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Working on the Community

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On the one hand there is a widespread feeling of political impotence. The possibilities that unions, citizens' groups, workers' councils and other subordinated levels have for influencing the political process appear to be constantly dwindling. Even national politics argue more and more frequently that their decisions depend on higher instances, like the EU, for example. Finally, the powerlessness of politics in comparison with the economy is cited. Regardless of whether one believes in the omnipotence of globalization or regards it as an economistic excuse, the chances for the success of political engagement from below have dropped in the minds of many. Actual and looming unemployment additionally seem to suggest concentrating on economic survival. On the other hand there are ideas of merging both, namely unused potentials of engagement as well labor power that is no longer employed, into a meaningful third. Under the provocative title "The Soul of Democracy" Ulrich Beck recently argued for his concept of "citizens' labor".[1] Instead of "financing the idleness of several million people at the cost of millions", these people should be integrated (voluntarily) in concepts of organized social engagement under the leadership of "public good enterprises",

ranging from palliative care and care of the homeless to "art and culture". "Citizens' labor is not remunerated, but rewarded. And specifically in an immaterial manner, for example ... with distinctions." According to this notion of work at the price of social assistance, this would mean "building up an engaged civil society that takes care of public concerns and animates the public good with its initiatives." The reduced possibilities of political participation are thus to be compensated with work. The state saves money and the citizens are meaningfully occupied. They are even "rewarded" for this, so they have no reason to be restless.

When several models of participatory art practice are discussed in the following, this is the background against which they should be seen. In other words, they should also be seen against the background of the question, to what extent is "social action" political, to what extent does a social interest take the place of the political. The following examples are taken from very different contexts. However, I will leave out an entire complex from the spectrum of artistic approaches that make use of participatory methods. This is the fashionable approach of "working with others" that is so popular among the young, dynamic curators of mainstream exhibition operations, because it allows for the incorporation of "the social" in small bites that are aesthetically easily digestible, but do not require any further reflection.[2]

At least in terms of its tendency, the concept of a participatory practice is to be distinguished from two others: from interactivity and collective action. Interactivity goes beyond a mere perceptional offer to the extent that it allows for one or more reactions, which influence the work - usually in a momentary, reversible and repeatable manner - in the way it is manifested, but without fundamentally changing or co-determining its structure. Collective practice means the conception, production and implementation of

works or actions by multiple people with no principle differentiation among them in terms of status. Participation, on the other hand, is initially based on a differentiation between producers and recipients, is interested in the participation of the latter, and turns over a substantial portion of the work to them either at the point of conception or in the further course of the work. Whereas interactive situations are usually addressed to an individual, participatory approaches are usually realized in group situations. There are combinations of all three, the boundaries are permeable, and rigid categorizations have little purpose.

"Participation" as a practice or postulate (almost) always plays a role in the art of the 20th century where it is a matter of the self-critique of art, of calling the author into question, of the distance between art and "life" and society. The activation and participation of the audience is intended to transform the relationship between producers and recipients in its traditional variation of the work-viewer relationship. This one-dimensional, hierarchical "communication structure" produces a consumist, distanced observer, representing a "school of asocial behavior", as Stepanova wrote in 1921.[3] The intention of dissolving this situation into a dynamic of reciprocity develops parallel to a criticism of purely visual experience and is frequently targeted to an activation of the body as a precondition for participation. This physical involvement can have a phenomenological foundation, as described by El Lissitzky for his "Demonstration Spaces" (1926): "Our arrangement is intended to make the man active. This should be the purpose of the space. ... The effect of the walls changes with every movement of the viewer in the space. ... He is physically forced to come to terms with the exhibited objects."[4] However, participation can also be initiated, as with the Dadaists, through acts of provocation. In both "proto-participatory" movements of Dadaism and Russian

Constructivism and Productivism, the beginnings of a "history of participation" are probably to be found as a sub-history of the avant-garde. In the Soviet press, according to Tretyakov, "the difference between the author and the audience begins ... to disappear."[5] Depending on the ideological foundation, as a program of different demands for change participation can be conjoined with: revolutionary ("dissolution of art in the praxis of life"), reformative ("democratization of art") or - with less political content - playful and/or didactic, perception and "consciousness altering" ambitions.

