

IT HAS NOT BEEN WRITTEN YET!

This project questions our capacity to manifest our solidarity and empathy. It challenges the collective narrative of social and societal conditioning. It wants to contribute to a form of sociability, in the contexts of actual groups or of a symbolic collectivity, and it postulates a dialogic capacity of self-narration as a form of emancipatory and solidary empowerment in a conflict-ridden and dualistic society.

It presents specialists possessing knowledge of and being skilled in the communication of a world of experience of the Other: artists, thinkers and poets who, by means of their work, bring up the status of our (social) cohesion. Through the experiences they offer, this reader feeds our existence and thus aims to contribute to the knowledge and ability that fosters our experience of life. As Mrs. Jet Bussemaker, the Dutch minister of culture, said: "Culture does not get really important until you use it to shape your own life and the life of others." ⁽¹⁾ Referring to what I wrote before: the art in this project shows cultural expressions which are not quite set (socially ambivalent) and which puts the experience of this expression on a different track (culturally ambiguous).

The Urgency

The decadent West's population is seduced by the stale rhetoric and the bureaucratic conditioning of the neoliberal regime, while the rest of the world is still tempted by the promises of capitalism. Thus, the entire world is an instrument of the same logic: the logic of formally scientific, modern economic thinking. As a systematic approach these ideas make their conditioning patterns resound in the practices of our life. In particular because this thinking in systems has a tremendous influence on the media-dominated culture and the privatised public domain, our capacity to act and think autonomously is restricted substantially. As our individual political freedom can only manifest itself with difficulty under this dominance, it looks as if we are not engaged and as if we agree with things as they are.

Yet there are movements in which we do show our individual faces and tendencies which prove that we do not let it all go by without comment. Look at Turkey and Brazil, where people demand room to participate in society in a different way, where they call for less dominance by this neoliberal regime. The need for individual engagement is

(1) Bussemakers' translation "of what Isala Berlin calls 'positive freedom': freedom only takes on meaning in the lives of people if they can really use it." (from: White paper by minister Bussemakers to as a starting point for a fundamental debate on culture, the part: the government has to play and the value of culture for society, June 2013)

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(4) The conservative neoliberal culture is so weak in its postcolonial geographic nationalism, that it puts at stake the freedom, equality and brotherhood it says it embodies, while trying to maintain the separation of powers.

(2) In the 'World of Work' report, published in mid-2013, the ILO (International Labour Organisation) warned for growing social unrest in Europe as a consequence of the increasing socio-economic inequality in Europe.

(3) A movement growing more and more urgent as the situation of the avant-garde becomes more precarious because government support, based on collective thinking, is dwindling.

also revealed, in a more passive way, by the attention for the individual within the conservative movements at both the left and right wings of the European political spectrum, passively represented and therefore with their needs only articulated in a dormant way ⁽²⁾. And look at artists who, in a progressive, tentative way, try to find room for elevation in direct, personal relations ⁽³⁾. This tentative approach to relations is what we need now: we have to exercise our bottom-up capacity to elevate ourselves in a direct relation with the others within our network. It is time for elegant anarchism (to re-pitch a 'polluted word').

Our society is no longer embodied by its social structure, but by a virus of networks. The organisation of the way we live together is determined less and less in a top-down way. Increasingly, we set the course ourselves, and increasingly we organise our own social economy. And exactly because of that, it is vitally important to mobilise our own capabilities to stop the existing wheels of power, driven by the force of habit. Often, these capabilities and the movement which feeds them are invisible, as they move under the skin of society. Where we mobilise our networks, the traditional public sector finds it hard to follow us: geographically, we are beyond the reach of their staked-out territory, which blurs the 'public' interest; economically, the possible take-off is moving towards a different market than the market for public interest. The socio-economic relation between collective and individual has changed, and demands expansion of exchanges between individuals. Even more so, now that class differences seem to have disappeared and differences of birth and origin—in particular from a neo-colonial point of view—are kept alive by the conservative neoliberal regime. In our living rooms as well as in our heads the self-evident nature of thinking in terms of birth and origin—having taken root in our behaviour after decades of neoliberal cultural production—persists stubbornly ⁽⁴⁾. If only because expectations and good manners go hand in hand.

