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Title: Participating Cultures

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For Tate Liverpool Exchange

I am going to talk about Participating Cultures with its link to the use of collaboration and participatory practices, language and the value of art within VVM 7 as an object to guide thinking

I will start with a quote

An apparatus or dispositif are those mechanisms, terms, dynamics, people who consolidate and fix in place the existing order, even those persons who appear to critique and analyse this order without realising what an apparatus is, are themselves an apparatus.

Critical metaphysics as a science of apparatuses. Tiqqun 2

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"Participating Cultures" is a term l invented in 2010 for a talk l gave in Mongolia, and should be understood and contextualized within the much broader term of "This Historical Moment". Both images revise and extend the space and understanding of "Post Autonomy" as a scheme that plots the trajectory and effects of Neo Liberalism on art and thinking, which l have been working on since 1998.

Who these participating cultures are is difficult to say, but possible countries that come to mind are Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and can roughly indicate those cultures who are dissatisfied with the existing definition of art, culture etc, given the existence of the internet many countries World Wide are now involved in this debate on art.

The term references participatory practices and methodologies for reflecting on existing forms of art without adopting or perpetuating those forms.

Participating Cultures is a term to indicate a space where articulation and thinking is possible, on breaking with Neoliberalism and Colonisation, and is usually indicated by 2 open brackets ( )

That space is the intersection, coming together, collision, of multiple participating cultures, to test out and break down existing positions, positions of power, belief systems, inherent thinking, to assist in a collective going forward with the formation of new, although not necessarily homogenised, thinking, positions, art.

With the understanding that under the existing formation of Cultural Power we are unable to say or do anything except promote its existing ideologies of Colonisation and Neoliberalism, whether we are aware of the problems or not, under the existing conditions we are unable to do anything about this trajectory.

A condition that l define as Cultural and Temporal Looping or Stasis. The sense that time has stood still and is merely stretching

[This has echoes of Heidegger's notion of "Technological thinking" that has guided humans – a term that seeks to analyse Ontology more deeply, as a carrier of Western destiny leading into global domination, that inhabits, shapes and drives us, where there is nothing we can do about it or alter its course. If we make a big leap forward we can now recognise Ontology as the very term, Religion and Philosophy, what have you, for Global White Supremacy.]

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However, these statements should not give the impression that I am pessimistic nor passive, on the contrary.

Instead I want to propose that through the destruction of art and thinking by Neo Liberalism, the Global financialization of art and existence, we arrive at a blank, an erasure of what exists and its formation, a new beginning, a new space to reimagine Art opening out into a new temporality, which l term this "Historical Moment", and Participating Cultures is the process that shapes thinking and art in this new context.

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1

What is the rationale for examining Participating Cultures in the context of VVM 7 as part of the Tate Liverpool Exchange?

When l invented the term in 2010 it appeared that participatory practices had been deliberately appropriated and short circuited by art institutions, if we are to believe a detailed article produced for Radical Philosophy, and if you look around this appears to be true - [Please see my text for Fillip number 8 & 10 which summarized 20 years of research into the theory and methodologies of participatory practices, this text is taught in art schools as far afield as San Diego school of art and China] - and acknowledged by Tania Bruguera in her project Arte Util which is intended as a safe repository of P projects.

 So, the term PC is an ongoing series of reflections and strategies to break this impasse, therefore it makes sense to continue these reflections, given VVM 7 search for a set of words to describe what it is doing, including the generalised use of the term PP, along with others, collaboration, performance etc, as though the configuration of terms is unable to satisfactorily pinpoint what is taking place or intended. At this stage, however under theorised and elementary VVM 7 is, it can start to make sense if we make a leap of the imagination. ln my mind VVM is a form and image that clarifies or aides thinking about the process of participating cultures, it is both a mirror and a compression chamber, a collapsed space, a black hole, a molecularized, granulated version of the Art World itself, where in this compressed form there is the potential for comprehending the Art World as an idea, as an object for thinking. At a moment when the art world itself is little understood and under researched and functions instead as a minus object. We know that Art exists but we don’t know what it is, if we are to believe Diedrich Diederichsen [in [Over]production and value].

2

This unlearning is in part an effect of the Art Market and Neo Liberal influenced art institutions, and because we still insist on recognising the overall shape of the Art World through the prism of the 19th century, while the structural integration of the ideology of Capitalism into the organising and displaying of art is little understood. Although we no longer understand how time and history work today, it is nevertheless a gross mistake to apply solutions from the 1970's 80's and 90's to solve the problems of today and to wish for the unbroken legacy of art, which conservative curators, galleries and museums and historians of art insist on doing, that is not to say that time and history should not be more elastic.

