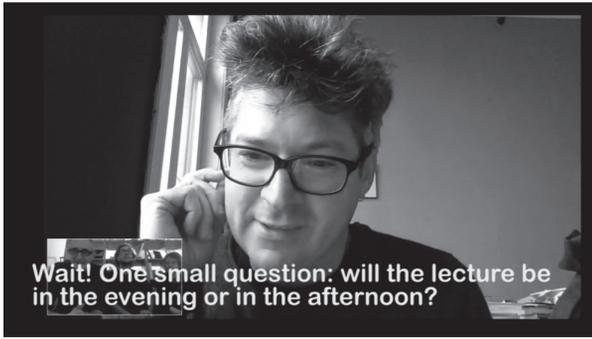


Pascal Gielen about

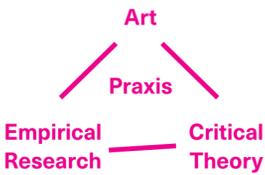
The murmuring of the artistic multitude



—End of the afternoon!
Ah, well: good afternoon then, thanks for inviting me by skype, and I will try to give a lecture about the back side, a prelude of my book *The murmuring of the artistic Multitude, Global art, Memory and Post-Fordism*.

Prelude

I will first tell a bit about my background and experience as a sociologist. First slide shows my books, very important to the trajectory of my work, and on top we should now see a triangle.



On the left you can read 'Empirical Research': it's what I was trained in as a classical sociologist. But at a certain moment, as a sociologist of art, I got a little frustrated at how a lot of sociologists were always talking *around* art and not *about* art. I had the feeling that a lot of colleagues did very sound methodological and empirical research, but asked completely wrong questions when it came to art.

I came to this conclusion by talking to artists, and I became aware that art had to play a more pivotal, central role in my research. It is a form of speculative thinking, and as such it is important that I take it seriously in my research. For instance, when speaking with the artist Pistoletto on the subjects of exodus, he said, "no, it is *immodus*..." You have to take those concepts seriously. I take art to stand for subjectivity and speculative thinking, things that are absolutely forbidden in academic sociology of art. Moreover, I think sociology as such—we might call it social reality—is in fact a very conservative discipline. It is only looking at what is happening and does not dare to build on what *can* happen. Speculative thinking was very important for me.

One last thing that inspired me was reading *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.² I was touched by the critical theory rather than the critical thinking, we might call it the Marxist tradition. What touched me in *Empire* was that, in a way, this book became a bestseller after 9/11 but it was written before... They foresaw 9/11. That's why it became a bestseller. What I found interesting was *how* they could foresee the 9/11 attacks in the USA. They explained it through the notion empire, a kind of world constitution. *Since this is the way the world is currently functioning from a macro sociological perspective, this will happen.* That made me look at my own practice in a completely different way. I saw a lot of sociologists around me who, like Hardt and Negri, made no effort to hide what their research agenda was. For example, in the 1980s all the research in the sociology of culture was about cultural diversity. Today it is about cultural entrepreneurship. It is a very strange kind of agenda for sociological research. For me, critical theory is to reflect on your own practice and your own research agenda. Where does it come from? Where do your questions actually come from? This is very important for me.

This triangle marks all the books I make. I try to balance these three elements: while I remain a sociologist who does empirical research, I also try to involve speculative thinking—and this is what art or subjective thinking, represents for me—and reflect about my own research agenda.

So this is what I do, this is my practice: it is theory-based empirical research, which at times also uses empirical findings to theorise in a speculative and subjective way. Sometimes I've been completely wrong. Sometimes my research was too subjective, sometimes too empirical. At times people find my thinking too wild and inconsistent. It is very important for me to try and balance this. *The Murmuring* is also a matter of trial and error. This was a long prelude, I know, but this is the kind of thinking that I am very much involved in, and I don't have yet the solutions or outcomes, but this introduction explains where I stand, and introduces the book.

how much time you need to produce a work, how much it costs to make it, and how much you should ask for it. You learn to measure yourself. Central is money exchange, which defines the relationship and also the time. The notion of deadline is a market definition; you measure your time against the deadline, and you are in a relation of trade and exchange. I don't need to say a lot about this but I mention the auction as a ideal or pure example, because the auction is *only* about money. You can call Sotheby's anonymously and say, "I want this work". You don't need to know anything about the art; it is purely about money. This being said, there are a lot of market situations, even in commercial galleries, that are not solely about the market. They are mixed; there are always social and artistic relations involved.