After the war, much that made use of participatory methods initially came from the Cage school: Fluxus, Happening, Rauschenberg. In music Cage realized a demand that Benjamin had already ascribed to Hanns Eisler, namely "eliminating the opposition between performers and listeners ...".[6] "4'33"" (1952) consists of nothing other than the noises in the concert hall. Although the audience essentially produces these noises, it is not yet really active. This is also similarly true for Rauschenberg's "White Paintings" created at the same time, which reflect nothing other than the movements of the viewers. Rauschenberg's "Black Market" (1961) then actually calls for the audience to take action. The boundary between art and life is to be bridged by turning the recipients into co-performers.

The neo-avant-gardes of the 50's were obsessed with "reality". Following the integration of surrounding noises in music and objects in images, Happenings and Events involved "real-time" procedures. The "blurring of art and life" strove for a "concrete art" located in or even dissolving into "real life". Kaprov, influenced by Dewey's *Art as Experience*, defined aesthetic experience as participation. Taking action becomes a condition for experience, because otherwise no Happening can result. The kind of action is taken from everyday routines that are imbued with a new, aesthetic

quality in collective, usually playful practice. The final consequence involves returning the newly valued actions into everyday life: "Doing life, consciously."[7] For Maciunas, who refers to both Dada and the Russian Productivists, the artist assumes an elitist, parasitic status in society. It is therefore up to the "anti-professional" Fluxus artist to demonstrate the substitutability of the artist by showing "that everything can be art and everyone can practice it."[8] What begins as participation within the framework of art should thus be fulfilled in a general aesthetic (life) praxis. This is a program of democratization, whose failure is prefigured in the authorization of the layperson by the artist. In the Beuysian variation, though, this is then linked with real politics, but this still changes nothing in the fact that everything else is called into question except the status of the artist.

Alongside the open, chance-oriented, anarcho-poetic and partially even destructive (e.g. Vostell) conceptions, in the sixties there was also another direction with a stronger didactic orientation and more closely linked with objects. Here it was attempted to replace the concept of the artwork with "communication objects" or "action objects", which suggested a more or less clearly defined use. Based on culture-critical ideas on the conditioning of everyday perception through the consumer industry and social constraints, these kinds of objects, which were not subject to any previously ritualized mode of use, were to enable immediate, elementary experiences in the course of processes of approach and experimental use. A position of this kind, embodied by Franz Erhard Walther, for example, replaces observation with action, in part also collective action, yet by opposing "alienated" experience with "genuine" experience, it remains indebted to an autonomy aesthetic that invokes a counter-world without opening up potentials of resistance.

Heal the World - The Rhetoric of the NGPA

The context in which participatory art has been most prominently discussed in recent years is that of the conglomerate of inhomogeneous practices, for which the label "New Genre Public Art" has prevailed. The terms "community-based art" and "art in the public interest" are also in use for the same phenomenon. As even its proponents note, this does not at all involve really "new" practices, but rather the kinds of practices that have been pursued since the seventies, but which were purportedly marginalized by an elitist and object-fixated art world. Their time is said to have come now, because the different practices are negotiated in the category of "Public Art", in the framework of which they first become a kind of movement and in which they characterize a change of paradigm. The latter proposes, briefly summarized, the following history of "Public Art": after public places were initially rather randomly beautified with autonomous art works, the next step led to site-specific artistic interventions oriented to the architectonic, spatial conditions. Following the work and the place, now in a further step the social aspect, a local population (group), minority or "community" is shifted to the center.

The NGPA is first of all and primarily interested in a definition of its audience. For this there are - alongside individual concerns - at least two objective reasons. For one, many of the (older) socially and politically engaged artists were long so marginalized by the dominant art system that they were forced to open up other fields of work outside the institutions. The other reason is that local resistance to "art in public space" and the ensuing discussions (see Serra's "Titled Arc") showed that the question of the audience had not been taken seriously enough by the conventional public art

