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### Participation and collaboration in contemporary art : a game without borders between art and 'real' life

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Object of enquiry, research questions, field of study**

The 1990s in several countries saw a growing interest on the part of artists, as well as art institutions and policy makers in art outside formal exhibition venues and, more particularly, in art that engaged directly with audiences. That was mostly art not coincidentally produced and presented in just any place, but made with a specific site in mind. As Miwon Kwon noted, until the late 1960s early 1970s the “site” was considered to be the physical or architectural environment within which artworks were placed.<sup>1</sup> Gradually since then the term came to refer to the social context of a place, to a specific community (or a group of people considered as one), or to a specific social or political issue. By the end of the century it referred even to an artist him or herself, whose work was considered connected to a certain issue, so the artist was invited to different places to work specifically on that.

These observations regarding changing notions of what constitutes a site of art outside the white cube entailed broader changes in conceptions and practices regarding not only notions and roles of the artist, art institutions and audiences, but also of art production altogether in relation to social and political life. A number of books, articles, conferences, exhibitions and other projects since the 1990s dealt with various aspects of the above general phenomena. Not that taking art to the streets, to the people or to other disciplines was a groundbreaking innovation. Part of the 1990s discourse occupied itself with whether it was all just a catchy or naïve replica of 1960s and 1970s art, and what that would mean.<sup>2</sup> Anyhow authors tried to provide critical interpretational frameworks, historical references and theoretical tools including a vocabulary. Names of categories such as (new) public art, site-specific art, (socially or politically) engaged or responsible art, community(-based) art, participatory art, collaborative art, interactive art, activist art, interventionist art, art of encounter, relational art, Kontext Kunst (context art) were old and new terms turned into buzzwords.

The present research came out of this general context. The time-frame includes the 1990s and the first years after 2000, a period when the practices examined here flourished in Western Europe, where most of my case studies are located. For reasons of brevity “Europe” in this book refers to West-European countries, and “America” refers to the United States, unless otherwise indicated.<sup>3</sup> The particular object of study is process-based, participatory or collaborative, public art practices. To be more precise, practices of public art in which artists involve in the art making process groups of people directly related to the social or political issues addressed within the projects. The projects discussed are ephemeral and long-term, comprised of a cycle of actions, activities or events, without any single object-based art work (e.g., an installation, a series of photographs) emerging from the process as concrete, final outcome. Due to their ephemerality and multiple authorship these artistic practices are considered amongst the most open-ended art forms possible. Almost all artists discussed have been working for years in that direction, building up experience as well as networks, both within the artistic as well as other relevant social or political fields. This building-up, operation and use of networks constitute an important part of their artistic practice.

It might have become apparent from the above description of the object of study that significant attention is given to form. Indeed, it is the forms of artistic practices, rather than the socio-political issues dealt with in art projects that are at the heart of the main research question. This focus reflects both my personal research interests, and also the curiosity to take certain paths in analyzing engaged participatory/collaborative, public art that were inadequately addressed in dominant discourses. To be more concrete, this book explores the question of what forms these practices employ and produce as art, and how these forms operate with regard to the social or political issues at stake in the projects. So after presenting what the projects are about, I analyze *how* they go about it. My analytical concerns lie with investigating the positions expressed in the projects primarily through the construction of their expression. This approach is most important in the case of long-term, ephemeral projects. Whether as pieces of art or objects of study, in a certain sense such projects “exist” in what is communicated about them: in narratives of their intentions, themes, concepts and descriptions of what has taken place. This is also where I start from. This book examines forms produced by the projects in question in a three-fold way. Initially, I examine the formation of concepts and narrations and the use of language - foremost verbal and, secondarily, visual. Then follows an investigation into the shaping of relations with all possible stakeholders of a project: from the groups referred to directly as participants or collaborators, to whichever group, organization, institution etc. becomes involved in setting up the art project. Finally, I consider the production of organized collective actions, activities or events during projects, all of which I conventionally call events.

At another level, there is a second research concern regarding the site-specificity of projects within the international or global (art)world. This concern has informed the choice of case studies and their contextual analysis. It originated particularly from two observations that led the path of this research during its early stages in 2003. Back then the artistic practices in question had reached their heyday in large international art events (e.g., biennials), as well as in national contexts such as in the

United States, Britain or the Netherlands, where they also had recognizable historical predecessors. Elsewhere as in my homeland Greece, they emerged as isolated cases that also caught attention. There, their public and engaged, participatory/collaborative character (without being performance art) appeared historically suspended, but it was not clear whether that was a deficiency of art, or of written history.<sup>4</sup>

A second observation was that the most widespread literature about this art during the 1990s originated from the United States. Interpretational frameworks proposed by Rosalyn Deutsche, Suzanne Lacy, Nina Felshin, Hal Foster, Suzi Gablic, Tom Finkelpearl, Grant Kester and after 2000 Miwon Kwon - to give only authors' names at this point - formed a common contemporary critical and theoretical ground on which discourses also in Western Europe were based. By and large, the above authors reviewed issues and perspectives specific to American socio-political and cultural circumstances, as well as to a Western modern and post-modern art canon. The period of my research coincided with the time that theoretical frameworks and a vocabulary prevailing in European contexts entered international discussions. For instance, the term "context art" ("Kontext Kunst") surfaced in German-speaking discourses thanks also to the exhibition in Graz curated by Peter Weibel under this name. The term "relational aesthetics" was first coined in France by Nicolas Bourriaud. While notions of participation, collaboration or interactivity surfaced simultaneously in several areas. Consequently, the second research concern of this thesis is to contextualize the artistic practices examined in their simultaneously overlapping and distinct local and international discourses. And subsequently to cross-examine points of resonance and tensions specific to the 1990s paradigm of "glocal" art production, issues and networks. This last point is examined particularly in chapter two of Part II, "A universe of relations." There, some widespread interpretational frameworks are scrutinized regarding art produced outside the Western centers of the modern art canon.

To sum up, there are two central, interwoven research concerns in this book. The one is a question of form. It asks: what forms of art do process-based, participatory/collaborative practices outside the white cube produce, and how do they operate? The second is a consideration of a site-specific contextualization mainly within West European art discourses.