3

I think one of the fundamental problems we are confronted with today is that we simply do not recognise the time and space we occupy. What do l mean by that? I mean that we do not recognise and comprehend the actual implication of the EU, as a space without war and conflict and the role art plays as a pinnacle of the West, and the role art plays in filtering the World, and there is nothing else other than art to embody this. So, it seems that art is required to be more than it is. Secondly neither do we recognise the new spatialization brought about by Globalization or the World in which we now operate, now that the process of Westernisation is nearly complete, along with the role of art in this new spatial extension. Again, art has to function beyond what it is, or rather it takes on a new function which we haven't registered, and we cannot see, and what this thing is that is little understood, could be the role art plays as a total work of art, as a type of Art/Philosophical Empire.

We can glimpse the meaning of these strands of thinking from the following brief quote from Alexander Kojeve, Philosopher and Politician, and intellectual father of the Common market and EU, which makes understandable the current problems we have with language, concepts, recognition of time, history, beings. An analyses and program closely aligned to the total program, rethinking of everything and starting again proposed, by the Italian Philosopher Agamben.

Notes from Kojeve's introduction to the reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of spirit

"The disappearance of Man at the end of History is not a biological catastrophe. Man remains alive as an animal in harmony with nature or given being". P 158

"The definitive destruction of Men properly so-called also means the definitive disappearance of human discourse [Logos] in the strict sense. Animals of the species Homo Sapiens would react to conditioned vocal signals or sign language, and thus their so-called discourses would be like what is supposed to be the language of the bees. For this reason in these so called post-historical animals there would be no [discursive] understanding of the Self and the World". P 160

My reading of this is that we have reached a point where we have passed beyond the categorises, terms, descriptions and narratives where current thinking about humans and animals and the ingredients of thinking itself are redundant, and this is exactly the condition of narratives today.

But it is also the audacity of Kojeves statements which seem to have the power to overturn the existing rigid order on its head.

C

Art and Neoliberalism

In order to address this gap in understanding the make-up of today's art, my contribution to the project, titled "Art as Global Currency" takes a term from David Joselit's book "After Art", as a definition of art in the context of Global Neoliberalism. It is also used since the financial crash to show how art is used as a form speculation, and a form of currency that is able to cross-boarders. The link between art and Neo Liberalism is also linked to the ideology of the British Museum and Louvre, that cultural artefacts no longer need to be seen in their place of origins, since they are Universal, so they can stay where they are in the Louvre and British Museum. This notion of contextual dislocation is taken further in Joselit's analysis of images on the internet and their appropriation and remixing by Western art, with the liquification and elasticity of time and space and specific cultural identities and place.

Art as Global Currency sought to give a shape to the complexity of the context we operate in, putting a face to power, portraits of figures who have shaped Global Imperialism, the British Commonwealth, Global government, the EU, the rise of the right wing, non-linear warfare, the technical term for the deliberate condition of confusion and unknowing we exist in today, art under the financialization of art, the legacy of Cartesianism at the core of Western power, images of total power, a sketch for an art capable of addressing this complexity which resembles an "institutional critique of total power."

So how far do we need to drill down into existence and what complexity and range of material and ideas do we need to uncover in-order to reach a complete understanding of what is taking place? This totality or total program that l am imagining has a resemblance to radical ontology, the analysis and displacement of ontology.

These sweeping generalisations only make sense within the discourse of a new art and a new language for art, and you can see something similar in the work of Seth Price, Darren Badar, Benoit Maire. But you can also see in the work of Jonathan Horowitz, a balancing and weighing up of arts capacity and function, whether in its links to conservatism and the status quo, an evaluation of art under the financialisation of art in the form of zombie formalism, or art as cultural signs of power, and a critique of cultural signs of power, images that shape and tie existence together. Where spaces for art is the space for testing out all forms of articulation, all received notions of history and time.

D

Cultural Stasis

I now want to look at 3 interrelated issues

How we use art to filter existence, how we understand something and the nature of the context we work in, within the larger framework of the cultural stasis or the cultural temporal loop at the centre of European and American culture. The purpose of participating cultures is to confront and break with the deep-seated problem posed by Cultural and temporal stasis, and l need to say a few words about this in order to understand exactly what we are confronting.

Cultural Stasis continues the same similar sounding problems that have already been indicated, an environment where we are unable to understand what is taking place inside culture nor locate problems and solutions to problems nor a capacity for development and change.

l cannot be certain that CS actually exists or not but the signs or symptoms lead me to this assumption, nor can l be certain whether l have a partial or complete picture.

These assumptions are derived from reflecting on a project organised by BAK, an art institution based in the Nederland, titled "Former West", art after 1998, and further insights from their current project "Propositions for non-fascist living".