Then the last field is the **Civil space**. This is the space where you argue about the quality of your work or where you represent your work. This sphere is about quality and not about quantity. Here you try to develop public value. A public museum, the media, or even a file that you send to the government in which you argue why they should give you money for an exhibition is for me the public sphere. Here you discuss why you do what you do, and argue why it is important in general for society. The last thing I like to say about this square—and that is the reason why it is placed under **Modern Art**: this pictures the situation in making art that developed after the 19th century. It lasted until the 1970s and 1980s, when we started speaking about contemporary art; this is about modern art. What does this mean? Until the 1970s, those four squares or spheres were institutionally protected on a collective level. For example, the domestic sphere was very much protected by the institution 'family'. Young artists in particular used to say, "For the first ten years I lived off my partner". This completely changes after the 1970s. I don't want to go too deep into this, but I think that the institutional *collective protection* of all those fields—there's also for example a huge problem with the civil sphere, with the museum—disappeared after the 1970s, '80s, '90s. And yet, on an individual level, those spheres remained very important in the artists' minds. For them it is always important to find a balance between those four spheres.

So it is not good to stay too long on the 'Market', because you start repeating yourself. Classical. It is sometimes good to go back to the 'Domestic' sphere, or the 'Peers', for research and development: to reinvent yourself again. At the same time it is also not good to stay only in the Domestic' sphere, because then art becomes therapy or a hobby; it is not professional art. You need all four spheres, and you need a balance. This is why I call those spheres an artistic biotope. It is also an infrastructure: for a good artistic dynamic in a city, you need to these four: a domestic service, peers, a market, and a civil space. This, I believe, has been the situation until the 1970s, and then things started to change.

Next slide:

FLAT & WET

What happened? As a metaphor, I often say that the world is becoming more flat and wet. Before the 1970s, the art world—but also the western world in general—was organised in **vertical** pillars, vertical institutions like the museum; museums gave you grandeur, stood on history and sanctioned the art-historical canon. This started shifting around the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1990s, by a world that was becoming increasingly **horizontal**: so flat and wet. From the 1990s we start surfing on the internet, surfing on the surface: we jump from project to project. You need to be very well connected because otherwise you fall off the flat earth. So we are living more and more in a networked world, which is flat, and we are surfing on its surface. And surfing means that you cannot find depth anymore, you don't have time for going deep, digging deep into history. And you lose the grandeur of looking up at the sky, toward heaven. In the nineteenth century there was grandeur, and you *got* grandeur, as embodied by the classical bourgeois idea of the museum, and the museum visit. In the flat condition of the contemporary this disappeared.

Next slide:

FLAT & WET again: 3 historical shifts (1970—2000)

We are now looking at the three historical shifts that all took place between 1970 and 2000. There have been a **political** shift, a shift in **labour** and a shift in the **artistic field**. I am not a historian, so I don't know what the connection is between those shifts: but these are facts, I think. The first shift was from the political to the post-political, and it is usually connected to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. That meant the collapse of communism and the end of history, as defined by Fukuyama: a moment in which there is only one ideology, Liberalism.³ That's why I talk about post-politics. When there is only one ideology left there are no oppositions anymore. It was also the deconstruction of the welfare state, which started in the 1970s. I call this ideology **Repressive Liberalism**, but today this is called neoliberalism.⁴ I don't call it neoliberalism because it is

not about freedom; it is about the regression of freedom. I will try to explain this later.

The second shift took place in the field of labour, which I call a shift from Fordism to post-Fordism. And the third shift that made the world flat took place in the art in the 1980s, with the rise of museums of contemporary art. We don't call ourselves modern artists, but contemporary artists. This also involved a loss of depth, a loss of history. The contemporary is nowhere, it has no future and it has no past. It is about who is most visible, shouting the loudest. Modernity was a project, an arrow that went from the past to the future.

One remark. You have seen I use a lot of 'post-this', 'post-that', and you might have thought, "oh God, now Pascal is going to talk about post-modernism". Again! But what I want to point out is that we are still living in a post-modernly organised world. The way our institutions are organised today is post-modern. It is a kind of post-age, in which we have lost history and we live in a networked society. We also live in a post-political and post-democratic way—just look at what happened last week in the USA.⁵ For me this is really a symbol of the fact that we live in a post-political reduction of things. This flat world is marked by three very important shifts that all took place in the same time frame: starting from the 1970s, and ending maybe in 2008 with the banking crisis.

Next slide:

REPRESSIVE LIBERALISM

I will try to explain what repressive liberalism is. I will only use two of the three quotes in this slide. One of them is by the Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis, from his book entitled—though I don't think it got translated: *The Utopia of the Free Market*. In it he refers to an interesting quote based on economic research:

"While governments cut back everywhere and regulate tasks to the (good) market, the supervisors who must guard the freedom of that market grow and grow."⁶

What does this mean? It is a very interesting paradox. He says, more and more given to the market, is given for free—do it autonomously! organise-yourself—and at the same time you see a growing control. He then draws an example of this from research by an economist who analysed healthcare in the Netherlands. He says, "In 2006 a law was voted which privatised the healthcare system in the Netherlands". What is interesting about this is that the percentage of GDP spent on healthcare in 2005, before the voting, was 7,2 per cent: two years after the voting, in 2008, it was 30,3 per cent. You would think with the free market the prices would have gone down, but instead they went up. And Hans Achterhuis asks: Why?

