ACVIC- QUAM 2010

Today, I will approach the theme of the symposium "Cracking the system. Art and Citizenship open source in public realm" from four aspects: urban transformation and politics of space, representation of multitude of publics, the concept of participation and the empowerment of publics through art projects.

Whose public space are we talking about?

Although the urban context and city life has always been a particular interest for artists, it has become a central point for artistic and theoretical research during the last two decades, especially together with the process of re-birth of the cities due to the phenomenon of Globalization. The decline of the authority of nation-states along with the globalization has led to the emergence of cities as centers of the new world order and their rising autonomy. "Global Cities" like New York, Tokyo, Sao Paulo, Caracas and London have surpassed their geography and nation-state and have become the heart of a new commercial and financial geography realized by the digitalization of knowledge and the information revolution and became centers of arts and culture as well[1].

These massive global transformations (from national to trans-national, analogue to digital, welfare state to neo-liberal conditions) that we have been going through, have had an undeniable impact and unfavorable consequences on urban development and urban "public" spaces.

Two major issues are at stake: urban politics and the representation of multitude of publics in the cities.

Actually, it is ironic to talk about neo-liberal urban politics now when this global economic system is going through such a serious crisis. Though this crisis manifested in the economic sphere recently, it has been alarming in social and urban structures for such a long time, exemplified by the rioting of third-generation immigrant youth in Paris suburbs. It has been manifesting as various social illnesses and severe socio-economic divides in many other cities.

When we say neo-liberal urban politics, we are not only talking about the privatisation of the major public property like energy supply, telecommunication, transportation or social housing, which is also subject to the process of gentrification, but also, the rules and operations of the free market economy and corporatism that is promoted by urban policies in the development/transformation of the cities. According to these policies, the decision-making mechanisms for the urban development mainly depend on market parameters and consequently, the central city is reserved for commercial concentration, entertainment/tourism and

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[1] Saskia Sassen, "The Global City: Strategic Site/New Frontier", Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City, Ed. by Engin F. Isin; Saskia Sassen, "Whose City is It? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims", 2nd Johannesburg Bienniale, 1997).

business, which particularly illustrates how cities transform around the culture of consumption as life becomes organized around shopping malls.

We know that the physical urban "public" spaces are under negotiation, however, when we talk about "public sphere" as a notion of political forum, it needs to be redefined and reinvented from a radical perspective. Since the '90's, the conception of the bourgeois public space of Habermas has been revisited and criticized while new concepts such as "post-public" were coined (by Simon Sheikh) to understand and define the term "public" or "public space" in the contemporary context.

Today, it is not possible for us to talk about a unified and consensualized public sphere, nor a single "public" united under a "general will". The fragmented public spaces are facilitated by a multitude of publics with different cultural, ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Here the question is how to live together and how to organize the urban public spaces to represent the multitude?

In his article "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik – or How to Make Things Public", Bruno Latour articulates this position:

"And yet, we are all in the same boat, or at least same flotilla. To use Neurath's metaphor, the question is how to rebuild it while we are cruising on it? Or rather, how can we make it navigate when it is made of a fleet of diverging but already interwined barges? In other words, can we overcome the multiplicity of ways of assembling and dissembling, and yet raise the question of the one common world?"[2]

Certainly not with such an overwhelming task as Latour mentions, but, with a similar impulse to create a common ground for collective experiences, practices and languages among the citizens of Istanbul where social and spatial fragmentations have been an ongoing phenomenon, together with my friends, I initiated a series of urban art exhibitions called "Istanbul Pedestrian Exhibitions" in 2002.

Istanbul Pedestrian Exhibitions are designed as a series of biennial urban art interventions in the public spaces and can be considered as a response to the call of the city under transformation. The exhibition series are named after "pedestrian" as it refers to the common ground in the daily use of the urban public spaces without signifying any specific class, origin, language or religion. Emphasizing the human scale as opposed to the global scale, the first edition of the Istanbul Pedestrian Exhibitions was called "Personal Geographies, Global Maps" (2002) and the second one was realized at Tunel-Karakoy axis in 2005.

Italo Calvino, in his lecture series, "Six Memos for the next Millenium, Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1985-6", states that for Ovidius, the knowledge related to

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2 Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik – or How to Make Things Public", Pavillion 15, Reader of Bienale Bucharest, 2010 (p.213)

the world is the disintegration of the unity of the world [3]. In order to find the ways of assembling the diversities, we first need to dissemble the unities. So, through different interventions of the artists, we wanted to explore the way urban public spaces are used, how they organized and who they aims to serve and how, as these decisions are always political.

Istanbul Pedestrian Exhibitions 2: Tunel – Karakoy, 2005

Co-curated with Emre Baykal

1- Kemal Onsoy
2- John Kormeling
3- Gel Keyfim Gel / Murat-Fuat-Ayten-Yakup
4-

According to Latour, space has replaced time as the main ordering principle:

"Philosophers define time as a 'series of successions' and space as a 'series of simultaneities'. Undoubtedly, while we filed away everything under the power of progress, we lived in the time of succession. (...) Strangely enough, we have changed time so completely that we have shifted from the time of Time to the time of Simultaneity. Nothing, it seems, accepts to simply reside in the past, and noone feels intimidated anymore by the adjectives 'irrational', 'backward' or 'archaic'. Time (...) has suddenly becomes something that neither the Left nor the Right seems to have been fully prepared to encounter: a monstrous time, time of cohabitation."[4]

Through his conception of time that he calls "time of cohabitation", Latour placed the politics of space in the heart of the question of representation.

