Introduction
A Public Sphere, For Example

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In 1869, in the immediate aftermath of the Boshin War that started the Meiji Renovation in Japan, the Shinto shrine known as Yasukini was built. Originally the shrine was meant to pay tribute to those fallen in the Boshin War. Today, however, it honours those who have fallen in any of the twelve wars fought since that time. Since 1978, when the souls of a dozen Class A war criminals were enshrined in Yasukini, the shrine has been highly controversial. Its yearly memorial service, traditionally held at the beginning of July and attended by most state officials of the Japanese government, has been strongly criticized by China, Taiwan, South Korea and others (all of whom have suffered under the military rule of Japan).

The memorial service, not surprisingly, is a highly publicized, public, and political moment, taking place right at the heart of Tokyo. Immediately bordering on the Imperial Palace and next to the Imperial War museum, the memorial connects the urban with the national, the rituals of a constitutional democracy with those of an empire (the Boshin Wars were — and this is what makes this shrine so significant, what at some point made it the chosen site for the memorial service for all war casualties — the beginning of the Renovation that was so important to Japan). And of course the commemoration is also an economic and cultural affair: it attracts the small entrepreneurs and owners of market stands selling trinkets, souvenirs, religious attributes and pickled vegetables; it attracts tourists and nationals, and so on and so forth.

The annual memorial service at the Yasukini Shrine is an excellent case study for how the authors in this book approach the idea of the public sphere. In general terms, the essays understand the public sphere as a volatile field in which the different powers of society intersect. None of the powers has complete control over the situation, which is what makes the situation volatile but also makes it a site of political struggle and socio-economic emancipation. The annual ritual taking place at the Yasukini shrine is an example of how these different powers intersect. We can see different economies at work here, vying with each other and/or conspiring together: the micro-economics of the market stands selling trinkets, the macro-economics of the multinational corporations sponsoring the event, a religious economics of paying tribute to the dead whose souls are enshrined in Yasukini, the political economics of state officials visiting Yasukini and thereby paying tribute to war criminals,

and the cultural economics of creating a tradition and a cultural identity that traces modern Japan back to the Meji Restauration. And of course, all of this is broadcast, publicized, and becomes a topic for public debate on a national and international level.

Such a public sphere, the Yasukini example makes clear, is not only a volatile intersection of different powers in society; it is also something that must be 'kept alive', so to speak, it must be reiterated, reaffirmed and reinstated in order to exist: the media must keep on broadcasting, the economic forces must keep looking for dominance, and so on. For a public sphere to exist it must be *constituted* in each and every moment, through each and every gesture, through each and every institution that adopts its principles and aspirations. The public sphere, in other words, is constituted by the continuous intersection of different societal powers, usually in the city. The question for this book is: how can art contribute or interrupt this process of constituting a public sphere?

Interruption and Constitution

Interrupting the City wants to contribute to our understanding of the ways in which art — or more precisely: artistic practices and interventions — constitutes the public sphere. Most contributors working with us on this book were kind enough to go along with us in assuming that *interrupting* the city is one way of forcing the public sphere to renew itself; or if not renew then at least to rehash itself. The essays engage with the question *how art might contribute to the constitution of a public sphere*. They provide different answers to this question, compelling the readers to make up their own minds about the contribution of art to the public or even to the political sphere. But to make all of this comprehensible and convincing we must clarify the premises and core concepts we are using. We need to answer questions such as: what do we mean by interruption and constitution? And if we assume that interrupting the city is a way to constitute the public sphere, then aren't we working with a rather minimal way of defining constitution?

To such questions we would respond: yes, why not try to approach constitution as the result of an interruption, as caused by a series of interruptions? That is indeed a minimal definition of 'constitution'. Precisely for that reason it allows us to take a fresh approach to understanding what constitution means, both

politically and artistically. More importantly, how it helps us understand the relation between art and politics, art's intervention in the public sphere.