Because when you privatise healthcare you need more control. In the past this control was organised by the state, but now they also privatised the control. So they gave the task of control to a lot of small companies and offices that oversaw the auditing and accreditation review process in hospitals. But when you privatise control you get competition over control. Those companies represent themselves as holier-than-the-Pope, because anyone who passes the audits is guaranteed to be subsidised. So in the free market system you get a competition over control. This makes the system very rigid. There may not be more rules, but the rules are applied inflexibly, there is a competition in rigidity. This gives a very repressive feeling to the organisation of things. That's why I talk about repressive liberalism. It guarantees freedom for the market, and at the same time it generates enormous control. Today we see this happen everywhere. In the art field, museums but also art schools. I have been working for the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen and Fontys Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Tilburg for ten years, and we have had seven accreditation reviews and audits in these ten years. The name of the last, private office that did the accreditation for the art academy in Tilburg was *Control*. The fact that *Control* has become a brand means it is considered a good thing. And this is the system the art world: artistic institutions, museums, residencies are more and more involved in. This kind of complexity emerges whenever you try to organise yourself within a market situation: you need to exactly follow the rules and you are controlled. This reminded me of a quote from a book that I read at nineteen but didn't understand at all at the time—Herbert Marcuse's *The One Dimensional Man*:

"Under the rule of a repressive whole, liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination".⁷

See the very strange paradox. I believe it is this paradox that Hans Achterhuis was talking about. It's also what repressive liberalism is about: making people *free*, *free* on an individual level, turning them all into free-lancers, so that politicians have all the tools in their hands to develop a sort of totalitarian regime. Once more, it happened last week in the United States. We see this kind of collapse more and more in our world. Maybe Marcuse in 1960 put it a little bluntly, but more generally today repressive liberalism is a tendency in policies, certainly in Europe, also governing the cultural artistic field.

Next slide:

REPRESSIVE LIBERALISM



This has an influence on the whole biotope; on the Domestic sphere, Peers, Market, and Civil. Of course the influence of a growing market could have been foreseen. But what is important for me is that the market took over the other spheres that were autonomous and protected by the institutions. Now institutions no longer protect them. It means that market thinking re-organises something in those other spheres, brings in a quality of the market into the other spheres, and this becomes very problematic: Measurement and quantification enter the other spheres. For example: "home entertainment" entered the domestic sphere. Home entertainment is quantified creativity; it is a measured and formatted creativity. I see this with my children when they are using a drawing program on their iPad. We also see it in our interviews with architects: what design software does to their creativity, by pre-emptively excluding risks even before the creative process begins.

The same happens in 'Peers'. Today art academies offer courses in the "creative industries". And what do students learn? They learn to measure themselves. For example: The professor of arts management of the Rock Academy told his students that pop songs should be four and a half minutes long, and no more. It is formatted.⁸ If you follow this format you can sell your song to the market. Three references—not ten—in a single pop song. You learn to format your creativity. As for cultural industries in the Civil sphere, the Guggenheim Bilbao is a good example. It is a completely quantified museum. They count every artist that they exhibit. For example: their policy program explicitly states that eighty per cent of the artists they show should be dead artists, because dead artists attract more people, more visitors. They count! The Guggenheim museum in Bilbao is a quantified space. You have the feeling that you go see an exhibition—which in Latin means *making an argument public*—in a civil space dealing with quality, but at the same time it is quantified. You see this everywhere, museums count their program. This is what is happening to the entire biotope in this repressive system.

Next slide:

THE ART WORLD as an economy of ideas

How does this affect labour in the art field itself? The art field becomes more and more what I call a post-Fordist labour sphere: an economy of ideas. Two things on post-Fordism, very briefly. The term "Fordism" derives from Henry Ford, an entrepreneur who organised labour in a specific way we all know: the assembly line, with fixed jobs and fixed working hours. *Post-Fordism* stands for flexible jobs, hyper mobility, creativity, and started around the 1970s. I won't go further into it now. In *The Murmuring* I wrote about this in detail, for now I just want to say: this organises—also in the art world—what I call: an economy of ideas. For me it is of interest now: how does an economy of ideas function, and how does it differ from the nineteenth-century form of organisation of the art world? I tried to find out by interviewing many people from the boards of biennales, curators, and artists.