programs. A practice that starts from locally defined, relatively manageable publics and usually has a time limit as well, seemed to offer the official programs for public art a welcome solution.
Every criticism of the NGPA finds itself confronted with the problem that it can either address single artistic projects or the strategic discourse, the identity established through the label. All too often the practices subsumed under the term differ from one another, and thus the practice also diverges from its theorization. The "Compendium" of over eighty artists and groups that Suzanne Lacy appends to her discourse-defining book *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* ranges from Vito Acconci and the Border Art Workshop, Group Material and Jenny Holzer, all the way to Paper Tiger TV and Fred Wilson, from the politics of identity to media activism to institutional criticism. A lowest common denominator can hardly be found. In contrast to this, there is a strong tendency to discursive homogenization, which can probably only be explained from motives of asserting a "movement", a "change of paradigm". The reason for nevertheless discussing the rhetoric of the NGPA in the following is that I place a higher value on its role within the current re-definition of the concept of art than on the practice itself. If we presume that one of the central points of this artistic self-understanding is the switch from the symbolic level to the level of the "real", in other words positing social practice in the place of the interpretation and criticism of the social aspect, then it is primarily the rhetoric of this pragmatic attitude that can provide insights into the world view it is based on.
Mary Jane Jacob, alongside Suzanne Lacy one of the most important mentors of "New Public Art" as a curator of community-oriented projects, outlines their historical location in this way: "If, in the 1970s, we were extending the definition of who the artist is along lines of nationality or ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation; and in the 1980s the place of exhibitions

expanded to include any imaginable venue ...; then in the 1990s we are grappling with broadening the definition of who is the audience for contemporary art."[9] Broadening the audience primarily means here differentiating the audience. From one anonymous art audience, specified publics emerge, so to speak, which are constituted as such through direct contact with the artist, which differ from one project to the next and are frequently included in the realization of works: "This work activates the viewer - creating a participant, even a collaborator."[10] The work is to derive its relevance for a specific community through the "dialogical structure" of its integration in this community.

What is noticeable about the programmatic writings by Lacy and Jacob, but also by Lucy Lippard, Suzi Gablik and Arlene Raven, is that political analysis is largely missing, even though there is much talk of social change at the same time. This political deficit is compensated by a terminological inventory that clearly evinces pastoral features: "To search for the good and make it matter: this is the real challenge for the artist," is printed in big letters on the cover of Lacy's book. Starting from the diagnosis of an elitist, self-absorbed art business on the one hand and a whole series of "social ills"[11] on the other, "connective aesthetics" (Suzi Gablik) are intended to be a bridge between art and "real people". In order to build this bridge by means of a "dialogical structure", first the two sides to be linked are separated: here the engagement of the creatives that is based on a certain desire, namely the "longing for the Other"[12] or "desire for connection"[13]; there the "real people" in "real neighborhoods"[14], meaning (preferably non-white) workers and poorer quarters. The rhetoric of the NGPA hardly obscures the process of "othering", the construction of an "other" as a condition for further projections. The "others" are not only poor and disadvantaged, they are also representatives of what is genuine and real, so that they are at once both needy and a

source of inspiration.[15] The image of art is similarly ambivalent. Considered aloof and bourgeoisly decadent in its institutionalized form, it represents a reservoir of creativity at the same time, without the qualities of which the life of the "others" cannot be enriched: "The community-based art (...) can not only expose the energy and depth of ordinary people but also help these people develop their human potential in individual and communal acts."[16] For Gablik, for instance, "care and compassion" are the central values of "connective aesthetics", which are defined as "feminine"; Lacy and Lippard emphasize "empathy". Without ever referring to the fact, with their gender-specific attributions of moral attitudes the authors share the same direction of thinking represented by Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan, according to which the social behavior of women differs fundamentally, due specifically to the capacity for care and empathy, from the male orientation to law and justice.[17] This difference-logical schematism corresponds to the rigid dichotomy of individualistic "museum art" and collaborative NGPA, which the latter, by denying the smooth transition even among its own members, likes to assert. The fact that women are comparatively well represented in this "genre", however, is less a proof of its gender-specific social character than of the familiar power relations in the institutional art field.

Yet in order for art to actually fulfill its "healing function" in the process of social interaction, which all the authors refer to, it additionally requires an educational dimension. In order to be able to "heal a society that has been alienated from its life forces"[18] - Jacob brings the figure of the shaman into play again - "the unique perceptions and creative mechanisms of artists"[19] must be passed on to the non-artist participants. The pastoral mixture of care and education explains the partly pseudo-religious features of the NGPA, the spiritual qualities of the invocation of community, and

certain tendencies to bind communities to traditionalist rituals such as "parades", for example. The criticism of individualism and the striving for a communal foundation for aesthetic action, for a "reconciliation" of social spheres, for civil participation in the processes of the production of meaning - all this testifies to a close proximity between connective aesthetics and the social theory of communitarism.[20]
It should be called to mind again, though, that a homogenizing discourse overlays extremely divergent practices here. Its traditionalist, essentialist, moralizing and mystifying (Gablik's "re-enchantment of art") elements should therefore not be taken as a basis for evaluating individual artistic procedures. However, it is necessary to recognize the conservative tendencies of the NGPA, because they threaten to co-opt a spectrum of approaches that are in part indeed productive and progressive.