We will have to do it ourselves. If we take a negative approach, this new stage could be seen as a sanctuary for egoists and we might become afraid of individualism or inequality. On the other hand, we can take a good look at each other, and stake on our will to use the social capacity. We should do that by showing our true face and appealing to the people's ability to transcend their position. And of course—in these times of crises, tackling this problem is quite a challenge: one does not know where to begin and what means to

use. So we have to tentatively approach our relations, because collective provisions are increasingly unable to find their place and top-down organisations are less and less able to offer any help from a 'public' point of view.

In the transition from top-down collectivism to bottom-up individualism our collective freedom also is at odds with our individual freedom. Tolerance seems to have disappeared, now that the multicultural dogma propagated by optimistic (leftish) sociologists appears not to be viable, because it results in relativism which makes it impossible to determine the status of good and evil.

An egalitarian society appears to diminish the value of emancipation. Our passive tolerance was a repressive tolerance. It did not ask us anything, but kept on playing. It rumbled on like an empty barrel at a time when the neoliberal regime elbowed out the good to be replaced by the beautiful and brought in the games to suppress the demand for bread. In the culture created in this way, emancipation, as a fundamental value, is increasingly under pressure ⁽⁵⁾. Values cannot be propagated as being absolute—that would turn us into fundamentalists, but they can be treated as fundamental, as inspiration and as a reference. Values then act in the context in which they move and are appropriated, in which we render account to our deep humanity. That may be the reason why the call for a kind of global humanity from the post-political masses is growing...

The general is never specific and the specific is never general. If every human being is unique, it means that every time we pigeon-hole a group of people, that is repressive both towards the people who are labelled and towards the people left out. If we are emancipated, there is no need to worry: we would not be afraid to let our soul speak and break with our friends, family and our (supposed) social status by showing our true face, for a start on social media where we compete in self-censorship ⁽⁶⁾. It is our fundamental right to distrust or contradict everything and everybody—to follow our own path. That is implied by our freedom of speech.

We are experiencing a transition in which the importance of elevation for people, as a well-defined group in a well-defined area (an ethical and sociological observation of society), is shifting towards the use of our capacity to elevate people in a network that runs through territories, different cultural shades and economic relations: becoming more personal. Here, the public and collective organisation of our society is

(5) Which has never been evaluated for its public role.

(6) Not only for fear of social consequences, but also for fear of totalitarian control and its possible effects.

(7) It is not the externalised technocratic motivation which duplicates itself in a material sense, but an internalised production which takes place between us and externalises in an immaterial sense.

changing into a more subjective organisation, in which we render account to ourselves and others as one man to another, in the fundamental practices of our lives. And doing that, the authority of a top-down fixed collective will shift to an ephemeral group of sympathisers, participating from the bottom upwards.

The past, the moment and the future are flexible in their subjective experience and their subjective positioning—more is happening in this flexibility than if past, present and future would be written for us. Because it stretches reality we lose our hold on a subject or a prescribed target and time seems to dissolve. This, however, is time slowing down, during which we reposition and re-imagine our understanding of the subject. It feels as if the strategic / instrumental rationality of our bureaucratised mill is coming to a standstill. This is caused by the fact that we have no object to hold on to. But within the subject, an acceleration does occur: we become more creative, more innovative and we deepen the capacity we invest into the ephemeral networks in which we live. Life becomes an operation. It's not the positioning themselves, but the subjects: not the thing, but man, not the signified but the significance ⁽⁷⁾.

We do not live anymore in a time of collective investments, but in a time of subjective impulses.

We do not live anymore in a time of collective responsibilities, but in a time of individual responsibilities.

We do not live anymore in a time of collective action, but in a time of subjective action.

We live in a time when we believe in this reality and in which we should all consistently be doing our very best

Thus we close the ranks of variety while rendering account. We meet them in good conscience. In this broadening of culture's potential and by allowing it to position in this confusion, a new marketplace of life will open up. The carryings-on of art shows a different face than those of day-to-day culture. Art offers the opportunity to emancipate within a culture. While culture is unable to pronounce upon the over- and undertones in its landscape, art is free to do so. If culture has to be fed on the participatory ability of our democracy, art is the means to feed dualism in a democratic culture. If democracy changes from top-down to bottom-up, this means that dualism has to find a position in the street. If we, in an open relation with art's social texture, face up to our own world of experience and allow ambivalence to enter, we will overcome our instinctive fear and we will learn to live in the flow. We should allow our life to happen, instead

of working against the flow, or stemming the flow by formalising and bureaucratising it in the service of the regime.