The reason why this way of understanding 'constitution' seems rather minimal is because we are used to the religious and political connotations that are deeply ingrained in the concept. In the English language tradition, constitution acquires its religious connotation clearly in the Douaye-Rheims Bible, the first English translation of the Latin Vulgate authorized and published under the auspices of the Catholic Church and published in several instalments between 1582 and 1610. The Rheims Bible mentions 'the constitution of the world'. A few decades later, in 1651, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* emphasized not just the importance of political sovereignty, but also the *constitution* of that sovereignty in the social sphere. This is what made him act against the idea of natural rights, defended by contemporaries such as John Locke and Hugo Grotius: no one is born with certain minimal rights, and no one is born with absolute political power, that is to say sovereignty. Instead, for Hobbes, the constitution of sovereignty becomes a social affair forced upon mankind because of the brutality and unpredictability of the state of nature. The social contract marks the transition from the state of nature to civil society, but it does so precisely through the *constitution* of sovereignty; that is to say, the constitution of an authority that presides and rules over the social and political world.

We can make do without a detailed biblical and political exegesis to grasp the transference of meaning taking place here. Through its religious history, constitution references creation — the 'constitution' of the world, a classic case of *creatio ex nihilo*. Through its political history, constitution references a transition from one state to another, nothing short of the 'birth' of the political: we are moving from one state of affairs, the state of nature, to another state of affairs, society, which promises to be totally different, as it holds in store for us everything that was lacking in the state of nature: security, comfort, safety. Over the next couple of centuries these two definitions were at times played out against each other and at other times spliced together. Accordingly, its semantic and political field inflated, affecting every concept in its vicinity — and that includes everything from 'constitutional democracy' to the highly metaphorical (and equally ideological)

'Birth' of a nation. With these big expectations of 'birth' (the creation of something new) and 'change' (the effectuation of a real change) constitution became something very abstract, at least for the individual citizens going about their daily lives. Constitution, after all, is not something one can do on one's own.

As a matter of fact, it is not something anyone, as an individual citizen, can do. It thus quickly becomes a rarity, a myth of origin almost, and therefore out of the reach of individual citizens. In that sense constitution, albeit a core concept of modern political thought, was poorly developed: it has become strangely sterile, acceptable only in the most technical of legal documents on the one hand, and the most disproportionate social dreams of revolution on the other hand. Precisely for this reason a minimal definition of constitution that emphasizes the reiterative and performative aspect of the public sphere can be useful. In our reading, the *constitution* of the public sphere does not refer back to a myth of origin, the birth of the political, but to a process that takes place time and again, through a multi-rhythmic articulation and reaffirmation of local economic and political concerns. The concerns are shaped and expressed through local customs and rituals, in combination with the use of global media, national and transnational institutions and so on. The massive virtual space opened by social media is part of the public sphere, contributes to its constitution while altering it and opening it up at the same time. The same holds for the city squares, streets, shopping malls, subway stations, slums and suburbs. They are *all* a potential part of the urban public sphere. What will be decisive for the constitution of the public sphere, however, is how these different elements are connected, and which communication flows they allow for. An artistic approach to this constitution, then, would mean little more (and little less!) than interrupting these different elements by making them visible or by addressing the biases that they impose on us.

A concrete example of how such a constitution of the public sphere through a continued and reiterated interruption of an existing urban space might look like, can be found in Jennifer Miller's traveling circus. Descending upon parks and public squares to engage with the local community in setting up a circus act, Miller's *Circus Amok* presents in this book how art intervenes in the public sphere. But she also makes understandable that such a reclamation of the public sphere can only be done in close collaboration and negotiation with the existing conditions of the neighbourhood,

taking into account its micro-economics and social and political tensions. The parks in which *Circus Amok* takes place are traversed by conflicting audiences, youngsters playing basketball on the courts, trucks that are parked in the parks, and so on. These material elements pair up with an institutional framework (the law) and together can begin to form a public sphere.