I asked them questions starting from my own amazement, for instance: why was Charles Esche from Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven selected for the Kwangju Biennale? What does he know about the context, etc.? I was always amazed about such choices. So I asked several boards how they choose a curator, and I also asked curators about their selection criteria for choosing artists. Is it all about name and fame? Sometimes it is. Is it because they are good organisers? Most of the time not: curators are often very bad managers. This is the reason why we had only one biennial in Brussels: the curator was a very bad manager. But when they make a sincere and honest choice, not based on financial or political reasons, it's because they hope the curator will come up with a **good idea**. But then the question is: what is a good idea within the economy of ideas? A good idea has to be a **new idea**, innovative, otherwise it is not a good idea. That is primary, and it is a basically modernist way of thinking. But what was already apparent with Harald Szeeman in the 1970s is that this is not enough. You also have to come up with an idea that is related to the context in which you operate. An artist is not only required to come with a good artwork, idea, or concept: no, her work also has to relate to the context in which it is to be exhibited. That is why you cannot cut-and-paste the same exhibition from Istanbul to New York. They will kill you if you do this. Your work or your exhibition will have to relate to the context. That's why I believe a good idea needs to be an **appropriate idea**, it has to be related to the context. Moreover, you always test your ideas against their context. Many artists and

curators today conduct several rounds of interviews before they do a biennial, just to gauge the political, social and artistic environment they will operate in. This means ideas also need to be **opportunitistic ideas**. By this I don't give a moral judgment, it means that they have to take into account the opportunities afforded by the environment. What is interesting is that for a contractor or a board of a biennial it is very difficult to know whether somebody can come up with a good idea this time. You'll never know if he or she will succeed. So it is a gamble, a bet: when you contract someone it is a gamble.

This is very important: what is contracted in this new situation is **the promise of a good idea**. You don't contract a good artwork anymore; you contract a good idea of an artwork, which is very ephemeral. It is something you cannot grasp, you never know whether it will work. So even when you know a curator or an artist did very good jobs in the past, you never know if they will come up with something new, something *good* in this new situation. It is a risk. Promise is 'capitalised': that is the core of post-Fordism or immaterial labor.

Today the art world is organised like this, which means that artists will try to find out who will be the new curator of the Venice Biennial and speculate on what he or she will do, and then try to articulate their own work in relation to the subject or concept of the exhibition. This is the situation today. When you organise art like this you cannot organise it in a classical fordist or institutional way any longer.

Next slide:

THE ART SCENE the post-industrial factory

That's why today we organise scenes. Scenes are the new factories in the economy of ideas. Scenes regulate the exchange of ideas in today's (new) art world. The image we see here is Michelangelo Pistoletto doing a performance at the opening of the Venice Biennial. The Venice Biennial is a typical example of a scene, a place to be. Today we see that art scenes, creative scenes but also design and fashion scenes are greatly promoted, especially by Richard Florida, the author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*.⁹ In that highly influential book, he says that every city needs an art scene for *economic* reasons. But I look at a scene as a sociologist. For me it is much more interesting to understand how it functions: so not as a financial tool but as a social mechanism. To understand what a scene is I looked for a definition in my first-year handbook of sociology. It says a scene is not a group, not a subculture or a category. A group has membership, membership cards, a scene doesn't, is not as fixed as a group. A scene is also not a subculture like the punk movement, where everybody wears the same clothes and listens to the same music. Maybe in the 1970 and 1980s this still was the case; everybody in the visual arts scene was wearing black and wore glasses like mine. This is over I think; there is no fixed identity anymore. But you can still recognise a scene. When you fly from Tokyo to Brussels or Antwerp you immediately recognise when you are on the scene. What does a scene do? That interests me: what is a scene about? A scene is not only a museum or a biennial; it is also the cafes and the restaurants where you need to be seen. These are the places where, as an artist, you get your assignments. This is where you have the informal talks with other curators and other artists. It could be, for instance, the opening of a biennial: these are the places that organise work for you.

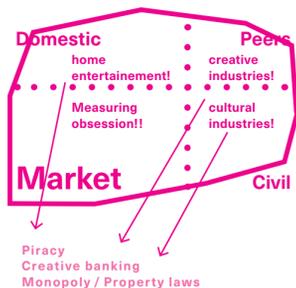
For example, designers in London were asked how many hours they worked, and to specify the nature of the work. In the diary they were asked to keep for a month, they mentioned that they spend 30 per cent of their time *being on the scene*, where they get new assignments, in informal talks with other people. These relationships are very important. A scene organises an economy of ideas for us. It is a kind of urban intimacy, in an in-between zone between being professionals and friends. Many curators I interviewed said, 'my friend Boris Groys', or, 'my friend Hans Ulrich Obrist'... It made me wonder what the status of "friends" is, in this situation? Sometimes they really *are* friends— even sharing each other's bed—and sometimes it is a purely professional relationship. The scene organises this zone between promises and needs, between the domestic and the working space.