Thus this research hovers between aesthetics and cultural theory. It falls within the area of enquiry that Rosalyn Deutsche defined as "urban aesthetics" or "spatial-cultural" discourse. Deutsche had in mind an interdisciplinary field that "ha[d] attracted considerable attention since the early 1980s" and which "combine[d] ideas about art, architecture and urban design, on the one hand, with theories of the city, social space and urban space, on the other."<sup>5</sup> Deutsche was a pioneer in theorizing the intersection of public art and spatial politics by drawing analytical tools from radical theories of democracy. Authors who followed her strand of thought examined the political roles and potentials of public art, investigating conceptions of the publicness of space and of art. As axes in their analyses they took questions of space, evolving around notions of place, location, public sphere, site-specificity, the city and, further, community. Inspired years ago by Deutsche and largely remaining within the interests of the interdisciplinary field delineated by her, this study investigates the politics of public

art primarily through theorizing practices, rather than space. Analyses of the two are often difficult to differentiate. Suffice it to consider that major studies like Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* and his *Critique of Everyday Life*, Jürgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Pierre Bourdieu's *Field of Cultural Production* or Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* – the latter two directly drawn upon in this thesis – provide theoretical frameworks applicable at the same time to both questions of space and of practice.

In view of the above it would be handy to add here some observations dominant in 1990s art critique, regarding penetrations in the field of contemporary art practices and theory (not just in public art). As Marius Babias noted in 1995:

Central cultural work is performed today at the periphery. The removal of the aesthetic mandate to formerly peripheral fields such as philosophy, art critique and art management characterizes the situation since the beginning of the 1990s. The periphery has started hollowing the centre – the autonomous artistic assertion. Art is created today in the knowledge that it is addressing a specialized audience and connoisseurs, and that it is received within a fixed hierarchy where social, economic and ecological criteria dominate over aesthetic ones.<sup>6</sup>

Babias' concern with transformations both of practices of art creation and of their institutional and theoretical framings, reflected his interest in exploring means of cultural resistance and socio-political engagement that artists picked up during the 1990s. Although this presents a quite general and vague statement, and although in this book I try to show that aesthetics is eventually returning through the back door after seemingly having lost its primacy (see above, "the removal of the aesthetic mandate to formerly peripheral sectors"), I believe Babias has a point when he says that early in the 1990s various other fields and disciplines have permeated art. This entire dissertation works on the tension field of in-between or new spaces created when non-art practices are drawn by artists into the domain of art, and vice versa.

Therefore also, while four out of seven case studies discussed here refer to projects produced by artists as art, the rest are either produced by artists as something different (socio-economic development of local communities, urban planning), or are produced as art by non-art agents for their own purposes (cultural work for migration activism). However, the perspective I take on all of them by looking into the form of their practices, is an essentially aesthetical perspective. It is intrigued by practices in the contemporary art field and, just like them, it expands in various directions, as much as it is penetrated from various sides.

In the above, three interconnected key terms of this study are already surfacing: *practices*, a category of "real" life and a distinction between *art and non-art*. To start with the first, as the projects examined are long-term processes, comprising a circle of actions, activities or events collectively implemented, it is preferable to talk of these projects primarily as practices, rather than as artworks. It is a practice of doing something as art (i.e. the art project), even if its component parts - such as organizing meetings with officials to lobby for migrants' rights, workshops of urban planning

and design or outdoor festivals - are not themselves considered as art events. Rather, they simultaneously maintain their original character as, e.g., political actions, professional activities, festive events, while at the same time they are also organized within an art project. For the above context, the most apt conception of artistic practices can be drawn from philosopher Jacques Rancière: “artistic practices are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.”<sup>7</sup> The relation of Rancière and the analysis of artistic practices in this thesis will become more explicit in chapter two of Part II (“A universe of relations: (Un)doing practice”).

All the above entail a presumption that there exists a domain of “real” life as distinct from which art is understood as separate and autonomous. The relation between the two is what is at stake in engaged art: art is called upon to abandon its preoccupation with itself and symbolically or concretely serve interests – understood as urgent – in life. By and large, this perspective presupposes the existence of a reality commonly recognizable by everyone, understood in terms of needs and conflicting interests - social, political, economic. In this study, due to the necessity for a conception of reality while acknowledging the shortcomings of the presumptions of this concept, I use throughout the term “real” life or “real” world to designate the horizons of the artists’ engagement.

Finally, the distinction between art and non-art, while relevant to the aforementioned separation between art and “real” life is, at least in its use here, somewhat less ideologically loaded. I apply it when I talk about forms and practices that are principally recognized as related, for example, to a professional field, a social or leisure activity, and which are appropriated by artists in their projects. In the original contexts of reference that these forms or practices come from, they apparently serve needs and interests of “real” life. But the category of non-art encompasses any forms and practices, from the urgent political or social realities addressed in activist art, to the elitist or naïve, surplus sociability offered in “relational” art. The understanding of the distinction between art and non-art is again informed by (but does not directly apply) Rancière’s aesthetic theory, and the relation there between aesthetics and politics.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The dissertation consists of two parts. In Part I, one artist is taken as case study. In the subsections all the themes of the dissertation are introduced: the production of forms of narrations, relations and events. In Part II, I take the approach to each theme as presented in Part I and by using further case studies I apply and expand further on one theme per chapter. Each chapter begins with relatively long descriptive sections presenting the case studies, supplemented, in the course of the text, by contextualizing details about the professional field or other related discourses. These descriptive and contextualizing sections came in response to a double deficiency observed in most available critical texts: a deficiency of detail about who was involved and what, where, how etc. happened during projects, as well as about the broader artistic, social or other context, within which the artists’ initiatives emerged, and to which they responded. This lack of information is not difficult to explain, as critics were primarily

drawn by the social or political aspects of the issues artists engaged with (remember here Babias).

Nonetheless, there is a potential deficiency in the case studies methodology in its application here. As the argumentation of my proposals in each chapter evolves closely around the analysis of each case study, the critique of practices might be narrowly regarded as criticism or appraisal of individual projects or artists. Case studies were selected however with the following criteria in mind. First, their relevancy to what I understood as important aspects of the artistic practices, and second, the artists' success or visibility within their fields. Central to the first, was the direct adaptation by the artists of forms of social, political, professional or other practices. Contingency, complicity, conflicting subject positions are inherent in the operation of relations in all of them. Re-produced as art, the uneasy character of their original models is sometimes reproduced too, while the professional success of the artists might even increase it. This is something that all artists I have interviewed were aware of, and dealt with it in individual ways.