GET DOWN AND PARTY. TOGETHER.

Adrian Piper's "Funk Lessons" (1982-84 in various places) follow an understanding of participation that strongly contrasts the pastoral type. The collective dance performances conjoin political subject matter with pleasurable experiences. Unlike the ideal type step model of the NGPA, diagnosis of illness - therapy plan - healing, the "Funk Lessons" have an explicitly experimental character ("A Collaborative Experiment in Cross-Cultural Transfusion"). The unpredictability already begins with the way the participants must *arrive* in response to an offer, rather than something being defined beforehand according to certain categories like "community" or "the others" (workers, old people, homeless, etc.). Community emerges, if at all, in the course of the event; nor does it make any claim to permanence; there is nothing essential

about it.
Starting from the widespread racist rejection by the white middle class of the funk idiom as "black working-class culture", Piper didactically employs funk as a "collective medium of self-transgression" to "overcome cultural and racist barriers". She explains the musical, dance-type basic elements, the cultural backgrounds and relationships to other, "white" musics. What starts as a kind of learning-by-doing develops according to how the deep-seated rejections, fears, insecurities or enthusiasm and curiosity are expressed in reactions and how counter-reactions set off a polyvocal dialogue, which transforms the original "learning situation" into an open discussion that can become quite vehement. Participation in this kind of process does not mean taking part in a vague feeling of community as much as entering into a confrontation that touches the boundaries of politics and personality. Integrating the participants in an ambivalent situation of offers (aesthetic experience, information) and requirements (articulating resistance, co-responsibility for the collective process) means drafting a precarious scenario with an open end for the standpoint of the artist.
What is most remarkable about Piper's "Funk Lessons" in comparison with the many well-meant intentions especially of the "pastoral" direction is perhaps the openly articulated self-interest: "My motivation in doing the 'Funk Lesson' performances also has a very large self-interested component (of course). The ignorance and xenophobia that surround the aesthetic idiom of black working-class culture have affected the audience's comprehension of my performance work since 1972."[21] To be able to continue to use this idiom as part of her personal identity, it seemed necessary to undertake an attempt to share it in some form with the predominantly white middle-class audience. Emphasizing this aspect of the work, which is certainly not the most important

aspect, seems appropriate, because it is diametrally distinct from the reverse side of the rhetoric for improving the world, such as is manifest in one of Suzanne Lacy's "acknowledgments": "Most important to me are the many invisible communities ... who have inspired my work over the years, those who suffer various forms of discrimination, violence, and injustice."[22]

Radical Democracy …

Since the late eighties Michael Clegg and Martin Guttmann have been working on artistic projects in public spaces, for which the active participation of the local population is a precondition and crucial criteria in the way that they function. A first attempt of this kind, "A Model for an Open Public Library", 1987, consisted in the placement of a bookshelf furnished with books from the artists in various places in New Jersey. The disconcerting appearance of a bookshelf in the open, especially in places not heavily frequented, had more poetic, almost surreal features and probably worked better in the documentary context of a later gallery exhibition. In a short text, "Proposal for an 'Open-Air' Library", published in 1990 in *Durch*, Clegg and Guttmann already formulated the basic ideas of their "Open Public Library" that was later realized in Graz and Hamburg: "A library without librarians and without surveillance, the stock of which is determined by the users themselves through a system of exchange, according to which every borrowed book is to be replaced by another chosen at will by the user. As an institution, a library of this kind could contribute to the self-definition of a community ... and would thus be a kind of portrait of the community."[23]
On the one hand this involves the idea of the "social sculpture", which is based on interaction with the audience, through the

intensity and concrete course of which the work is first constituted as such or is given its specific function. The second moment, the conception of the "portrait" of a community, is derived from the artists' earlier photographic works based on an expanded concept of the portrait. Although the idea of the social portrait is not to be separated from the conception of the "Open Public Library" and should not remained undiscussed, also in its problematic aspects, this seems to be of more secondary importance to our interest here. What is more relevant here to the question of the backgrounds and potentials of participatory procedures is the way a cultural institution that largely dispenses with hierarchies, control mechanisms and bureaucratic regulations is played through and tested in a model-like manner.