The scene also organises something else. It is clear that the scene is part of professional life. **You need to be seen on the scene in order to be on the scene**. It plays a role in getting new assignments but what is equally important is that it also regulates and controls the exchange of ideas. How does this work? A very important rule in the art world is that, as a curator for example, you never, never share your *new* idea under four eyes. You need witnesses to see you on the scene when you are sharing a new concept or idea, otherwise someone can steal it. And in an economy of ideas, an idea is money. So it is very important to always have witnesses. The scene organises relevant witnesses for you. This is what the scene organises for us and how it organises the art world. And this is of course also the main topic of gossip: "He has stolen my ideas!", a classical social sanction, as a sociologist would call it.

Next slide:
FREE-LANCERS

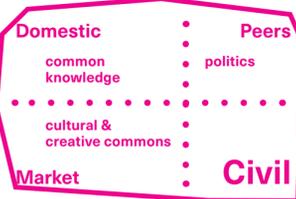
What the scene is also organising is the feeling that we have the freedom to travel the world from scene to scene, from exhibition to exhibition, residency to residency... but this freedom also makes us work; you need to be seen on the scene otherwise you don't get work. You need to be connected, you need to have a homepage, to be active on facebook. The same freedom to decide what you will do makes you work, makes you active. This is the situation we live in today. I just remember a beautiful lecture by German artist Hito Steyerl about the free-lancer.¹⁰ She explained the word free-lance comes from the samurai, "a mercenary soldier, a 'free lance', that is, a soldier who is not attached to any particular master or government and can be hired for a specific task." A free lancer fights for the best bidder. They have no political opinion, no union, they simply follow the best bidder. And this, I think, is why free-lancers like curators and artists are such weak political animals. They are not part of a union anymore, don't have social security; they are not protected. I believe this is very important, how the art world and its attitude promotes this post-Fordist labour ethics. That is also a central statement in *The Murmuring*: the way labour in the art world is organised today—this already started in the nineteenth century—is in fact copied by other economies. Even the financial world for example works in this fashion: if the promise of an idea that you have will bring in more contracts, you will be awarded with a bonus. This whole system is copied, in a very selective way, in other spheres of the economy.

Next slide:
FEEDBACK



Let's come back to our model. All this offers a very interesting feedback on the market itself. For example: from home entertainment to piracy. What happens is that the market takes over other fields, which has a very strange feedback on the market itself, and even blocks it. My children are illegally downloading stuff from the internet, and they are manipulating design programs, so they are doing piracy. And piracy is a very bad thing for the market. The same is true for creative industries, and creative banking. The creative industry advances the most creative people to the centre of the financial work. Mathematicians who model complicated and creative derivatives have led eventually to the crisis of 2008, to creative banking. And this creative banking is blocking classical, real economy and the market. The virtual economy is a very problematic thing. This is what is happening at this very moment. The same is happening in the cultural industries. If you give the major players in the pop industry the opportunity to negotiate for new laws in the civil domain you will get monopolies. Think about Bill Gates. What you get is a kind of re-organised system that, interestingly, blocks the market. The free market as it was defined by Adam Smith, as a working system, has blocked itself because of this feedback of other fields.¹¹ I think the creative industry is in this situation, and this is the situation that we are living in today: the post-2008 situation. The market as Adam Smith intended it is dysfunctional. This is very problematic.

Next slide:
SO WHAT CAN WE DO?
The constitution of the common



This is of course an open question, and I am now speaking mainly as a subjective, speculative sociologist. I think we should try to make the civil sphere bigger, big enough for it to take over the other spheres. I think we can never go back to the first scheme, where there was a clear separation between the various spheres, which was collectively, institutionally protected. We have to re-organise on a more tactical level and enter a hybrid area between the domestic, the market, the civil, and peers and develop their strategies. I know it sounds abstract, but now I will make it more specific. We should try to bring common knowledge back into the domestic sphere, to make knowledge free, free to use, to be creative again. Not as in free beer but

as in *free speech*. A good example is Wikipedia. Museums too can organise this, with free admission. Education can do this. Giving knowledge and information for free is extremely important. In the four spheres it means, for example, that art schools should encourage students to reflect on their position as artists; they should tackle the whole discussion about the artist as an entrepreneur. Art schools should at least question: Why do we all have to become entrepreneurs? What does it mean to be a creative entrepreneur, what are the advantages or the disadvantages? Politics doesn't mean party politics, it really means reflecting on one's position in society and even shaping it, thinking about how to live together. Reflection, reflectivity is important. For those who are in the market it could be very interesting to come up with mixed strategies with private and public institutions, in order to make things free again. The creative commons as introduced by philosopher Lawrence Lessig, for instance... I believe ideas of this kind are important.¹² Artist-in-residency programs could consider: How can we feed the common process, without becoming reactionary and claiming a need for rigid institutions to protect us? We have to organise ourselves in a collective way. I also believe that the individual position of the artist is over. It is done. As an individual you are a free-lancer, a weak political animal. We need to organise ourselves in a collective way.