In Part I the practice of the Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk is taken as pilot case study. Since the early 1990s Van Heeswijk has been developing participatory and/or collaborative projects with both artworld peers and various other groups (e.g., exhibition visitors, residents of a neighborhood). The analysis of her practice starts from all verbal and visual narrations of what a project is about or what has taken place during its process, as rendered in publications, interviews, websites, flyers, art reviews etc.. They all communicate a project's story, or a project as a story, during and after its implementation. Considering a project as a set of narrations means here regarding it as a kind of narrative space, within which the project is acted out and forever re-enacted, re-written and re-born. Michel de Certeau's theory of space as a practiced place is employed, considering the project's narrative space as a practiced place. Afterwards, the discussion moves to the production of forms of relations. I maintain that in socio-politically engaged, collaborative/participatory art projects, relations of art production and relations produced as art become fused and confused. Thus the relations considered here encompass all possible stakeholders, from target groups to local authorities, organizational partners, sponsors, art institutions, artworld peers and many more. Again drawing from de Certeau, the artist's practice is considered as simultaneously appropriating the tactics of everyday life and the strategies of institutions in setting up her projects. Thus she draws the negotiations of "real" life relations into the domain of art. Finally, the analysis turns to events organized during Van Heeswijk's projects, such as meetings, workshops, festivals, performances, dinners and so on. The question is, what kind of category do these "events" constitute in terms of their taking place in time and in space? And consequently, what role do they play within the framework of art projects that may last some days or years? The form and mode of the taking place of "events" is discussed extensively. This occurs initially in terms of Grant Kester's "dialogical" model that emphasizes discursive communication. Next it is explored in terms of performative parameters of the events' staging. Finally and most importantly, it is discussed in the relation of the "events" to forms of play and games, and in so doing I turn into analytical tools philosophical concepts of "play" by Johan Huizinga and, above all, Georg Gadamer. Significantly,

while I use Gadamer's concept of play, I simultaneously revise his theory of play as the form and mode of the encounter between viewer and artwork. Instead of that theory, specifically with regard to contemporary process-based and participatory/colaborative art forms, I show how Gadamer's concept of play may describe the form and mode of events organized as part of the contemporary artworks proper.

The first chapter of Part II discusses the use of language, verbal or visual, in the construction of concepts and narrations by the art projects. Two projects of art-activism by the artists' group WochenKlausur and a joint one by artists Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler are juxtaposed to artistic work developed by the women migrants' organization maiz as part of the latter's political activism. All three examples engage with issues of immigration in Austria, touching also upon official immigration policies and practices in the European Union after 1989. Issues of language and speech have been prominent in the debates over migration during this period in Austria. On the one hand, to be accepted as a "legal" non-EU immigrant one needed to obtain the correct official definition as "asylum seeker" or "refugee." On the other hand, in the increasingly frequent political and media debates about migration, immigrants hardly ever presented their positions themselves. Instead, they were represented by Austrian citizens. In the case studies the artists transfer political activism practices (giving people a voice) to art practices by means of participatory, public art projects, where, for instance, migrants are interviewed. In reverse, the activists transfer artistic practices (e.g., performance) to their political activism practices.

In the above examples I analyze how the narrations of projects as in videos, publications or websites operate in terms of content (articulated intentions) and form (the articulation of intentions). There are two central analytical questions. The first refers to the constitution of the subject of the narrations (narrating subject) and in the narrations (narrated subject). The subject at stake is the migrant as subject. The second question asks whether and how the social and political power structures that leave people marginalized and voiceless are challenged or confirmed in the narrative constructions of the artistic projects. With these two questions as guides and against the background of Austria's contemporary art-activism scene, I analyze the projects' narrative constructions and forms, and from that aesthetic analysis I return to the content of the artists' and activists' political statements. The initial inspiration for this chapter came from Judith Butler's approach to linguistic vulnerability, according to which, when we speak, we *do* language and we do it *on others*. While at the same time, language is also the thing that we do.

Chapter two in Part II is about the production of relations. Two case studies are presented. The first is the community-based, public art project TAMA (*Temporary Autonomous Museum for All*) by the Greek artist Maria Papadimitriou. TAMA was developed in Avliza, a location outside Athens, occupied by Roma and Vlach-Romanian Greeks. It aimed at setting up relations between artists, architects, theorists and residents of Avliza, as well as at developing a flexible infrastructural model for the Avliza settlement. TAMA attracted considerable interest in the international art world of biennials and mixed art-architecture exhibitions. The second case study is the ongoing (2001-) initiative *Gudran for Art and Development* in a small fishing

village called El-Max, outside the city of Alexandria in Egypt. Although initiated by artists, *Gudran* is a project where they use art for the social, infrastructural and economic development of the village. It has gained considerable visibility within networks of development NGOs, (social) art initiatives and cultural institutions in the Middle East region. In both the cases of TAMA and *Gudran* there is a merging of relations of production and relations produced as part of the projects.

In this chapter I employ the theoretical approach introduced in Part I. Instead of Michel de Certeau's theory of "the practice of everyday life," I take as starting point Pierre Bourdieu's model of relations and practices in the "field of cultural production." I adjust Bourdieu's model to contemporary conditions within an expanded and international field of networks that affect the local fields, within which the artists' projects of my case studies emerge. Practices of community development and of professional networking are re-produced by artists sometimes as art (TAMA) and sometimes not (*Gudran*). Demonstrating important parallels between the two projects, I maintain that in essence they both exemplify contemporary site-specific, community-based *artistic* practices. From this perspective, I investigate for both cases the aesthetic parameters of the formation and operation of relations produced by the projects. The critical aesthetical analysis of community-based artistic practices leads eventually to a critical analysis of both the changing landscapes of "peripheral" cultural fields (Greece, Egypt), as well as the changing horizons of their relations to the traditional centers of the Western (art) canon.

Finally, chapter three of Part II returns to the production of events, the forms of play and games and the Dutch context seen already in Part I. This chapter examines the practice of the so-called Bureau Venhuizen. It was established in 2001 by artist Hans Venhuizen who officially abandoned his artistic professional status and career to step into the field of professional spatial (urban) planning. Venhuizen has developed a methodology for collective decision-making, applicable when multiple stakeholders need to reach consensus over specific spatial planning projects. Bureau Venhuizen's methodology is based on a group game played by representatives of various groups of stakeholders. Stakeholders include policy makers, local authorities, urban planners, local residents and so on. Bureau Venhuizen is quite successful in the Netherlands, a country where almost every single square meter is planned, and an important percentage of the land is artificially constructed by man (polder land).