Focusing on the politics of space, the 5th Scape Biennial of Art in Public Space, Christchurch (2008) aimed at unfolding the city spaces in terms of social fluidity and hybridity through a close examination of the structures that organise it and condition its development. With the title of the exhibition "Wandering Lines: Towards a New Culture of Space", we propose a kind of autism towards our established conceptions and passive acceptance of the given spatial organisations around us and of politics behind them. "Wandering Lines" is drawn from the notion of 'indirect or errant trajectories obeying their own logic'[5] through which Michel de Certeau described Francios Deligny's experience with autistic children. Here, we are not pointing out a solution or a new culture of space but the urgent need for it. In the exhibition, the projects are marking this need from

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3 Italo Calvino, Six Memos for the next Millenium, Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1985-6, Turkish print, Can Yayinlari, Istanbul (p.23)
4 Ibid. (p.216)

5 Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1998, pxviii.

different viewpoints and with different focuses, proposing to suspend our usual ways of perceiving, experiencing and operating in the urban spaces.

Commercialisation of the public space, gentrification, social divides, democracy of space and "reinvention of publicness" were the major concepts that the artists dealt with in their projects.

5th Scape Biennial of Art in Public Space, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2008

Co-curated with Danae Mossman

1- AVL
2- Lonnie

Mouffe considers the public space as "the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation".[6] She posits: "According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony"[7]

In line with Chantal Mouffe's idea of critical art, reason d'etre of any art project in public spaces is to create a contrast or add more conflict to make it visible.

As the credit crisis was unfolding, massive global changes were becoming more visible and beginning to be assessed more critically. As the euphoria around neoliberalism declined, questions were raised concerning its impact at the social as well as the individual level. In diverse formats, artists have been investigating and 'testing' the recent socioeconomic and political transformations and their repercussions on civic rights. In the last couple of years, the 'new democracy' – what Chantal Mouffe calls 'post-political democracy' – and its varied programmes and applications have become major focal points for artistic production.

These current tendencies are reflected in the underlying agenda of the 2009 SKOR (Stichting Kunst en Openbare Ruimte / Foundation art and Public Space) programme and were exemplified in different projects, exhibitions and events SKOR was involved in during the year.

Events and activities for "My Name Is Spinoza" were realized through a considerable number of partnerships and collaborations with fellow art institutions and organizations based on a collective platform[8.] Spinoza's revolutionary views

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6 Chantal Mouffe, "Art and Democracy, Art as an Agnostic Intervention in Public Space", OPEN 14, 2008 (p.10)
7 Ibid. (p.12)
8 These include de Appel, Art Amsterdam, De Balie, the Jewish Historical Museum, the Lloyd Hotel, Mediamatic, SMART Project Space, the Stedelijk Museum, the Stedelijk

regarding tolerance, respect and freedom of speech, which have maintained their social relevance today, were taken as inspiration by artists such as Job Koelewijn, Francisco Camacho, Thomas Hirschhorn, Aernout Mik and Nicoline van Harskamp.

In their projects, both Mik and Harskamp investigate and articulate the diverse ways and processes in which the democratic apparatus – freedom of speech, debate, demonstration/protest and political staging – operates. While Mik's work investigates this from a global perspective, Harskamp's scripted and staged conference dives into the matter on a micro level. Each project essentially questions pillars of contemporary discourse, such as participation, diversity, freedom of speech, consensus and 'new democracy'.

While these two projects were intended for culturally interested audiences, Thomas Hirschhorn's Bijlmer Spinoza Festival was envisioned for a 'non-exclusive audience': the residents of the Bijlmer neighbourhood in Amsterdam. Likewise, Francisco Camacho's Group Marriages Initiative aimed to gather 40,000 signatures to submit a petition to the Dutch parliament to allow more than two citizens to enter into a civil marriage. Camacho managed to collect approximately 10,000 signatures, which was not sufficient for the initiative to be placed on the parliamentary agenda but signified an extraordinary level of audience participation for such an alternative, if not progressive, proposal.

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services (...)."[9] The 25th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as a starting point for Tue Greenfort's land art project HUNGER, which was produced as part of Land, art in the Zeeland Wilhelminapolder in 2009. GPS-guided tractors mowed the word 'hunger' into one of the polder's extensive sugar beet fields. This majestic work, while referring to the Hongersdijk manor, the site of the exhibition, also contrasted the feeling of wellbeing in the prosperous Netherlands with the harsh reality of other geographies, where a brutal lack of basic human necessities is part of daily life.

Through the extension of its activities into a more discursive arena, SKOR is endeavouring to expand its capacity for criticality so as to highlight differences, voice the repressed, and contribute to new formulations of civility.

Museum Bureau Amsterdam, Straat van Sculpturen/Open Source Amsterdam, Tijdelijk Museum Amsterdam, and W139.

[9] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, published by the United Nations Department of Public Information.

Radically seen, an artist who works in the public space must aim for the point at which his work as such is no longer noticeable (…)." *

Unlike the early representational or late abstract modernist sculptures in the public space, contemporary interventions function in life; the real space and time and exist in reality temporarily. In public space, any art project relates to infinite number of spatial, urban, social, psychological, individual or communal, political and historical contingencies, thus, mediates and intervenes the reality in flux.

Empowerment of the publics

 "No matter how wide you stretch it, the political horizon might be too small to encompass the whole Earth." (p.210)

 "... most of European philosophy has been obsessed by the body and state. They have tried to assemble an impossible parliement that represented really the contradictory wills of the multitude into one General Will.... But this enterprise suffered from a cruel lack of realism. Representation, conceived in that total, complete and transparent fashion, cannot possibly be faithfull..." (p.214)