What is a Public Sphere?

One of the most pressing questions that this collection of essays tries to answer is: what shape does the public sphere take on today? How is the contemporary public sphere structured? And which political, social and economic forces determine what can or cannot happen within the public sphere? In answering these questions, the concept of interruption takes the lead over constitution. The hypothesis that the essays in this book explore, holds that the public sphere is constituted by a combination of social, political and media forces. But also, and primarily, we submit that this combination of forces is in a continuous flux, continuously in need of reiteration and subject to institutionalization, but also, and most significantly, continuously being interrupted. So what does interruption mean in this context? Interrupting these forces can mean that they are brought to a temporary halt. This is what happens during a demonstration or a public sit-in or occupation, for example. At the same time, such an interruption can be the starting point for a reorganization, a re-evaluation and creative recombining of the social, media and economic forces that make up the public sphere. Such a reorganization, the idea goes, can only be achieved through interrupting the already existing structures of the public sphere. Such an interruption, indeed, is never a real stand-still but rather an activity that must be undertaken collectively. In the city nothing ever really comes to a halt. Quite to the contrary, the moment a square is occupied city life is intensified: police are sent out, media pay attention, passers-by take an interest in what is going on, discussions take place. Interruption means first and foremost the interruption of the solidified structures according to which public life in the city takes place day in, day out. These activities can lead to a reorganization, indeed a (re)constitution, of the various forces that make up the public sphere.

We wish to distinguish this conceptualization of the public sphere from a more conventional, albeit authoritative and important

reading such as the one developed by the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas in his classic essay *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). For Habermas, the public sphere came about in modern times, after the onset of capitalism and the rise of media within civil society. He traces back the genesis of the public sphere to the broader, more encompassing development of a new economic and political system during the fourteenth and fifteenth century: proto-capitalism. With the rise of capitalism came the rise of a 'sphere of commodity exchange and social labor'.[1] This sphere of commodity exchange was, in Habermas' own words, 'privatized, but publicly relevant'.[2] In other words, it was a public sphere and needed to be treated as such, but it should not be regulated by the state (it is, after all, privatized).

A negative way to approach this observation would be to point out that this situation holds all the key ingredients for neoliberalism. Something along those lines was done by Michel Foucault in his argument on the relation between sovereignty and economic liberalism during the seventeenth century.[3] A more optimistic approach, chosen by Habermas, would argue that this opens up an alternative site for politics. In so far as this is the site where a free discussion on the direction society should take can take place, this is a site for genuine democracy, perhaps even making democratic politics as we know it possible. Habermas adds that this public sphere was itself already prepared and performed by the literary public sphere which 'provided the training ground for a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself'.[4] When, finally, the rise of the mass media took on steam, with journals and later newspapers facilitating the discussions and debates that belonged to the public sphere, the public sphere that still up to a large extent acts as the main site for political and social discussion began.

In more recent publications, Habermas has acknowledged that the emancipatory potential of the public sphere, the freedom to speak one's mind and to discuss publicly one's ideas and beliefs — in short: the Enlightenment ideal of the public sphere that was sketched by Habermas in his publications from the early 1960s — has not been realized. As early as the 1970s he began to warn his readers that the rise of technological communication media and the control exercised by various political and commercial parties over these communication media were posing a threat to the independence of the public sphere. Worse even, it seems

as if this independence, this so-called *separateness* of the public sphere may have always been a fictive idea. This is where our idea of the public sphere diverges from Habermas. Whereas Habermas maintains that the public sphere is separate from other spheres, such as the political and the economic sphere, we suggest that the public sphere is built up out of the economic and political vectors that come together in the public domain. More concretely, and at the risk of oversimplifying things, what can be said and thought today is largely dependent upon the structures of contemporary capitalism. Mass media such as television and (online and offline) newspapers adjusted their publication policies to commercial successes, indicated by viewer ratings and the number of clicks and mentions received.[5] The upsurge and influx of 'infotainment' in news media emphasize this reorientation of the public sphere on the basis of market concerns.