In this chapter I place Bureau Venhuizen's game-based methodology within a wider historical context of exchanges and collaborations between artists, architects and urbanists in the Netherlands. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century a hybrid field of art and art-related practices in public spaces seems to have existed there. Urban planners have been keen on seasoning the rationality of their plans and blueprints by inviting artists to contribute creative ideas and practices, thereby making plans and blueprints more palatable. Here I analyze how various forms of play and games are very often met in the historical course of these collaborations and exchanges. I explain that these forms have functioned as interfaces bridging artistic concepts and practices with "real life" spatial (urban) planning situations. The analysis of forms brings to the surface the social ideas and political priorities that eventually determine final decision-making in spatial planning.

### **Discursive frames of reference and points of departure**

It was maintained earlier that the practices of public, participatory/collaborative, engaged art that this book is about made their presence felt and were discussed in the United States earlier than in Europe.<sup>8</sup> As the focus here is on the latter, I will limit my references to American discussions that reached this side of the Atlantic and especially the local contexts I have been studying. The American references below are predominantly from books, as books are the most easily disseminated, while the experience of events like exhibitions or conferences has a rather local impact, unless debated in print. In addition, some related periodicals such as *Documents* (1992-2004) or *Afterimage* were not widely distributed in Europe, whereas, for example, *October* is found practically everywhere. The references selected may not necessarily be the most widespread ones for their particular areas (e.g., activist art, community art, public art). They are the most relevant and broadly influential ones for the practices examined here (process-based, participatory/collaborative etc.).

Socio-politically engaged art in the United States during the 1980s often expressed oppositional positions to the conservative Ronald Reagan administration.<sup>9</sup> In part it was activist art or, as Arlene Raven called it, “art in the public interest.”<sup>10</sup> Some artists and authors differentiated it from “art in public spaces” that was supported by institutional and market constituencies.<sup>11</sup> The latter was connected to a public art sector that by the 1980s had gradually grown to a recognizable field following the establishment of the Art in Public Places Program at the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) in 1967, and the formation of state and city percent-for-the-art programs.<sup>12</sup>

The interesting category here is art in the public interest. This was perceived and assessed as activism. Artists turned to groups, audiences or communities considered as socially, politically and culturally excluded from mainstream institutional practices. The particular issues discussed in the American literature on engaged art during the 1980s and 1990s mirrored the areas negatively affected by the conservative political backlash. According to Lacy, the 1980s saw “increased racial discrimination and violence,” “attempts to circumscribe the gains women made in previous decades,” “cultural censorship on a scale not known since the fifties,” “deepening health and ecological crisis ... AIDS, pollution, and environmental destruction.” One could add here also homelessness.<sup>13</sup> As with their work the artists opposed political decision-making for serving an economic rather than social mandate, their artistic practices were analyzed and evaluated accordingly through the lenses, priorities and vocabulary of their activist agenda. In the extracts below, Nina Felshin and Suzanne Lacy respectively describe and define activist and “new genre public art” (term coined by Lacy). Both authors lay emphasis on forms of collectivity in these artistic practices. These forms coincide to a great extent with those of the practices examined in this book: they are process-based, outside art institutions, participatory or collaborative, draw ways and methods from political and social activity, and make things happen that may only be possible through group work. Felshin explains:

Activist art, in both its forms and methods, is generally process-, rather than object- or product-oriented, and it usually takes place in public sites, rather than within the context of art-world venues...<sup>14</sup>

Participation is thus often an act of self-expression or self-representation by the entire community. Individuals are empowered through such creative expression, as they acquire a voice, visibility, and an awareness that they are part of a greater whole.<sup>15</sup>

And Lacy on new genre public art and its genealogy:

For the past three or so decades visual artists of varying backgrounds and perspectives have been working in a manner that resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility. Dealing with some of the most profound issues of our time – toxic waste, race relations, homelessness, aging, gang warfare, and cultural identity – a group of visual artists has developed distinct models of art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language. The source of these artworks' structure is not exclusively visual or political information, but rather an internal necessity perceived by the artist in collaboration with his or her audience. We might describe this as "new genre public art" ....<sup>16</sup>

This construction of a history of new genre public art is not built on a typology of materials, or artistic media, but rather on concepts of audience, relationship, communication and political intention.<sup>17</sup>

It is significant to note that in this context of engaged, participatory/collaborative art, the notion of the "aesthetic" appears problematic, especially as there is no consensus on its meaning. In some authors – relatively similar to the view of the "aesthetic" implied in the earlier citation by Babias – it is understood as referring to a self-absorbed art that forms an opposite to socially and politically concerned art. Often it is identified with a formalism à la Clement Greenberg, regarded as an elitist, well-marketed art. Such narrow understandings of the "aesthetic" are evident in some advocates of a collectivism along the lines described above, who often completely condemn "aesthetic" art. For example, Steven Bingler spoke highly of a mid-1980s community art project in Los Angeles that took "a strong position about the value of art beyond the abstract and aesthetic," and "support[ed] socially and culturally functional art that is inclusive rather than exclusive."<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the exact same practices could be viewed with a completely different conception of the "aesthetic:" In the above citation by Suzanne Lacy the "aesthetic" is rather vaguely defined with reference to a sensibility specific to artists and to an almost intuitive power of collectivity activated by collaborative art. In Lacy's conceptualization of new genre public art the "aesthetic" serves not only the mandate of engagement. It appears as the cipher of surplus value that art contributes to the socio-political causes of engagement. It is the element distinguishing the uniqueness of artists' contribution to activism.

To leave the study of activist and community-based art and move on to concepts of public space, the theoretical contribution of Rosalyn Deutsche here remains unsurpassed. There is a strand of theoretical approaches to participation in art that examines its democratic potentials, and Deutsche laid the theoretical grounds. She demonstrated that during the 1980s the conservative "dominant paradigm of urban-aesthetic

