrable. On closer inspection however, contemporary art is found to contain a substantive agenda operating on at least two fronts: firstly, through the increasing politicisation of contemporary art by those seeking to reinvigorate a vapid left-wing imaginary, and secondly, through the instrumentalisation of contemporary art in a form/manner that can be deployed as a link in the chain of equivalence deemed so fundamental to the development and deepening of the democratic revolution.

Yet what is most interesting and most political about the development of this 'logic' is not so much the 'results' or 'representation' of 'democracy' and the political as informed by this same logic, in other words, as constituted in terms of contemporary art, but more in the continued connivance of artists and theorists to get to this point of circumscribing our approach to and contemporary artists' representation of 'democracy' and the political within the realm of contemporary art. This is by far and away the most political aspect of this project.

Philosopher Agnes Heller typically reflects the views of many such artists and theorists today when she identifies the political as "the concretisation of the universal value of freedom in the public realm" (Devries and Weber, 1997, 342). However the question remains for artists, what if anything this has to do with contemporary art...as it must surely be clear by now that if contemporary art *is* political then surely it is clear by now that it is political in its antagonism and instability rather than its agonism and determinacy and hence anything but universal – Fish says as much about politics, in that:

> whether of speech or action, [politics] is not a medium capable of being stabilised; it can always take another and unexpected turn, and no amount of careful planning will assure either that it will stop on a particular dime or that it will respect no-entry signs even if they have traditionally been obeyed (Fish, 2001, 133).

Curator Andrew Renton may be engaged in just such an attempt to 'stabilise' politics and the political. On the difficulty of curating an exhibition in Jerusalem during the height of the Palestinian *Intifada* in 2002, Renton wrote of the invited artists:

> One by one, they fell away. Each artist offered one excuse or another....Such was their adamancy that I began to question my own ethical position. But I, as curator; had a duty to carry on; if all the open minds were to stay away from Jerusalem, the field would be left to fanatics (Renton, 2002, 21).

For fanatics, read – the enemy, the unrecognisable, the illegible, the antagonist, the vigilante, the zealot, the racist. As a curator – as one of the open minds who refuses to

give in to the fanatics, Renton's 'tolerance' seamlessly echoes that of Rogoff's ('Mutualities' and 'Collectivities') and Morgan's (potentially productive plurality) to form part of a general lexicon of terms used to describe that soon-to-be-arrived-at non-instrumental abode of contemporary art that escapes the ravages of belligerent Capitalism, unrepentant Fundamentalism, and all other substantive agendas.

Renton goes on to say

> The first step of any curatorial project is to understand the context in which the show will be seen. The next is to bring together a group of artists who might respond with sensitivity to the theme or context. In the end, you hope to develop new relationships between one artist and another, between artist and audience, and bind it all together with a strong sense of place....I decided I would not show Israeli artists while Palestinians could not feel equally at ease to participate (Renton, 2002, 21).

In other words while we are 'free' and encouraged to participate we should do so with a growing and particular awareness of social interchange, the larger political, economic or psychological framework and so on. Understanding how the exchange of participation takes place is obviously too important a project and outcome to be left to the vagaries and disinterestedness of public participation.

Participation is treated in terms of the kind of 'compulsory volunteerism' introduced through the US Public Service Bill in the State of Maryland 1992 – a controversial yet vain attempt to 'resurrect' some semblance of a public domain through introducing a compulsory, 70-hour voluntary service element to high schools.

Renton's fear that he might be in danger of leaving the field to the fanatics is indirectly addressed by Fish in the challenge which he sees for liberal discourse by those non-negotiable fundamental beliefs. Fish says