Despite its hegemonic hold over the contemporary public sphere, the market and its obsession with economic gains is just one element that constitutes the public sphere. It competes with other elements, which often try to counter the influence of the market on the ideas that circulate in the public sphere, and it is this struggle that creates a vibrant public sphere in which we can intervene in political, aesthetic or economic ways. In our reading, then, the public space is neither 'open' nor free. More than anything else, the public sphere today is a site of struggle: a struggle both in the sense that participating in the public sphere revolves around continuously trying to open up to new, divergent ideas and actions, and a struggle in the sense that the public sphere is constantly being shaped and transformed by 'external' economic, social and political forces. It is also this struggle which can explain the importance we attach to interruption. These struggles must be understood as activities that lead toward an interruption of the public sphere and, as a result, a reconstitution of that public sphere.

Although the ubiquity of digital communication networks suggests otherwise, the last two decades have not seen a democratization of the public sphere. The conditions that determine who has access to the public sphere by means of public fora, newspapers and broadcasting time have remained largely unchanged: they are still exclusive, obfuscating or downright ignoring many of the events and political and social concerns that people are struggling with in their daily lives. The essays collected in this book

attempt to chart the conditions under which one is able to develop a voice in the public sphere, to analyse them and to ask in what way these conditions could be altered by means of artistic interventions. Likewise, the contributing authors ask questions such as: to which restrictions are artists, writers and intellectuals who engage with the contemporary public sphere subjected? And how do they deal with these restrictions? At the same time, however, *Interrupting the City* asks which voices, actions and bodies remain inaudible, ineffectual or invisible in the public sphere. And what sort of aesthetic or artistic strategies would enable these slighted voices to become audible?

Just as we argue that the public sphere is not properly a 'separate', let alone autonomous sphere, but that it is determined by social, political and economic forces within society, so too we argue in this book that the contemporary public sphere is not led by (or even focused on) the production and exchange of rational arguments. Today, the public sphere is structured and dominated by emotions and affects, sentiments and feelings of hope and fear rather than by colloquial reasoning. 'Public spheres', Lauren Berlant has suggested, 'are always affect worlds, worlds to which people are bound ... by affective projections of a constantly negotiated common interestedness'.[6] Public debates not only revolve around overcoming disagreements or addressing political conflicts; they are also, in the final resort, spectacles, performances and aesthetic (and most certainly rhetorical) interventions. People are not only attracted to these performances and interventions because of their cogent articulation of political ideas and visions, but just as much because of the affectual impact they have upon listeners and viewers. The aesthetic or sensory performance in political debates, as much as the context in which these debates take place, determine to a large degree how people will relate to them; that is to say, whether they will be able to project their own social affects onto the issues and ideas that circulate in the public sphere. As Berlant has it:

> In liberal societies, freedom includes freedom from the obligation to pay attention to much, whether personal or political — no-one is obliged to be conscious or socially active in their modes and scenes of belonging. For many this means

that political attention is usually something delegated and politics is something overheard, encountered indirectly and unsystematically, through a kind of communication more akin to gossip than to cultivated rationality.[7]

For Berlant, however, the 'freedom from the obligation to pay attention to much' does not result in a loss of political agency for individual citizens. People are simply not moved by arguments that appeal to their rationality, but by issues that speak to their immediate personal or social concerns and desires. 'Amidst all of the chaos, crisis and injustice in front of us, the desire for alternative filters that produce the sense — if not the scene — of a more livable and intimate sociality is another name for the desire for the political.'[8] In short, the political — that is to say, the public sphere in which political discussion and action take place — rather than being based on rationality and sound argumentation, is primarily driven by public passions, affects and shared emotions. These passions and affects, coming about at the intersection of the personal and the public, is what provides the public sphere its specific dynamic. This is, as Berlant has it, the *desire* for the political.