interdisciplinarity” and “the most influential radical critiques of that paradigm – although they both mobilize a democratic rhetoric of “openness” and “accessibility,” had a common denominator.<sup>19</sup> The model of democracy and public space they favored was one in which disagreements should be solved, conflicts resolved, differences dissolved. But in Deutsche’s view, if the ultimate targets were harmony and unity based on absolute consensus, this would respond to a totalitarian rather than a pluralistic democratic model. A model that would systematically suppress and exclude whatever expressions would not fit in.<sup>20</sup> Deutsche brought new - for the 1990s - theories of radical and plural democracy “to bear on current thought about what makes art public.”<sup>21</sup> She turned, for instance, to Claude Lefort for a concept of democracy, to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe for the term “antagonism” (see also the recently more often heard “agonistic” public sphere of Mouffe, after Hannah Arendt’s concept of “agonism”), she referred to Habermas’ model of the “public sphere,” to the latter’s critics such as Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, and further to Étienne Balibar, Jean-Luc Nancy and others.<sup>22</sup> Combining all the above, she offered the most exhaustive analysis of conceptions of “public space” in relation to spatial (urban) politics and art. She advocated for the necessarily conflictual relation between a social identity and its “constitutive outside” as the relation on which a really open and pluralistic, democratic public space should be based (see here Laclau).<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, a democratic public art should acknowledge and represent rather than negate and obscure this uneasiness of relations. Rosalyn Deutsche’s perspective, analytical framework and specific references from political theory have been extremely influential in later American and European discussions about art, public/urban space and democracy, as well as collectivity and democracy, which have been central for the topic of this thesis.<sup>24</sup>

To leave the triangle art-space-democracy, another strand of critique relevant to engaged, process-based, participatory/collaborative art practice that also has its origins in American art theory is Hal Foster’s paradigm of the artist as ethnographer.<sup>25</sup> Foster perceived it as “a new paradigm structurally similar to the old ‘Author as Producer’ model” (Walter Benjamin, 1934) that “has emerged in advanced art of the left.” In the new “ethnographic” paradigm “the subject of association has changed: it is the culturally and/or ethnic other, in whose name the artist most often struggles.” This is no longer “defined in terms of economic relations” but “of cultural identity.”<sup>26</sup> This development came out of the artists’ engagement with cultural identities - ethnic, racial, gender etc. - and especially their engagement with exploring, bringing forward and advocating identities that were marginalized and invisible, for instance, in the context of race and colonialist oppression.<sup>27</sup> Foster’s famous essay “The artist as ethnographer” informed later discussions of artists’ involvement with any group understood as representing an “Other.”

Important points to retain here from his critique are, firstly, his formulation of the “realist assumption,” which has explicitly informed the conception of “real” life as I explained earlier for this thesis. According to Foster, “the ethnographic model, like the producer model, fails to reflect on its realist assumption: that the other, here postcolonial, there proletarian, is somehow in reality, in truth, not in ideology, because he or she is socially oppressed, politically transformative and/or materially productive.”<sup>28</sup> Quite importantly, Foster links this realist assumption with a “siting”

of political truth and of politics altogether in a projected other, outside the self, something that bears a twofold danger. It “may distract from a politics of here and now.” Or, reversely, it may cause a complex “self-othering,” if the artist gets too much identified with his or her subject of association, entering a politics of identification rather than identity.<sup>29</sup> Whichever the case, whether politics are sited somewhere outside or turn towards the self, a complicity might not be avoided of artists and art institutions alike, when they perform exercises in ethnography or cultural anthropology by projects that uncover histories of oppression (e.g., slavery, colonialism) and deconstruct power relations. Because at once artists and commissioning institutions “could have it both ways – retain the social status of art and entertain the moral purity of critique, the one a complement or compensation for the other.”<sup>30</sup> Foster’s paradigm has been used by critics skeptical of community-based art to scrutinize the validity of the latter’s argumentation. For instance with regard to Lacy’s model, where the history of new genre public art is understood as constructed on “concepts of audience, relationship, communication and political intention.”<sup>31</sup> Foster’s critique has shown that it is exactly due to the politics at work in the formation of these concepts that artistic engagement becomes problematic. Here the critique of the ethnographic approach surfaces especially in Part II, chapter two, where the artists explain their engagement as triggered by the valuable cultural particularity of site-specific communities threatened due to the expansion of urban centers.

A third interpretational framework from the United States that rapidly caught attention in discourses across Europe was Miwon Kwon’s theorization of the notion of site-specificity. Her approach can be found in articles dating back to at least 1996-97, but the publication of the book *One Place After Another* facilitated its systematic dissemination.<sup>32</sup> Moving within the field of “urban-aesthetic” or “spatial-cultural” discourse defined by Rosalyn Deutsche, Kwon’s contribution is interesting here from a three-fold perspective.<sup>33</sup> Firstly because she constructs a genealogy of three paradigms of site-specificity in art since the 1960s.<sup>34</sup> First a phenomenological or experiential understanding of the notion, in which the surrounding urban environment is considered the site of mostly sculptural works. Second is a social/institutional understanding of the site, as in the institutional critique of the 1960s and 1970s. The third is discursive, where the site might be a specific social or political issue, a community, or even an artist him or herself, whose work has been connected with a certain theme and is invited here and there to work site-specifically on that. Kwon examines “aspects of what the transformation of the site – from a sedentary to a nomadic model – might mean for the art object, for artists and art institutions today.”<sup>35</sup> She is strongly skeptical of community art, especially of new genre public art, arguing that it can “exacerbate uneven power relations, remarginalize (even colonize) already disenfranchised groups, depoliticize and remythify the artistic process, and finally further the separation of art and life (despite claims to the contrary).”<sup>36</sup> Kwon’s critical analysis of the notion of community as derived from community-based art is the second interesting parameter. It includes a schematic typology: community as mythic entity, “sited” communities, invented communities (temporary), invented communities (ongoing).<sup>37</sup> The third interesting aspect of Kwon’s contribution does not lie directly in what she proposes, but in that she combines Deutsche’s and Foster’s aforementioned

approaches. Thus she links the strands of the analyses of the democratic public space of art and the ethnographic paradigm, through the elaboration of the notions of site-specificity and community in public art.<sup>38</sup> This approach is inherently connected to the analysis here of the practices of artists who work directly with people from the very groups they work about, and in the latter's spaces.

Less directly influential for this thesis, but still important to mention are two further paradigms: art as service provision, and "dialogical" art. The former was introduced by Andrea Fraser and Helmut Draxler in the on-going, traveling project *Services* that started in 1993.<sup>39</sup> They registered a shift in artists' ways of working, turning from the artist's work as object production to service provision. I am here rather conventionally locating *Services* amongst American discourses, just because Fraser is an American artist. She collaborated with Helmut Draxler from Germany, and several other international artists got involved in meetings and presentations of the project, which toured only in Europe.<sup>40</sup> The second paradigm is Grant Kester's dialogical model.<sup>41</sup> Kester drew up a genealogy of modern artworks that provide contexts of communication and dialogue rather than content. The seeds of their dialogical aesthetics he located already in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Further, there are significant authors - artists, critics, historians - such as Allan Kaprow, Lucy Lippard, Suzi Gabolic, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper or Tom Finkelpearl, whose impact on the wider discourses of the field studied here has been great, but less evident in this book.