> The fact that religious zealots and racists are often lumped together as representative of the energies liberalism wishes to muzzle reveals much about how these arguments work. There are at least two levels of operation, one is logical: both religious zealots and racists hold controversial views and wish to intrude them into the pubic sphere by enacting them into law (by, for example, banning abortion or legalising discrimination according to race. The other is rhetorical: in liberal eyes, religious zealots – be they fundamentalist Christians or ultra-orthodox Jews or Khomeini-like adherents of Islam – are, or are very likely to be, racists. The equation is rarely made explicit; the link between zealots and racists is left to be made by those readers who will recognise in both groups a suspicious unwillingness to submit their beliefs to the correction of reason, itself

identified with a faith in rational corrigibility. By this norm, zealots and racists alike can be declared 'irrational', and once that conclusion has been reached the obligation to give reasons to the devout is no longer felt because reasons are not what they traffic in. The argument is finally circular – these people pay no heed to our reasons, and therefore they are unreasonable, and therefore we need not take into account anything they say – but the circularity will be missed by readers eager to distance themselves from anything associated with racism, even if the association is only implicit (Fish, 2001, 12).

The questions arise: is this really just another way to avoid the enemy's gaze? the substantive agenda, another way to put off going to war? So whether Hirschhorn 'implicates', Haaning 'engages' or Sierra simply 'pays' the viewer, they do so within a framework of a predetermined legibility whose normative basis is most fully expressed by a work such as *STIR*.[38]

So, as I said in the opening page of this thesis, while contemporary art *is* political and may even be so in the manner democracy is political – in its antagonism, contemporary art has in fact nothing in particular to do with democracy.

I want to conclude this thesis with a call to de-politicise contemporary art – a call to free contemporary art from the increasing moral and ethical obligations which demands contemporary art be ready to play its part in the democratic revolution, in other words to be predisposed to a participatory logic:

> Vast areas of contemporary art could be accused of giving in to the desire for an unconditional identification of advanced political and social concerns with artistic and aesthetic ones. Much of contemporary art practice seeks to displace the enigmatic character of artworks that Adorno took to be central and make artworks the bearers of a discursive meaning, statement, or position (Hirsch et al, 2003, 8).

This is not to say that contemporary art will not, nor should not be political but rather that it should not feel itself obligated to represent a certain kind of (anti)political position as natural or given to contemporary art (and I include Hirschhorn, Haaning, Tiravanija and Böhm as being complicit in this; it's just really a question of 'degrees of legibility'

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[38] This is the Aristotelian *polis* which Adrian Little claims we must return to for inspiration, especially when concerned with issues such as the promotion of happiness, virtue and the common good given that the domain of non-instrumental association is increasingly overwhelmed by economic rationality.

Little says "Aristotelian thought clearly implies that spaces and environments need to be constructed for the virtues to flourish, 'so certain economic, social and political conditions must be met if the members of a human community are to achieve their potential as rational and moral beings. All of this presupposes appropriate locations and discourses in which discussion of the common good can take place. Plainly this was a key feature of Aristotle's thinking, namely, that opportunities for discussion of the common good were likely to engender the creation of the common good" (Little, 2002, 13).

rather than one work being more or less participatory so to speak). Neither should the call to 'de-politicise' contemporary art be thought of simply as a call for autonomy for contemporary art (or a return to a debunked form of autonomy for contemporary art) – what some might consider to be the polar opposite of a participatory logic.

What I am calling for is instead an opening-up or a casting into doubt what might constitute the political within contemporary art or what in fact might be thought of as a call to 're-politicise' contemporary art. And while I'm not proposing 'autonomy' as an alternative to the logic of participation (autonomy is no different to 'participation' at the point of ideology in that both are equally a politicisation of contemporary art), I am thinking about a form of ethical particularism that I touched on in chapter three, which can reject universalising moral or ethical 'obligations', neutral principles in other words, on the grounds that they are either unreliable in that they all admit of exceptions – or unnecessary in that they tend to produce an emasculated and impoverished kind of contemporary art.

This position does not necessarily prohibit contemporary art being taken up by theorists as a link in a chain of equivalence but will nonetheless refuse an unequivocal and easy relation to democracy and its representation.

So finally, we must reject the presuppositions of an exhibition such as *STIR*. We must reject Renton's spurious ethics as we must reject the pretence of contemporary art's so-called radicality and freedom and we must embrace antagonism and fight for our own utopias. We must, in short, go to war.

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