Whatever emancipation is to a democracy, ambiguity is to culture: both are liberating and disturbing basic conditions for an open and honest way of life. It seems as if this human capacity is becoming too alien in our increasingly fast and pragmatic culture⁽⁸⁾ (or maybe I just don't feel at home in my own country any more). To prove that we can still embody our freedom, starting from our own spirit, in the culture we share, and to see to it that we are free to emancipate ourselves in our own life, we have to build a life with and through this ability (art).

The Act

Together with designer Dave Keune, responsible for the exhibition design he produced with his team, we created a setting which aimed at challenging the spectator to zoom in on the works, in order to reach a deeper understanding of the social texture which was displayed. Apart from that, the design aimed at providing the white space between the works with a support. Anticipating the behavioural patterns of the dominant culture, we wanted to catalyze the interest in a deeper relation with its social texture situated and framed. This we did by, figuratively speaking, creating an 'island empire' in which each work was born in a cloud of pleasingly superficial, noncommittal fragments on square supports, which would provide a pleasant, hollow theme throughout the exhibition⁽⁹⁾. Using this pleasant and inviting surface, we wanted to incite the public to zoom in on the social texture of the valuable cultural exceptions we showed. In a stripped-down version, the theme returns in this book, designed by Eva van de Schans, Inedition.

With this we anticipate the rift between art's natural arena and the arena of culture⁽¹⁰⁾. Maybe that is the reason why I held on to the exhibition space as a location where art is offered to our experience as a free consultation; the fact is, that this is an untainted test plot in which the works of art can function separately and side by side⁽¹¹⁾. On one hand, the white cube offers opportunities for tranquility and concentrated communication among those present and between them and the works, but on the other hand it is not public, or not public enough, to start the cultural flow with hegemonic capacity⁽¹²⁾.

That is exactly why art is shown here in a horizontal way: directly confronting the public, right in front of them.

(8) In which the concept of creativity is deprived of its practical autonomy as a consequence of the neoliberal regime.

(13) And wants to let itself be known and wants to communicate in the experience-oriented poetry of its ambiguity...

(9) More about the exhibition design in the text on page 12 of this book.

(10) Resulting in more than 20,000 visitors, most of them reacting positively.

(11) Here, the works function like social interfaces which offer knowledge and experiences about the other close to us; that is why I use the term 'social texture'.

(12) For that, the 'MediaMarkt' is too powerful as a competition.

(14) hopefully without becoming cynical.

The established cultural supply is expanded by a stock of non-established contemporary art. Because this art, within its social texture, emancipates from its beauty, this kind of authentic art lacks the legitimacy of an avant-garde, as it used to be awarded by the cultural capital⁽¹³⁾. It lacks the kind of top-down awarded social basis we know from official dogmas about the extent social change can be effected by policies. In reality it does not find a social basis in the nationalist conservatism that aims to infect our popular culture. The gestures in this book are no culture, but stimulate culture as a test installation of and for social texture—for a vertical opening of our cultural horizon. It appeals directly to our heart and poses the question what the effect is of our solidarity within the group or the collective we are part of, and of the empathy we feed into others.

In a pleasant atmosphere and setting, this project seeks out an unpleasant situation. It challenges the weak spots. An Other positive emerges from the negative and thus tries to provide it with new dignity: beyond the postcolonial culture of a neoliberal regime, in the direction of a borderless world and subversive towards culture on a geopolitical scale down to the proximity of our homely politics. Our world of experience makes a landing in the borderlands of its moral and ethical understanding and capability.

If it ends up in the domain where we experience the social texture as ambivalent, it will awaken us to the ideological limits of our capacity for personal experience and social relations in praxis. In the ambivalence of this situation we experience our situation as if from the other side of the medal—as a restriction, and therefore as source of potential extremism. We understand ourselves through the eyes of a minority or find ourselves back as a minority, simply because we all are special if we dare to be special. Suddenly, our capacity can take in a different position.

In recognition of social ambivalence, you will live as a god regardless what happens: whatever god, to whoever... In the pleasure and recognition of ambiguity in the manifestation of your culture, you live as a man among men⁽¹⁴⁾. The social texture proposed here is ambiguous, but shockingly sharp in the negative, and challenging in the positive with which it incites to overcome statuses. Perhaps even a dualistic approach rooted in free subjects is possible!

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