In all the above American interpretational frameworks that have also been influential on this side of the Atlantic, there is one interesting common feature. All authors lay emphasis on genealogies. They provide historical artistic predecessors for the methods and interests of contemporary artistic practices. And in that history they find genealogies for the new concepts and interpretational frameworks they propose. The historical predecessors for American engaged, participatory/collaborative, public art practices coincide by and large across the literature. They combine civil-rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s (feminist, environmental, free-speech, Black, anti-war etc.) with the legacy of conceptualism, from minimal art to institutional critique and to Happenings and Events of Allan Kaprow and Fluxus.<sup>42</sup> Within this framework the authors trace genealogies of practices or of concepts for their theoretical proposals. Interestingly, only Rosalyn Deutsche has also explained the notion of genealogy she has used for her concept of public space, with reference to Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche conceived first of the term "genealogy" to describe a conception of history in which "the recovery of origins does not reveal the essential, unchanging meaning of a concept; it shows, on the contrary, that meanings are conditional, formed out of struggles."<sup>44</sup> Amongst the other authors, for example Hal Foster describes his entire anthology *The Return of the Real* - where "The artist as ethnographer" belongs - as a study of genealogies of "innovative art and theory" in 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Art.<sup>45</sup> He "traces these genealogies through *turns* in critical models and *returns* of historical practices."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Miwon Kwon and Grant Kester also refer to the genealogies of concepts they explore, site-specificity and dialogical art respectively.

I must admit that up until revising the general bibliography to write this introduction I had paid little attention to this common approach. Then it suddenly re-

sponded to an ongoing concern. This thesis has been written by taking a mainly synchronic contextual perspective on the projects and practices discussed, rather than a historical one. Within this framework the last chapter where I discuss forms of play and games in Dutch public art by means of drawing up a genealogy of their relations to art and art-related practices and concepts during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, looked somewhat like an inset. Its necessity was derived from the requirement to explain in particular the relations between forms of play and games, and practices of artistic interventions in architecture and urbanism. These relations were traceable in concepts, practices and the institutions that supported them. And they have survived through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, transformed and transfigured. Juxtaposing all aforementioned approaches, it seems that the construction of genealogies has become a kind of conceptual and methodological tool for studies that see continuities in associations between concepts and forms in 20<sup>th</sup> century art, beyond the logic of a modern/post-modern interpretational framework.

On this side of the Atlantic public art and artistic socio-political engagement – in the context of which process-based, collective practices also came to the foreground – made a strong impact during the 1990s, persisting also after 2000.<sup>47</sup> This time-frame, as well as the thematic range varied from place to place. Nonetheless, for all its local particularities this was the period that transnational mobility and exchange took off unprecedentedly. Artists' residencies, projects co-produced by various institutions, biennials, artists' initiatives, cultural activism networks, free-lance curators, all took Europe as their playground and looked out far beyond.

For the interests of this thesis certain artistic, political or other events became common references hallmarking wider processes. For example the exhibition *Chambres d' Amis* curated by Jan Hoet in private apartments in Ghent back in 1986, brought up questions of public/private/institutional spaces of art, which would be picked up more emphatically later. Each Documenta in Kassel made its impact on art tendencies of the following years, whether as opposite reaction (Jan Hoet's Documenta IX in 1992 was targeted as too elitist) or by signaling new paradigms (Catherine David's Documenta X in 1997 and Okwui Enwezor's Documenta XI in 2001 for decentering attention from the West as artistic and political statement). Especially the year 1993 has been singled out by art critics as a hallmark, because several exhibitions across Europe pointed to the decade's prevailing directions: project rather than object-based, site-specific and often service-oriented, process-based art. Such exhibitions were *Sonsbeek '93* (Arnhem), *Unité* (Firminy), *Kontext Kunst* (Graz) *On Taking a Normal Situation* (Antwerp), *Viennese Story* (Vienna), *Oppositionen & Schwesternfelder* (Vienna, Kassel), *Backstage* (Hamburg, Luzern), *Integrale Kunstprojekte* (Berlin), *Fontanelle* (Potsdam), *Real* (Salzburg, Vienna, Graz).<sup>48</sup> The Venice and Whitney Biennials of that year also featured some artists working along similar lines.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 stimulated mutual cultural curiosity for exchanges and collaborations between East and West, as well as political and economic activity and a huge migration wave that instantly caught art world interest.<sup>50</sup> The 1990s also saw the rise of the anti-globalization and various other transnational resistance movements and networks organizing "autonomous zones," within which cultural actions, predominantly collective and in public, urban spaces, gained attention.<sup>51</sup>

If in the United States the conservative Reagan administration represented a common frame that socio-politically concerned artists reacted against, the same could not exactly be maintained for Europe. The end of the communist era in the East, or a general neo-liberal turn of West-European governments, were indeed general frames within which, for instance, EU-wide policies were shaped.<sup>52</sup> Yet the local coordinates determining the reception of such processes varied considerably according to national, regional and global economic, social, political and cultural circumstances. It would be impossible to elaborate here further on this matter. In each chapter some more details are provided in accordance with the issues addressed in the projects discussed.

Debates on the meanings of public art or of the public space of art, have by no means reached a conclusion. Rather, the ongoing discussions about them seem to have been giving content to the terms' meaningfulness. Discussions have focused on urban space, examining the changing face of cities, new patterns of work, habitation and movement, rapid changes in population composition, gentrification, new classes of rich and poor or the new geopolitical distribution of capital and production due to which the formerly industrial infrastructure of West European cities was handed over to cultural industries.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, one should add the privatization of space and the regulation and control of people's movement in space, from regulating patterns of movement in privately owned—publicly accessible shopping centers, to controlling access of non-EU migrants in the so-called “fortress Europe.” Such approaches drew their theoretical tools mostly from the fields of social geography and political theory.<sup>54</sup> In the latter case, Rosalyn Deutsche's strand of thought was often followed, especially with regard to politics of gentrification. Within this context, certain concepts and theoretical frameworks affiliated to the notions of public space have been examined extensively. For example the “public sphere,” has been discussed mostly in revisions of the original Habermasian model, as in Chantal Mouffe's “agonistic” public sphere or Oskar Negt and Alex Kluge's multiple public spheres.<sup>55</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concepts of “Empire” and the “multitude” have resonated mostly in the area of the anti-globalization and other protest movements.<sup>56</sup> A re-working of concepts of “alternative” or “autonomous spaces” for art came part and parcel with the appearance in many places in Europe and beyond of artists' initiatives and networks, as well as with the expansion of new media that facilitated new organizational formations - sometimes mobile or virtual. In this context, the reconsideration of the political program of the Left after 1989, but also the promotion of governmental cultural policies that propagated social relevancy for the arts, while the welfare state was dismantled in the social policies, also played an important role.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, in the context of engaged art and theory certain concepts used to describe artists' practices resonated widely, regardless the exact issues handled in projects. Most notably the concepts of relational aesthetics, participation, collaboration, the art of encounter, and secondarily interactivity or context art (Kontext Kunst). Contrary to the earlier discussed paradigms of critique and theory, such as new genre public art or the ethnographic turn that were mostly introduced by a certain author, only relational aesthetics had a single inspirer, the French curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud.<sup>58</sup>