Following a first version of the "Open Public Library" in 1991 in Graz and a model for a freely accessible tool repository (Toronto 1991), which was to work on the same principle, the Hamburg version of the "Open Public Library", implemented in Autumn 1993, represented the first fully mature variation. In three demographically different districts the circuit boxes of the electrical company were equipped with shelves and glass doors and thus turned into public, freely accessible libraries. Prior to the project, local residents were informed about the concept and asked for donations of books. Only one minimal rule for using the library was given in writing on location: "Please take the books of your choice and bring them back within an appropriate period of time. Additions to the stock of books are welcome." The lack of further regulations and instances of surveillance transfers the responsibility for how the installation works and its fate to the users. In this Clegg & Guttmann see "an experiment with a radically democratic institution".[24]

The political dimension of this kind of "experimental arrangement" is found in the challenge of self-determined collective action,

where the wide-scale absence of rules has no place within the normality of an institutionally administered repressive society. Questions arising from this were formulated by Clegg & Guttmann in conjunction with their Graz project: "What happens when you leave books unprotected by guards or librarians? How will people react to such an utopian proposition? People are very opinionated about questions like that. But they have no data to rely on. We wanted to find out what the real situation was."[25] The sociological studies that accompanied the project indicated a high degree of participation, which was manifested in the almost complete renewal of the library stock in the course of the project, among other things, as well as a fundamentally positive reaction to the "utopian proposition": "Reasons given for the attractiveness of the project referred primarily to the display of trust, the possibilities for communication that it opened up, and the increase in solidarity on the basis of exchange relationships."[26] Even though the participation in the project varied from one district to another and ultimately had a broad span "ranging from vandalism to support from grassroots initiatives,"[27] the entirety of the resultant communicative situations and social relationships indicates a structure of needs that imbues the "utopian" dimension of a radically democratic institution with a real foundation. This is ultimately what also makes it possible to overlook the somewhat exaggerated rhetoric with which Clegg & Guttmann position their practice in the history of ambitions of the historical avant-garde with the grand words "breaking down the boundaries to life". Although Clegg & Guttmann's work has long been firmly anchored in the art world and they also have no hesitations about making use of this background for "art-external projects"[28], its theoretical foundation is derived from a special reading of Peter Bürger's *Theorie der Avantgarde*. It takes up the intention of the historical avant-gardes described there of transferring art to life

praxis, but ignores Bürger's historicization of this claim, according to which the transfer of art to life praxis did not take place and "probably cannot take place within bourgeois society."[29] According to Bürger, "the means with which the avant-gardists hoped to effect the suspension of art have meanwhile achieved artwork status", for which reason "the claim to a renewal of life praxis can no longer legitimately be linked with their application." For Bürger the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art*, thus negating the "genuinely avant-gardist intentions".[30] In reference to Bürger, it seems in fact to be a "very particular interpretation" to maintain the avant-gardist rhetoric and also to link it with a "position of leadership".[31] Nevertheless, this interpretation of avant-garde history as "an inspiration for a process of democratizing institutions"[32] indicates a way of taking leave of the grand narrative of a revolutionary "avant-garde" without relinquishing its social-critical potentials. Indeed, works like the "Open Public Library" promise to redeem partial claims of the historical avant-garde, as they are related by Bürger, such as "suspending the opposition between producers and recipients",[33] the collective form of reception or the notion that "art and life praxis form a unit if the praxis is aesthetic and the art is practical"[34]. How effective these kinds of practices can be in relation to the democratization of the institution of art is an open question. The more interesting question would be, however, what it means for the emancipatory symbolic power of an undoubtedly astonishingly well functioning radical democratic experimental arrangement, if it turns out - as it did in Hamburg - that an installation like this is most successful among the population with the greatest economic and educational capital, specifically the population group that participates most in the democratic process (e.g. elections) under normal circumstances as well.[35] The problematic aspect of the "portrait of a community" should then

also be discussed in this context, if it threatens to portray nothing other than the somewhat stereotype notion of a capability for democracy that corresponds with the social standard.