The desire for the political, then, is composed out of wider social concerns that are addressed in the public domain proper as well as out of personal, vernacular concerns of individual citizens. On the basis of this insight we may arrive at a more precise characterization of the public sphere as composed out of both public and personal affects and ideas. On the one hand, the public sphere concerns public debates which take place on public fora (on television, in the marketplace, or on the internet). On the other hand, the vernacular public spaces of our daily lives (the neighbourhood, the shopping mall, the pavements and local parks) have an equally important role to play in the constitution not only of the public sphere, but also of our social and political desires. Judith Vega's essay 'Imagining the City: The Difference that Art Makes' (2013) addresses this issue.

When Vega speaks of the public space, she is referring to the various bodies that can be found in the public space: 'Mere empirical presence in the public space does not suffice as an indication of presence in the public sphere: whether we "see" presence in the public sphere depends on a conceptualization of what counts as being-in-public.'[9] This is important because for Vega the city is a 'difference machine', a generator of inequality. Whereas

in the public debate argumentation takes place discursively, there the force of art, she argues, is that it is able to show us the 'actual "embodiments" of urban subjectivity and interactions' such as they take place in the city.[10]

These different views of how the public sphere can be defined are related to how one defines politics. The starting point in this is the distinction that Rancière makes between 'politics' and 'the political', in *Disagreement* (1999).[11] In the classical sense, 'politics' is the political debate as held in parliaments, so it is about how parties, through negotiations, convert their interests into policy and about the way in which this is discussed in the ritual conversation that a parliamentary debate is. Once every so many years, this ritual is performed in the form of elections and the associated spectacle. The underlying thought is that the people only interfere in politics at these moments but in the interim leave it to specialists.

Rancière posits a different definition of the political: the political is a struggle about what can be seen and can be said within a community. Lauren Berlant, quoted earlier, again situates this in the sphere of affect: 'This locates politics in a commitment to the present activity of the senses. It sees the work of citizenship as a dense sensual activity of performative belonging to the now in which potentiality is affirmed.'[12]

Artistic Practices in the Public Sphere

So where does art come in? Could it be as simple as saying that certain artistic practices, if well-prepared and performed at the right time, can interrupt this public sphere either through an intervention in the material conditions of the public sphere or through an intervention in the legal and institutional frameworks that hold this public sphere in place? In one way, yes; but in another way most certainly not. Because although this is indeed the sort of interruption we believe art can set in motion in the public sphere, thereby forcing it to reshape and reconstite itself, we also recognize that the ways in which this can be done (through art or by other means) are far from simple. They necessarily intervene in a complex constellation of institutional, material and cultural constraints.

What the effect of an artistic interruption will be is often hard to predict. But art that takes place in the city, that positions itself within a city and takes a stand with regard to this city, interrupting

it where possible, not just hiding in its museums but moving into its suburbs and slums, does contribute to the constitution of the public sphere. In *Interrupting the City*, various aspects of the relations between art and the public sphere will be discussed: reflecting, criticising, constituting, interrupting, disrupting but also transforming and imagining. For this reason we have brought together artists, academics, geographers, art historians, philosophers and sociologists. We are convinced that the complexity of art's relation to the public sphere, one of its vested entries in becoming political, cannot be studied from just one angle. This book tries to unravel the complexity of this seemingly simple relation between art and the political as mediated through the public sphere. They try to make it tangible by analysing concrete examples.

The various contributions to this book represent the continual exploration of the relations between artistic practices and the public space, including the various relations between art and politics. The first of these is that of 'representation'. An artwork or a literary text is always a representation of reality (or the illusion thereof). This representation quickly becomes a comment or critique on that reality. This is relevant when we think about writers and artists who take on the role of public intellectual or of an engaged writer in order to directly — explicitly or otherwise — intervene in the rhetoric of the public debate.