To the displeasure of many who considered Bourriaud's ideas either loosely argued, or representing the curator's professional circle, relational aesthetics triggered debates throughout Western Europe and also reached the United States. Bourriaud saw a new paradigm in practices of artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, Felix-Gonzalez Torres and Dominique Gonzalez-Foster, whose art created situations for meetings. Relational aesthetics referred both to concrete staged meetings, such as the famous Thai dinners of Tiravanija, or to projects that conceptualized conditions for potential or imaginary encounters, as in Carsten Höller's installations or Liam Gillick's work. Bourriaud's theory was conceived with gallery, rather than public art practices in mind. However, as Maria Lind noted in 2007 about the model's broad expansion:

... the notion of relational aesthetics ... has become a catchphrase carelessly used for any work within an interactive and/or socially related dimension. Recent years' relational tendencies, which often depart from the model Bourriaud formulated, include interventionist and off-site projects, discursive and pedagogical models, neo-activist strategies and increasingly functionalist approaches (e.g., art/architecture collaborative groups).<sup>59</sup>

It is within this context of the expansion of Bourriaud's notion that it is useful for the practices examined in this book. To be more precise, the common ground is the priority of the question of form. Bourriaud maintained that:

the possibility of a *relational art* (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context)... points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art. To sketch a sociology of this, this evolution stems essentially from the birth of a world-wide urban culture.<sup>60</sup>

In the above, even though attention is given to categories of the social or the urban, this does not entail that aesthetics are examined in close connection to the political or social context of art's production, as in Deutsche or Kwon. Bourriaud's is "a theory of form," where *form* is understood as "a coherent unit, a structure (*independent entity of inner dependencies*) which shows the typical features of a world. The artwork does not have an exclusive hold on it, it is merely a subset in the overall series of existing forms."<sup>61</sup> And "forms are *developed*, one from another. What was yesterday regarded formless or "informal" is no longer these things today. When the aesthetic discussion evolves, the status of form evolves with it and through it."<sup>62</sup>

Vague as this definition of forms and their development might be, it can prove fruitful when applied in the consideration of the form of artistic practices and their operation, which is the object of analysis in this book. At first sight, Bourriaud's description of form as having certain bounds ("a coherent unit," "an independent entity") and a certain structure appears at odds with the celebrated open-endedness of ephemeral and collectively authored artistic practices. However, the discrepancy is given a response in the idea that in the course of the development of forms, the previously "formless or informal is no longer these things today." This means that the terms of the aesthetic discussion are internally transformed and reconfigured,

and so is the operation of the aesthetic in the world. In addition, the emphasis on the idea that the artwork is not the only kind of entity, the forms of which have a representational function in the world, but it is one amongst others, is also quite useful. Because it relates directly to the discussion of the exchange of practices between art and other domains. Quite importantly, relational aesthetics have caused a relocation of the category of relations with regard to art production. Contacts, affairs and exchanges between subjects are at the centre of recent aesthetic developments: “as part of a ‘relationist’ theory of art, intersubjectivity does not only represent the social setting of the reception of art, which is its ‘environment’, its ‘field’ (Bourdieu), but also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice.”<sup>63</sup> This points to what is at stake when practices from various fields, art and non-art, become practices produced as art.

In view of all the above, the theoretical terrain of Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics, however loosely constructed and dubious ideologically, is for the interests of this study the other part of the field of enquiry that begins there, where the interests of Rosalyn Deutsche’s analysis of spatial politics end. By which I mean that, as described above, the theoretical program of relational aesthetics could be linked to an “interdisciplinary field of ‘urban aesthetics’ or ‘spatial cultural’ discourse,” but its focus on the question of art form – and by extension, artistic practices – reconfigures the discussion.

To move on to further concepts, the most relevant ones here are “collaboration” and “participation” that basically refer to methodologies in art production. There is neither a single-authored hallmark study on the matter, nor on the differences between these two and other related terms. As Maria Lind pointed out in the book *Taking the Matter into Common Hands. On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, which she co-edited with artists Johanna Billing and Lars Nilsson following an international symposium under the same title (Iaspis, Stockholm, 2005): “From the outset ambiguities appear. Concepts like collaboration, cooperation, collective action, relationality, interaction and participation are used and often confused, although each of them has its own specific connotations.”<sup>64</sup> Amongst those terms Lind considers the meaning of collaboration to encompass all others.

The same word was favored also in another international conference, “Diffusion: Collaborative Practices in Contemporary Art” (Tate Modern, London, 2003) that was followed by a special issue of the periodical *Third Text* entitled “Art and Collaboration,” guest-edited by the conference organizers, John Roberts and Stephen Wright.<sup>65</sup> Without showing much preoccupation with other related terms possibly applicable to the same artistic practices, the following extract from the editors’ introduction shows where they consider the notion of collaboration in art to derive its special significance:

Collaboration in art is as much bound up with value – artistic value, the value of artistic labour, the value-form of capitalism – as it is with politics and representation. Indeed collaboration in art expressly allows one to talk about value in art as a political matter, for collaboration is where labour embodied in the artwork (manual skill, cognition, art-specific competences of all kinds) is exposed to scrutiny.<sup>66</sup>