… and Counter-Consciousness

A high degree of conceptional reflectedness and precision in the practical implementation is undoubtedly to be attributed to the projects by Clegg & Guttmann, especially the "Open Public Library". In this way they differ from a number of other projects that do not go beyond a rhetorically playful level. However, the construction of a singular position, as it is undertaken in the discussion of this work again and again, still seems somewhat questionable. The abstract, generalizing reference to participatory approaches in the art of the sixties and seventies, which are largely regarded as "failed", ultimately only serves here to mark the historical special position of Clegg & Guttmann. The artists themselves stress that they "regard the project not as a revival of the (somewhat naive) works of the sixties."[36] And Michael Lingner, who deals specifically with the art-historical dimension of the "Open Public Library", radically distinguishes the way it works from all earlier attempts to transfer the competence to act to the audience. As he states: "The sixties saw artists conceive activities - and the latter's objectified manifestations - that were keyed to a 'self-determining' audience. To date, however, the majority of these projects have not been put into practice; they were merely presented and received as ideas."[37] It is only Lingner's main point of reference, the "Handlungsobjekten" ("Performance Objects") by Franz E. Walther, that can explain his view that Clegg & Guttmann "devoted so much effort under today's conditions toward rendering self-determined involvement on the part of the

public truly practicable (...) instead of confining their realization to the restricted context of art [that defines] their clear and fundamentally distinct position within art history."[38]

There can be no question of such "fundamental" differences, though, as soon as one turns to the historical models that are in fact close to that of the "Open Public Library". As one of the most elaborate concepts of participatory art practice, which can also be followed consistently over a long period of time, I would like to bring up the projects that Stephan Willats has carried out since the sixties. Willats' work exemplifies that the generalizing references to "naivety" or the merely ideal nature of older models of participatory practice are not tenable in this way.

Since the early sixties Willats has been producing kinetic objects and plastic constructions that are partly oriented to interactivity with the audience. Critical reflections on the elitist character of the museum and the consequent structure of the art system, however, soon led Willats to develop new working methods, which build on the "communicative" properties of the early objects, but which shift the emphasis from the relationship between people and objects to intersubjective, in other words social relationships. If art is imagined as a form of communication, then it is not necessarily exhausted in the communicative relationship between artist and audience, but can be invested in existing social spaces and their relationships. The term that is central for Willats in this respect is "self-organization", which means establishing or intensifying the social relationships within a group of participants in an aesthetic creative process: "I consider that the audience of the work of art is as important as the artist, and that the active involvement of people in the origination of art work is an essential part of the process of generating interventions in the social process of culture."[39]

For this understanding of participation, there are two points that must be especially noted: the "audience" (now, in fact, co-

producer) is already integrated in the *origination* of the art work, not just in the actuation of a given score as in other models, such as those of the Fluxus artists, or in the implementation of one of several given possibilities. And the second point is the aspect of "interventions in the social process", in other words the scope of action beyond the art context itself. Willats' projects are thus less concerned with the abstract idea of "participation" as some kind of logical successor to the "death of the author", but are instead oriented from the start primarily to the concrete life context of the people that take part in them, and they always aim to change these circumstances of life: "From the outset it became obvious that a model of practice would be required that would bind it to the context in which the artwork was to be presented, and which could embody the priorities, languages and behaviours of the audience."[40]

The redefinition of the relation between art and audience that is the issue here does not merely numerically expand the circle of recipients familiar with the conventions and criteria of art by an indeterminate dimension of the ordinary citizen, who would thus actively partake of the values of the creative and the aesthetic. What is characteristic of Willats' model is instead the concentration on a different, yet very specific audience, which is initially more or less identical with the magnitude of the circle of participants in the respective project. The reason for this is the aim of not only cancelling out the separation between producers and audience, but that these group(s) also represent the theme, the subject matter of the work at the same time.

The social-critical position from which Willats cooperates with each specific audience is based on an insight into the institutional constraints of modern living conditions, the social norms and culturally predominant codes that dominate everyday life, the behaviors and perceptions of human beings. Willats finds an

exemplary embodiment of these repressive structures in the characteristic apartment buildings of post-war modernism, which essentially influence the mental and social life of their inhabitants - a contradictory "community of the isolated". The projects that Willats develops with the residents are intended to set processes of perception in motion, which should lead to an analysis and possible change of both the individual relationships to the environment and social relationships with one another. In this respect, Willats presumes a latently present "counter-consciousness" that is expressed with regard to social compulsions in the subversive re-coding of signs and a spectrum of actions ranging from graffiti to vandalism to the "improper" use of public spaces. Part of the work consists in articulating different forms of counter-consciousness and raising it from the individual to the communal level through confrontations with others.