Last slide:
'I am concerned with making art politically. But I'm not concerned with making political art.'

This remark by Thomas Hirschhorn I find extremely important. It means: positioning your work within society in a way that creates new spaces for your art, and have influence on giving form to society with what you are doing. I end with another quote by an artist, Thierry Geoffroy: "The emergency will replace the contemporary". I think we have to go beyond the "contemporary" in the contemporary art world. I think we have to think really hard about what is the emergency of the artist today in society and how we can defend the commons. How can I protect my autonomy? Next to *how do I make my art*, you have to think how to *organise* your work and your autonomy in society. We have to learn how we can *collectively* protect our autonomy, and even to *make* space for it. A circus is a good example for this. They put up a tent and create a space, and their organisation is very heterogeneous. It is about creativity, it is an economy, it is about negotiating with politics – because they have to put up the tent! It is about family life, it is all mixed. I think this can be a good example, a model, of how we can defend our autonomy as artists and do what we want; something that isn't contemporary but something that has an emergency: it is emergent.

Rob Hamelijnck: You said that to be individual you need to be collective. That's a wonderful contradiction. PG: I would not use he word individual, I would say singular; to be a singular artist, to be autonomous, you need to be collective, or you have to organise yourself in a collective way. Not only collectively with other artists but also in a heterogeneous way, including economists, lawyers... a mixed organisation. This is very interesting to think about. I also think about cooperatives. I am not saying that **everybody should make collective work, but that we have to organise collectively to keep our singular autonomy alive, and also to make it performative, in society.**

Nienke Terpsma: What does it mean in this light to be in a city or in the countryside or small town, where you can't only be with peers simply because there aren't enough peers. In the periphery you *have* to organise heterogeneously. PG: Yes, let's go back to the first slide, the one with the squares of the domestic and the peer situation. I forgot to say that these two squares are the basis for research and development. To be temporarily isolated in a collective way is very much necessary for creativity, I think. It doesn't mean that you *always* have to be disconnected. I remember a romantic artist from the 1980s who said in an interview: "The social will be the death of you!" This, I think, is a completely wrong interpretation of what an artist is. But of course there are moments, and that is probably what he meant, that it is killing. You need to be isolated and on your own sometimes to renew yourself, to research and develop. But you also have to go back to the world.

Organisations that operate towards the margins, in the periphery, not in the city, not in the hyper-network, not on the scene, are very important and keep the connection or even *organise* the connection with the scene and play the role of a gatekeeper to the scene. Gatekeeping and protection is very important, but it has to be organised. It is very easy nowadays—even when you're in the so called margins of the art field—to be connected, and sometimes it is even problematic for artists that to be always connected. You can be at the margins and at the same time completely in the centre. This can be a threat to both these domains. Arthur de Pury: Are you optimistic that artists can work in this common way? We tried many many times, in different projects, and my impression is that it

only works for a few days, and then everybody goes home. PG: I don't know if I need to be optimistic or pessimistic. The coming 5 years, together with 7 others, I will do a research about these new organisations in Europe. It is entitled: Sustainable Creativity – because for sustainability you get money. (laughs) It will be about this question: How do you organise? How to make a sustainable organisation in the long run, that functions?

Some Esprit d'Escalier questions over mail

ADP: Could you give some examples of groups of art related people who are experimenting new models of autonomy, and how they manage to renew a political message within the scene?

PG: When you scan the website of the Peer-2-Peer foundation you could find more than 1000 examples. Those examples come certainly not all out of the art world. That's in fact my point, artists need to organise themselves much more heterogeneously when they want to safeguard their autonomy. Let's stick with one of my favourite examples to make this clear. *Recetas Urbanas* appears to be taking such a new model of autonomy the furthest, paradoxically by building houses, schools and community centres wherever associations and communities deem them necessary. So, *Recetas Urbanas* does not cater to the free market, or to governments, but rather to citizens who feel a civil need. In response to their requests, *Recetas* offers strategies to occupy public spaces to create agonistic places in which the opportunity for action, appropriation, occupation and use of the city is given back to the citizens through architectural interventions and actual buildings.

Rather than working in the margins, *Recetas Urbanas*' proposals transit between legality and illegality, playing with the established order to re-articulate laws and to compose new social and economic exchanges around building projects. In Gramscian terms, *Recetas Urbanas* disarticulates existing discourses and praxis by offering moments of re-identification in which citizens become the initiators of actions, appropriations and occupations as responses to their collective needs and common necessities. Rather than a withdrawal, *Recetas Urbanas* provides citizens with the tools to engage, as Chantal Mouffe would say, with the authorities and dispute their power from within. And those articulations and alternative social compositions do not stay at the level of the local spot or community. *Recetas* went beyond such folk politics by building a huge national and even European network (The Group for the Reuse and Redistribution of Resources) of exchange of knowledge, (building) materials, and practices. In this network, for example, legal precedents established in one city are communicated and used to fight for the same civil rights in another city. So, the network is not only used to exchange information, but also to develop counter-hegemonic strategies and practices.