In the above, collaboration is connected to the value of the artistic product (artistic labor, the artwork) that is located at the conjunction of the worlds of art, economy and politics (under capitalism). It is this “location” and respective operation that renders the notion of collaboration important in art. And, more generally, as the editors write in the next paragraph: “Collaboration is that space of interconnection between art and non-art, art and other disciplines that continuously tests the social boundaries of where, how, with what and with whom art might be made.” Whilst undoubtedly the specific connections with the domains of the economic and the political stressed in the previous citation are significant for the role of art in the world at large, the second, more indeterminate citation that simply characterizes as “non-art” or “other disciplines” what is not art might, conceptually speaking, be more helpful here. The questions of “where, how, with what and with whom art might be made” refer in the first instance to the making of art, i.e. to artistic practices, rather than to outcomes. (Unless, of course, the process is the artistic outcome, which is something that happens particularly with process-based art, and that is exactly why the boundaries of art and other fields designate its space, rather than the limitations of its scope.) So without pre-empting the content or ignoring the importance of the parameters of the political and the economic in relation to art, the general formulation of art and non-art may enable one to find a different conceptual path for the consideration of transformations in the relations between the aforementioned three domains. This would be a path going through the analysis of forms, i.e. the means of art, and the aesthetic discussion of practices. And where practices are understood - as already mentioned earlier in this introduction - following a Rancièrian approach, as “ways of doing and making” that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.”<sup>67</sup>

For all the fuss over participatory art practices in recent years, the only known systematic study of the notion in contemporary art is provided in a reader compiled by Claire Bishop under the title *Participation*.<sup>68</sup> The reader contains pre-existing texts by philosophers and artists from the late 1950s onwards and by contemporary curators and critics. Some of Bishop’s introductory editor’s remarks are interesting to mention here. Firstly, she considers participatory artistic practices since the 1960s to be “appropriating *social* forms, as a way to bring art closer to everyday life.”<sup>69</sup> These forms are intangible experiences such as dancing samba or funk, drinking beer, running a café or a travel agency.<sup>70</sup> What Bishop understands as social forms relates to what in this book O refer to as “practices” drawn to art from other disciplines or fields. While “social forms” is a completely relevant term and in accordance with Bishop’s opening statement that her “point of departure is the *social* dimension of participation,” it nonetheless obscures the fact that some of the practices appropriated by artists primarily originate in the worlds of economic (e.g., commerce, services) or political (e.g., campaigns, propaganda) activity. But anyhow, the structure and operation of participation (or collaboration etc. for that matter) in the context of the artists’ appropriation of forms from any of the above fields is similar. Secondly, Bishop distinguishes between “an authored tradition that seeks to provoke participants” and that is “disruptive and interventionist,” starting with avant-garde practices like Dada mock trials. This tradition is opposed to a “de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity and is “constructive and ameliorative,” exemplified, for

instance, in Soviet mass spectacles like the Storming of the Winter Palace. Thirdly and finally, Bishop describes three concerns that she considers as summing up the triggering forces behind participation in art since the 1960s: activation, authorship, community.<sup>71</sup> Activation links to the empowerment of individual subjects by means of their becoming participants symbolically or physically, which is thought to have emancipatory potential for individuals. The opening up of authorship to more than one individual is considered an egalitarian and democratic gesture, and thus valued “as emerg[ing] from, and producing a more positive and non-hierarchical social model.”<sup>72</sup> Finally, community refers to a concern with “restor[ing] the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning,” and it is understood as stemming from “a perceived crisis of community and collective responsibility.”<sup>73</sup>

In the dissertation I constantly use the terms participatory/collaborative together. The first one is understood here to have connotations of a framed activity, within which other people (than the initiating agency) are activated. So, it indicates a framing format, as well as the precondition of some hierarchy of authorship. In addition, I consider the term participation as having more immediate, visible connotations of processes of democracy and representation, thus linking in the first instance with the political questions posed in collectively authored art. The second term, collaboration, does not really indicate anything about the framed character of the artistic practices in question here. This character is extremely important with regard to questions of authorship, representation and participants/collaborators’ emancipation. Nonetheless, collaboration has more obvious connotations of labor and production than the term participation, thus it appears more pertinent for the economy-related questions posed when art is produced collectively. Even if indeed, as mentioned earlier with reference to John Roberts and Stephen Wright’s citation that showed whence collaboration in art derives its importance, questions of value (economic domain), politics and representation (political domain) can hardly be separated. Consequently, the two terms supplement one another with each one’s particular connotations, covering the parameters of collectivity that are important specifically for this book.

Other related notions frequently used in the field are interactivity, context art and the art of encounter. Interactivity has been elaborated extensively with regard to art that activates viewers’ involvement, and recently especially in the context of new, interactive, media.<sup>74</sup> From both sides it is less relevant here. The term context art (mostly used in German, Kontext Kunst) was the title of an exhibition curated by Peter Weibel in Graz, in 1993. The exhibition focused on work that thematized the institutional, social and ideological framework of art production, emphasizing links between such tendencies in the early 1990s and the work of conceptual artists from the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the term art of encounter, quite common in the Netherlands (ontmoetingskunst), has been discussed in Erik Hagoort’s essay “Good intentions. Judging the art of encounter,” from which it would be useful to pick out a couple of points here. Hagoort reminds us that in 1993 – the year mentioned earlier as hallmark in Europe for the decade’s tendencies - Rirkrit Tiravanjia organized his first cooking meeting called *True to Life* as a gallery event in New York.<sup>76</sup> The same year the mega public art project “Culture in Action” curated by Mary Jane Jacobs opened in Chicago with several projects involving several local communities.<sup>77</sup> Hagoort main-

tains that “in retrospect” these two projects “marked the breakthrough of the art of encounter.” Because for all their differences, they shared an important common characteristic: “... the audience was expected to ‘interact’ ... [w]ithin a framework set by the artist ... . The encounter was the essence, not looking at an art object or attending a performance.”<sup>78</sup> At the same time, the differences between the two events have their significance too. For Hagoort they hallmarked two offshoots of the art of encounter, “one representing low-key, lounge-type gatherings, the other large scale socially engaged activities.”<sup>79</sup> This dissertation considers cases of the second paradigm, though opening up its site-specific, community-based, public art approach in other directions. Besides, Hagoort’s approach of encounter as the outcome of art revolves predominantly around the question of ethics and aesthetics of artistically staged sociability.<sup>80</sup> In that context, other issues like labor or democracy are generally seen through the lens of morality.

In conclusion, all the above interpretational frameworks have influenced what follows in this dissertation. Some of them appearing as points of reference at various junctures, while others as points of departure in different directions to their original authors’ approach.