But there are other relations as well. For instance, artworks or other cultural expressions may provide 'alternative scenarios'. In that case the work of art is not opposed to or juxtaposed with reality but offers another reality that may as well have been 'real'. In that scenario, the work of art creates the other possible realities (and thereby also comments upon and criticizes reality). Art and literature create imaginary spaces that shape reality in a different manner or present a new reality. In this context, various contributions to this book mentioned the phenomenon of 'embodiment'. How can we, through the imagination, give a body, a face, a voice to what remains in visible or hidden in the discursive-rhetorical public debate?

One may wonder whether criticism and comment suffice. Especially in thinking about art in the urban, public space, more direct forms of political engagement come to mind. Art made and provide an interruption or intervention that compels the public to look in a different way, the making things visible that would otherwise remain invisible. If one does not define politics in the classical manner, but rather in the manner of Rancière, then art in the public space can enforce a different distribution of the visible. In that context, there is also mention of an intervention that aims to disrupt the flow of neoliberal capitalism. This may be art that intervenes intentionally, but also spontaneous the servicing initiatives for which spaces are created in the city for a brief period; spaces that are owned by no one and where something is made visible. These are tactical, always changing creations that reveal moments of freedom and escape. As one of the contributors asks: does the city of today still have space to *play*?

Finally, another relation between art and politics is that in which art thinks that it has detached itself from reality. In the spirit of Adorno and Blanchot, people speak of 'autonomy' or the 'space of literature' is a place where the things that take place in political reality are actually totally absent and precisely in creating this absence — which may also be seen as destruction — life to critical potential of art. It is perhaps remarkable that in the contributions to this book, this view on art is conspicuously *absent*. In her contribution, Odile Heynders says that such an interpretation of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* is quite possible but that and other interpretations, in which Calvino's novel is a fictional prediction of the urban experience of today, is much more productive.

The Digital City
Today, the rise of the megacity and the recent emergence of a digital social sphere probably make up the two most important transformations of the public sphere. Of old the city has been the central site for public and economic interaction and debate, the public sphere that emerged in the wake of this. With the advent of the first cities in the late Middle Ages, West European culture gave rise to the idea that the square or market square was the place where public opinion was formed and literature was practised. It wasn't until the seventeenth and eighteenth century that the idea of this market square would develop into what we now call public space: a 'media space' in which various political voices can interact, a situation that is generally assumed to have been reflected in the magazine and pamphlet culture of the eighteenth century.

What seems to be central to both the capital mega-cities that today form the nodes of contemporary global capitalism and

social media is that they are both about *circulation* and *flow*. This may sound abstract but it is in fact very easy to grasp. With the expansion of the urban living environment toward the end of the seventeenth century and during the nineteenth century, it became increasingly important in these urban megalopolises is that the people would circulate. What needed to be avoided was people getting cramped in the streets, or in large public spaces; that would interrupt the daily flow of the city. Such interruptions could be simple traffic jams, but could also be political revolts. To sit down and occupy a public space and thus to lay claim to the public sphere and the debates taking place there, is not a new strategy. But as Occupy has shown, it remains a relevant strategy, one which only gains strength by the emergence of social media.

As far as social media are concerned, the digital megacity so to speak, there too an interruption of a flow may constitute a real space for public discussions. In the same vein, a contemporary media scholar such as Jodi Dean has argued that today we are in a form of capitalism that is best described as *communicative capitalism*. In communicative capitalism, Dean argues in *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 'the use value of a message is less important than its exchange value, its contribution to a larger pool, flow, or circulation of content. A contribution need not be understood; it need only be repeated reproduced, forwarded.'[13]

It is in this context that the concept of interruption can reveal its significance. To interrupt the city (be it digitally or materially) means to arrest the flow or circulation that the city consists of. The tactics by which this interruption is achieved may vary, ranging from a media offensive to riots in the streets, but each and every time it will mean that the activity that has been undertaken somehow affects the public sphere, maybe even *makes* the public sphere. For example, it could affect the media that co-constitute the public sphere, by using them and commenting upon them.