Willats' model of a participatory practice can be illustrated with a project like "Vertical Living" (1978). The choice of a typical council housing block of flats, Skeffington Court in West London, is followed by initial contacts with the caretaker and a friend's mother who lives there to talk freely about the idea of a cooperation with the residents and consider potential participants. Following the constitution of a group of participants, Willats conducts individual conversations over the course of three months, which relate to the relationship between the building and daily living habits, leisure time and social contacts. The recordings of the collected conversations reveal a problem horizon, on the basis of which certain problems can be specifically discussed again. Finally, picture panels are prepared, each by one resident in cooperation with the artist, which address certain circumstances, a problem, a deficit or an expectation with photos and texts. The panels are set up in the hall next to the elevator, whereby the architectonic structure is taken into account in that new panels are placed two

floors higher at regular intervals. Response pages are distributed in addition, on which other tenants can articulate suggestions for solutions, which are collected again and publicly presented in turn. Aside from necessitating physical mobility within the building, the course of the project especially generates a communicative dynamic resulting in a network of social relationships. These can be found so productive that the tenants continue similar structures themselves after the end of the project. Even though Willats starts from a concept of art as a socially relevant practice, his purpose is not an immediate "improvement" of social situations. The respective interventions simply open up a new framework of action that enables long-lasting changes if it is accepted or continued.

The individual tendencies of participatory art - the playful and/or didactic, the "pastoral" and the "sociological" - have at least one thing in common: the background of institutional criticism, the criticism of the socially exclusionary character of the institution of art, which they counter with "inclusionary" practices. For all of them, "participation" means more than just expanding the circle of recipients. The form of participation and the participants themselves become constitutive factors of content, method and aesthetic aspects. The separate tendencies differ significantly, however, in their ideas of "community" and their criteria for social relevance. Some understand the community as pre-existent and therefore tend to attribute a (fixed) identity to it. For others community is a temporary phenomenon with a potential for development that emerges in the course of the project.
In the end, it seems that it is not possible to assess the value or success of participatory practices by the extent of the scope of action that they offer the participants, nor by the measure of "concrete change". Particularly with regard to the often raised postulate of usefulness, skepticism seems advisable. Where it once

appeared necessary, in light of the extent of the social inconsequence of art, to insist on the possibility of "real" impact, the situation is different, when it is more and more often the superordinated political instances that call for engagement, solidarity and civil participation. In some circumstances, the usefulness of social (artistic) action suits the calculations of a state that can no longer afford its citizens and there exhorts them to self-help. The concept of "citizen's work" cited at the beginning is only one example for replacing possibilities of political involvement with "social practice". Under these conditions, it seems justified to ask whether changes that "only" take place at the symbolic level rather than the "concrete", as intended by certain models of participatory practice, should not be revalued again. In many cases, these are the practices that retain at least the idea of the political ability to act. The reason for this is, not least of all, because they first adhere to political consciousness and the foundations of co-determination without immediately devoting themselves to the pragmatism of solving the problem.

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[1] Ulrich Beck, "Die Seele der Demokratie", *Die Zeit*, Nr. 49, 28. Nov. 1997, p. 7-8.

[2] For instance Rirkrit Tiravanija, Christine & Irene Hohenbichler or Jens Haaning might be named as representatives of this kind of socio-chic. In their criticism of these kinds of methods, to which they ascribe a "marked exploitation character", Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann use the term "sub-enterprise". This outsources production, but profits from the added value. See: A. Creischer/A. Siekmann, "Reformmodelle", *springer*, III, 2, 1997, p. 17-23. For the variation that remains limited to the social-communicative relationships between artists and exhibition

visitors, Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term "relational aesthetics" for the exhibition "Traffic" that he curated.

[3] Quoted from: Benjamin Buchloh, "Von der Faktur zur Faktografie", *Durch*, 6/7, 1990, p. 9.

[4] ibid.

[5] Quoted from Walter Benjamin, "Der Autor als Produzent", in: ibid., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II, 2, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1991, p. 688.

[6] ibid., p. 694.

[7] Allan Kaprow, *Essays on The Blurring of Art and Life*, edited by Jeff Kelley, Berkeley/London: Univ. of California Press, 1993, p. 195.