Recetas works in my eyes as how a new (art) institution of the future could work, which mean operating in a permanent liquid urban space of constant change. The autonomous social space they generate, independent of state and market, are best understood as circus big tops, erected only temporarily and then put up again somewhere else later. In other words, *Recetas*' temporary architectures are mobile units that only sporadically set up a perimeter. The area within this perimeter is not of a purely physical nature. It is a social domain in which social interactions are also shaped in a different manner. Because of the actions of *Recetas*, homogeneous communities and neighbourhoods are constantly challenged and stimulated by experimenting with other ways of housing and living and by demonstrating their viability. These lifestyles, by which artists crank up the new autonomies, will as *Recetas* shows in any case be highly hybrid. Just as in circus life, they will integrate private life and work, family and professionals, friends and enemies, celebration and creative production, art and economy. Only when, unlike the traditional circus, this itinerant company breaks open its own community and reflectively shapes itself in dissensus, like *Recetas* – in short, when this neo-tribal crowd becomes political – will their artistic ideas become operational. Artists that want to create new autonomous spaces deliberately continuously balance on the tightrope between legality and illegality and therefore cannot operate purely artistically or architecturally but is always forced to also think and act politically. Only in such a hybrid, open autarky can artists develop sufficient sovereign power to cre-

ate personal work and constitute new social figurations. In short, only when they manage to shape such constitutions – that are both artistic and social – will they feed life as grown-up artists in confrontation with their residents and passers-by. Within this fluid world, artists themselves are the performers of a common ground on which they can stand high and dry for a while, together with others.

ADP: At CAN we decided years ago to have free admission for all our exhibitions and events. This decision was of course based on the idea of making culture free—commons, etc.—but it was also political. If you make it free, you can avoid counting the number of visitors and by consequence you don't have any number to give to politicians. I tried to explain our position in a meeting of the directors of Swiss contemporary art centres. Nearly all of them expressed a total lack of comprehension arguing that having more audience and counting them was just fully and simply part of the job. I had the strong feeling that trying to address this question with (also) a political point of view was just throwing me out of the "scene" in their eyes; I was not part of it anymore. Don't you think that most of the freelancers integrated happily to feel free in this repressive liberal system? And that taking another position would have as consequence to risk losing your position in the scene, which could mean losing your job?

Do we have to change the scene, or create another one?

PG: Artists who take civil action always cross borders, and by doing this they indeed take the risk to lose their traditional position (as an artist) in society – such as the Situationist did. But I think, they have also the possibility to create new scenes indeed. At least, when they work collectively and organise themselves heterogeneous as mentioned before with the well functioning model of *Recetas*. And it starts with this mentality: 'I don't care when you say what I do is no (professionally accepted) art, because I think what I do is relevant and absolutely necessary in the contemporary economical, ecological, political and social conditions.'

RH: For quite some time now the artistic multitude—we, artists and curators that care and hope to change things—is murmuring. We murmur because we disagree with how the art world is organised, how public money is distributed. Our murmuring or revolt is framed as complaining. Just recently a honorarium for artists is on the political agenda. We need to rethink the distribution of the money for culture. I think this is one of the subjects of *Bye-bye la compagnie*. Duchamp wrote to himself: No more painting, get a job. But we don't need a job, we already have one; making art. What can we do and do you think a "fair" art world can exist?

PG: First of all, by recognising that artists are not alone in their murmuring: also surgeons are murmuring, teachers are complaining, lawyers certainly are etc. It's very important that more and more people want a 'fair' world. So, I think artists need to bridge and need to build solidarities between those groups by translating their collective concerns. They can make a 'fair' art world, when they neglect the classical exchange relationships between those groups, based on money. In classical Marxist terms, I think exchange value need to be reduced for use value in the art system, and the world in general. When other people are convinced of the use value of art, such as its potential of imagination, its performative power to change perspectives and even to change ordinary habits and attitudes, to show us other possible horizons, we will arrive in a much more 'fair' art world. But: this world will be not called 'the art world' anymore, but life as such.