The Contributions

Interrupting the City is divided into four parts. The first part, 'Artistic Imagination of the City', analyses how the city is imagined by artists. Sander Bax compares how writer Tom Lanoye and journalist Joris Luyendijk tried to influence discursive-rhetorical debate in the public sphere. It is interesting to see how the writer applies journalistic-rhetorical techniques, whereas the journalist is rather using 'embodiment'. Odile Heynders rereads Italo Calvino's

Invisible Cities as an imagining of urban experiences of today, showing that reading classic literature may induce a new relation to our own day and age.

In an interview with the artist Sarah Vanhee, Bojana Cvejić makes it clear that the city can be imagined in various ways. No matter how varied the artistic strategies that Vanhee applies are, she always tries to provide a stage or rather a medium for things that are also present in the city but have a low public profile. Cvejić and Vanhee discuss for remarkable projects by the artist in which she stepped out of the comfort zone of the pre-programmed theatre space. To interrupt the city first and foremost means that the artist herself allows to be interrupted too by what is not encountered in traditional theatre.

By way of 'intermission', architect Rennie Tang and choreographer Sara Wookey speak about their performance *ActionScape*, which they realized in Grand Park, Los Angeles.

In the second part, 'The City and Its Politics', we stay with the imagining of the city, but this time by giving the floor to philosophers and academic thinkers. How do they imagine the city in theoretical discussions? Bram Ieven concentrates on the political imagining of the public space in the city and how it is kept under control by and mechanisms of repressive tolerance and at the same time can be broken open. Thanks to the influence of technological developments, according to philosopher Gerald Raunig the city no longer consists of individuals but of 'dividuals' and therefore the city and the role of the public space must be fundamentally redefined. Even more so: the old distinction between private and public space is no longer relevant for imagining contemporary urban life. Erik Swyngedouw poses the question what the political and the artistic having common in their relation to the city and concludes that both perform aesthetic interventions. 'Art and politics', he argues, 'dwell in the register of the aesthetic.' But what does that mean and what does it imply?

The artistic interruptions are not always evident however, becomes clear in the third part, 'Struggle with the City'. In this part, Vanessa Joosen, in her essay 'Poet Interrupted', illustrates how artistic urban interventions can sometimes 'backfire' and hit the artist in the face like a returning boomerang. Featuring Bart Moeyaert as her protagonist, Joosen shows how this writer was driven into a

corner after being appointed city poet of Antwerp. What is tolerated, what is not? How autonomous are writers in their own work? Should they explicitly engage in politics or not? In short, what are the uncertainties of a sudden public artistic existence for someone who is used to sitting at his writer's desk in relative isolation? Joosen's text is certainly shocking: the city as a stage is an unsavoury place where artists have to fight tough battles.

The New York founder of Circus Amok, Jennifer Miller, seems better equipped. Although she made a conscious decision to bring the circus to New York parks, she nevertheless fights an uphill battle to make the public space public and keep it that way. Amok is not a regular circus, as soon becomes clear from the interview she gave to Tessa Overbeek: '... topics such as racial profiling or radical feminism may fly back and forth between jugglers'. As a critical commentator Miller has been following city life for two decades. Here, circus is a public chronicler of the city, about the city and in the city. Each time Amok 'pitches its tent' she makes that space public again for a while and therefore also political.

Miller's power sharply contrasts with the story of her fellow New York artist and theorist Gregory Sholette. He reveals how altruistic artistic and active is to get initiatives such as REPOhistory are easily usurped by the so-called creative class. The struggle over public space is a risky and tiresome undertaking indeed, whereby sometimes the artist scores a point but much more often capital prevails. 'Struggle with the City' makes clear that public art is an energy consuming business but also shows that clever artistic practices exist that succeed in evading prevailing paradigms time and again.