[8] Manifesto by George Maciunas (1965), quoted from Estera Milman, "Historical Precedents, Trans-historical Strategies, and the Myth of Democratization", in: FLUXUS: A Conceptual Country (= Visible Language, Vol. 26, 1/2), Winter/Spring 1992, p. 31.

[9] Mary Jane Jacob, "Outside the Loop", in: *Culture in Action*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, p. 52.

[10] Suzanne Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys", in: ibid. (ed.), *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Seattle/Washington: Bay Press, 1995, p. 37.

[11] ibid., p. 32.

[12] ibid., p. 36.

[13] ibid.

[14] Michael Brenson, "Healing in Time", in: op. cit., *Culture in Action*, p. 21.

[15] In her text "Won't Play Other to Your Same" in Texte zur Kunst 3, 1991, Renée Green noted that the construction of the "other" can involve the attribution of a state that can also serve to affirm "sameness" as the norm.

[16] Brenson, op.cit., p. 27.

[17] Cf. Seyla Benhabib, "Ein Blick zurück auf die Debatte über 'Frauen und Moraltheorie'", in: ibid., *Selbst im Kontext*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995, p. 161-220.

[18] Lucy Lippard, "Looking Around: Where We are, Where We could be", in op. cit., Lacy, p. 126.

[19] op.cit. Jacob, p. 56.

[20] For a criticism that deals more with the problematic "effects" than the ideological backgrounds, see Christian Holler, "Störungsdienste", springer, I, I, 1995, p. 20-26, and Miwon Kwon, "Im Interesse der Öffentlichkeit...", springer, II, 4, 1996/97, p. 30-35. Ulf Wuggenig conversely criticizes the "elitist and individualistically oriented" art world's repulsion of the "populist community orientation" of the NGPA. U.W., "Kunst im öffentlichen Raum und ästhetischer Kommunitarismus", in: Christian Philipp Müller, Kunst auf Schritt und Tritt, Hamburg: Kellner, 1997, p. 88f.

[21] Adrian Piper, "Notes on Funk I-IV", in: ibid., *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Vol. I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992*, Cambridge, Mass./London: MIT Press, 1996, p. 201.

[22] op. cit., Lacy, p. 16.

[23] Clegg & Guttmann, "Entwurf für eine 'Open Air' Bibliothek", *Durch* 6/7, 1990, p. 136.

[24] Claus Friede, "Interview mit Clegg & Guttmann", in: Clegg & Guttmann, *Die Offene Bibliothek*, ed. by Achim Könneke, Hamburg/Ostfildern: Cantz, 1994, p. 18.

[25] Clegg & Guttmann, *Breaking Down the Boundaries to Life: Avantgarde Practice and Democratic Theory*, Nr. 1 der Schriftenreihe des AKKU, Vienna, 1995, p. 57.

[26] Ulf Wuggenig, Vera Kockot und Kathrin Symens, "Die Plurifunktionalität der Offenen Bibliothek. Beobachtungen aus soziologischer Perspektive", in op. cit., Clegg & Guttmann, *Die Offene Bibliothek*, p. 88

[27] ibid., p. 85

[28] in the interview cited with Friede, p. 20

[29] Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981, p. 72.

[30] ibid., p. 80.

[31] Clegg & Guttmann, op. cit., *Breaking Down the Boundaries.*, p. 43.

[32] ibid., p. 35.

[33] op.cit., Bürger, p. 72.

[34] ibid., p. 69.

[35] See the results of the sociological study in op. cit., Wuggenig et al, "Zur Plurifunktionalität der Offenen Bibliothek", p. 84.

[36] op. cit., Clegg & Guttmann, "Entwurf für eine 'Open Air' Bibliothek", p. 136.

[37] Michael Lingner, "Ermöglichung des Unwahrscheinlichen. Von der Idee zur Praxis ästhetischen Handelns bei Clegg & Guttmanns Offener Bibliothek", in: op. cit., Clegg & Guttmann, *Die Offene Bibliothek*, p. 50. [Engl. translation:Michael Lingner, "Enabling the Improbable": http://ask23.hfbk-hamburg.de/draft/archiv/ml_publikationen/kt94-3_en.html]

[38] ibid.

[39] Stephen Willats, *Between Buildings and People*, London: Academy Editions, 1996, p. 7

[40] ibid., p. 8.