Former West comprising key theorists, curators, philosophers and artists sought to develop a picture of the edifice of the West and the possibilities of its mutation and transformation through the changes it has undergone since the end of the Cold War and the new role of the expanded and consolidated West.

While the new project looks at the different methodologies for registering and processing Socio Political events through the prism of the ideologies and cannon of a purely Western monolithic cultural framework [or to be even clearer over the past few years the illusion of the diversity of differences in art has collapsed back into one single monolithic concept of art. So instead of difference we have atomisation] And also asks what is the actual function of art today? Is its only role a propaganda one? Is the only function of art to develop a sign of a specific Nation State? For instances is my role to make British work or European work. And what does it mean for an art work to reflect and look into the formation of current society? Is it any more than state art? And what is the difference between state and non-state art, when the majority of art seems to be reduced to nothing more than state art?

In other words, both projects look at the internal self-criticism of the system and ideas which shape it and which it is a part of. Or to put it another way, is it possible to critique power from positions of power, for power to critique and change itself? [These rituals or axioms of power are analysed specifically in Non-philosophy] So at the outset there appears to be a contradiction in this quest.

At the same time, we are only starting to understand how Centres of Cultural power shape what is sayable and thinkable, against the background of an expanded network of Global art Markets.

The core process of the coming together of cultures, of PC, is the break up and reconfiguration of the existing centres of cultural power.

These points lead to a number of conclusions

What struck me after thinking about the Former West and confirmed after visiting and thinking about a number of large scale exhibitions, whether Venice Biennial in 2017 or Okwui Enwezer Venice Biennial in 2015 that looked at Globalisation, Politics, Communism, was that despite the research and insights, no actual useful suggestions were put forward for changing the actual substance of contemporary culture, just the confirmation of the status quo. And this sense of inertia and paralysis was added to by the stream of increasingly conservative exhibitions and projects, the consolidation of existing power, the consolidation of social hierarchies and injustices. And the other point is why is so much analysis and artworks examining these issues appearing simplistic and reactionary?

Arts links to Neoliberalism? PP today

Art institutions are now taking on the responsibility for shaping the material substance of existence in the West, changing from registering the teleology of Historical Christian time to one of the mixing the components of its peoples, in other words the increasing management and mixing of peoples, and the multi-cultural diversity as the new identity of the West. If this is the case l think we need to re-read the motivation of much of what has been taking place, especially around the notion of migration where Migration as a smoke screen for the consolidation of the European Global Empire, particularly if we are to understand the role art has in shaping the identity of the West itself, which seems to me to be a reinforcing of Centres of Cultural Power into existing specific places rather than their distribution. In other words, there is a close alignment now between art and the formation of global cities i.e. whether London & Berlin, and art and centres of global power/empire i.e. Venice and Documenta, and in many respects the effect of the popularisation and mass of art events throughout the UK has the same effect

This description shows the use and mutation of participatory practices by art institutions or new institutionalism, where all political issues are translated into art.

E

Participating Cultures

Route to Participating Culture within the context of this Historical Moment

Steps towards developing a workable practice?

There are clues to be found in Claire Fontaine's book "The Human strike" and thinking more precisely about the implication of the processing and transforming the World through art. In part this is a reworking of Agamben's notion of the "Inoperative" and "singularity whatsoever". "What space can we withdraw into to examine what is taking place without replicating the existing order?" Where there is a refusal to take part in any aspect of this formation of existence, but instead to look for different possibilities or potentialities.

There are two key aspects here. A new non-visual art practice and the language of the body, as a fundamental revision and reformulation of what thinking is, as sites reimagining how and where thinking as the body that thinks as a whole, that breaks with Cartesianism, I.e. the dividing up of spaces, between bodies, beings, species. My work in the last 2 years has explored this space of a new non-visual art practice, the breaking down or closing down to open up something else, with the removal of a whole layer of art, those blockages stopping further development, to guide towards the reimagining of art. This is where a fundamental shift takes place right here, these are the very changes we can make to ourselves even though the overall fabric and the inherent composition remains unchanged.

Instead of seeing participatory practices starting with a compromise, as a structural levelling out, it is now transformed, where each person is developed to their full capacity, from an informed understanding of existing conditions.

A conclusion and summary of the two key points

Neoliberalism has destroyed what we understand by art and thinking so erasing what exists, leaving a blank, a new space, where we can collectively reimagine art again, which is the first time in over 200 years where this is possible which is why l call it this Historical Moment.

But given cultural stasis we are unable to say or do anything by ourselves, we are unable to break with Colonisation and Neoliberalism, so it is only through a process of agonistic confrontation with other cultures, through the process of participating cultures, that it is possible to not only reach complete development but also effect a break down and reconfiguration of our thinking and positions with the reconfiguration of centres of cultural power.