In the fourth and final part, 'Common Public Space', we take leave of the daily struggle of artists and explore the possibilities in a more speculative manner. How to escape the pitfalls of the neoliberal creative city? Geertjan de Vugt takes a look at the cultural-historical importance of the notion of 'play' in the work of Huizinga and shows how Huizinga, as a cultural pessimist at the start of the twentieth century, mainly observed the loss of play in the modern city. At the end of his essay he has Huizinga walking through Paris together with that other great cultural critic of the early twentieth century, Walter Benjamin. Benjamin shows him that there are definitely still possibilities of play, also in the modern city

shaped by Haussmann — Benjamin's own, unfinished 'Passagen' being a case in point. After some pessimism, this reopens a more hopeful perspective.

Philosopher Lieven De Cauter and sociologist Pascal Gielen elaborate this hopefulness by exploring the possibilities of the common. Perhaps the struggle in the twenty-first century is not so much about the public sphere, but rather about a common place that transcends the dichotomy between private and public, between market and state. De Cauter sees 'commoning' as the challenge for the coming era. Following a clear exploration of what exactly the common is — including a very useful distinction between Common with a capital 'C' as the universal property of everyone and no one, and common in with a 'c' as an everyday, concrete praxis — De Cauter, in his contribution, posits relatively optimistically, as does David Harvey (2012),[14] that for every instance of gentrification there will be 'a thousand practices of communing, from a simple pick nick in the park to urban activism'.

Armed with the work of Richard Sennett and Michel de Certeau, Pascal Gielen concludes *Interrupting the City*. In 'Performing the Common City' he outlines the relation between art, public space and urban life in a sharp analysis, resulting in a typology of four possible relations between art, city and politics: the monumental, the situational, the creative and the common city. Gielen's argument shows that the fashionable creative city has had its day but that the struggle for the common city has still only begun. This struggle requires completely new strategies and even a completely new attitude from artists. Artists can only 'perforate' the city if they allow themselves to be 'perforated' too.

Interrupting the City connects reflections on artistic practices with theoretical perspectives, thus exploring the constituting role of art in the public urban space. Perhaps this space will no longer be called 'public' as that notion is too much linked to the state, or because it is too rigorously contrasted with private space. One thing is certain, however: only a physical, mental and virtual common city can be the challenge of the twenty-first century. How can it be organized politically and how can we build a solid constitution for it?

In any case, *Interrupting the City* shows that writers and artists are thinking critically and self-reflectively about the city, about how they imagine it or how they try to interrupt the flow of the city

through deliberate political projects. Whatever tactic they choose, artistic work testifies to the possibility of an always possible different way. These alternative constitutions for the urban public space are what we had in mind with this publication.

Those who dare to trust the imagination know which directions they *also* could take in their thinking and acting. With the imaginary city, artists and speculative spirits feed the energy and drive of those who try to convert words into concrete actions. Not seldom, they do so by suiting the actions to their words and their fictions. Those who interrupt the flow of the city generate imagination: how could it be otherwise? *Interrupting the City* attempts to articulate that imagination in the hope of a different liveable city, even in the hope of an artistically and politically effervescent urban life.

Notes

1   Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with assistance of Frederic Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 27.

2   Ibid.

3   See Michel Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 13 and further, and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2008).

4   For a concrete research into the waning independence of news media and the rising pressure of advertisers and market policies, see the recent research published by the Dutch Commissariaat voor de Media in 'Onafhankelijkheid van nieuws-redacties' (June 2015), online: www.mediamonitor.nl/analyse-verdieping/onafhankelijkheid-van-nieuwsredacties-2015/.

5   Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 29.

6   Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 226.

7   Ibid., p. 227.

8   Ibid.

9   Judith Vega, 'Imagining the City: The Difference that Art Makes', in *Contemporary Culture: New Directions in Art and Humanities Research*, ed. Judith Thissen, Robert Zwijnenberg and Kitty Zijlmans (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp. 51–61, p. 54.

10   Ibid. p. 55.

11   Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

12   Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 261.

13   Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 108.

14   David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).