- 1 Pascal Gielen: *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude. Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism—Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism*, Valiz, 2009.
- 2 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000.
- 3 American political scientist and political economist Yoshihiro Francis Fukuyama is known for his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*, in which he argued that the progression of human history as a struggle between ideologies is largely at an end, with the world settling on western liberal democracy after the end of the Cold War in 1989. Fukuyama is associated with the rise of the neoconservative movement, from which he has later distanced himself.
- 4 Pascal Gielen: *Repressief Liberalisme*, Valiz, 2013.
- 5 The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States, Friday, January 20, 2017.
- 6 Hans Achterhuis, *De utopie van de vrije markt*, Lenniscaat, 2010. Against the backdrop of the credit crisis Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis unfolds the development of neoliberalism as a movement and ideology, and wonders how he, too, saw it as some logic realist result of a natural evolution, an end of history for which there is no alternative. He describes the developments of this utopia through the works of protagonists like Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, Alan Greenspan, Ronald Reagan and TINA M. Thatcher.
- 7 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, 1964. Marcuse offers a critique of both contemporary capitalism and the Communist society of the Soviet Union, documenting the parallel rise of new forms of social repression in both these societies, as well as the decline of revolutionary potential in the West.
- 7 *The Rockacademie* is a 4 year full-time bachelor education in Tilburg. "Onze missie: Rockacademie leidt muzikanten op tot ondernemende professionals die de popsector mede gaan bepalen."

Colophon

This text is the slightly edited transcription of the skype-lecture Pascal Gielen gave from his home in Antwerp a few days previous to the public event. The lecture is based on his book *The Murmuring of the artistic Multitude*, and was one of the CO2-friendly skype lectures FGA organised for *Bye-bye la compagnie*, at CAN Neuchâtel in November 2016. We had brought *The Murmuring* as a present for CAN the year before, and it became one of the references for its self-reflection art project *Bye-bye la compagnie*. Pascal's lecture was recorded with the assembled CAN and FGA teams as an audience.

- 9 Richard Florida: *The Rise Of The Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community And Everyday*, Basic Books, 2002.
- 10 Hito Steyerl, "Freedom from Everything: Freelancers and Mercenaries" in *E-flux Journal #41*, January 2013: "As figures of contemporary economic reality, mercenaries and free lancers are free to break free from their employers and reorganize as guerrillas—or to put it more modestly, as the gang of ronin portrayed in Kurosawa's masterpiece Seven Samurai (1954). Seven free lancers team up to protect a village from bandits. In situations of complete negative freedom, even this is possible."
- 11 Adam Smith's 1776 *The Wealth of Nations* was a precursor to the modern academic discipline of economics. In this and other works, he developed the concept of division of labour, expounded upon how rational self-interest and competition lead to economic prosperity, and promoted the idea that the economic system is automatic, and, when left with substantial freedom, able to regulate itself.
- 12 In 2001, Lawrence Lessig founded Creative Commons, a non-profit organisation devoted to expanding the range of creative works available for others to build upon and to share legally.

+ The third quote on the slide was by Lawrence Lessig: "There has never been a time in our history when more of our 'culture' was as 'owned' as it is now. And yet there has never been a time when the concentration of power to control the uses of culture has been as unquestioningly accepted as it is now." (*Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*, 2004)

+ Note on the Multitude, taken from Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, (2003, p 22): I maintain that the concept of "multitude," as opposed to the more familiar concept of "people," is a crucial tool for every careful analysis of the contemporary public sphere. One must keep in mind that the choice between "people"

and "multitude" was at the heart of the practical controversies (the establishing of centralized modern States, religious wars, etc.) and of the theoretical-philosophical controversies of the seventeenth century. These two competing concepts, forged in the fires of intense clashes, played a primary role in the definition of the political-social categories of the modern era. It was the notion of "people" which prevailed. "Multitude" is the losing term, the concept which got the worst of it. (...) The two polarities, people and multitude, have Hobbes and Spinoza as their putative fathers. For Spinoza, the multitude indicates a plurality which persists as such in the public scene, in collective action, in the handling of communal affairs, without converging into a One, without evaporating within a centripetal form of motion. Multitude is the form of social and political existence for the many, seen as being many: a permanent form, not an episodic or interstitial form. For Spinoza, the multitude is the architecture of civil liberties (Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus*). Hobbes detests—and I am using here, after due consideration, a passionate, not very scientific word—the multitude; he rages against it. In the social and political existence of the many, seen as being many, in the plurality which does not converge into a synthetic unity, he sees the greatest danger of a "supreme empire"; that is to say, for that monopoly of political decision-making which is the State. The best way to understand the significance of a concept — multitude, in this case—is to examine it with the eyes of one who has fought it tenaciously. The person who grasps all the implications and the nuances of a concept is precisely the one who wishes to expunge it from the theoretical and practical horizon.

Thank you CAN team: Arthur de Pury, Marie Villemin, Martin Widmer, Marie Léa Zwaalen, Julian Thompson, Sylvie Linder.

Bye-bye la compagnie: 15 Oct. - 15 Dec. 2016, with Massimiliano Baldassarri & Jean-Baptiste Ganne, Sacha Béraud, Bruno Botella, Timothée Calame & Alan Schmalz, Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, FEC, Focking Good Art, Mohéna Kühni, Renaud Loda, RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co), Sebastien Verdon.

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