

# THE PARAEDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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The Paraeducation Department began as a way to use a platform provided by two institutions, Witte de With and TENT., in the form of an exhibition. The initial invitation asked six curators to seek out the city of Rotterdam, to check its cultural pulse so to speak, and to convey these stats back through an exhibition or project that would also mark the first collaboration between the two institutions, all with the originating purpose of celebrating TENT.'s five year anniversary. As we started, faithfully following our remit, the word that resonated for us was 'collaboration'.

In many ways the Paraeducation Department performed a certain resistance in relation to how the institutions wanted us to participate in their exhibition as 'artist' and 'curator'. We refused to engage aesthetically in the exhibition, and took on instead an experimental and ethical stance in relation to how we would resituate individualised 'output' as collective 'input' during the course of the project. This was a direct response to an overwhelmingly conservative agenda set out nationally in the Netherlands through the Culture Nota and the closure of spaces engaged with what might be understood as research driven non-aesthetic processes.

From the outset we were concerned not to replicate the rhetoric of participation and democracy as it plays out through many art installations, and to instead outwardly acknowledge that all invitations imply a set of exclusions and inclusions that affect how participation is understood, and who feels inclined (empowered) to take part. Finding the works of Ivan Illich and Noam Chomsky led us to think about how we understood participation as a set of localised situations and non-localised involvements. Edward Said provided invaluable terms for negotiating this practice within institutional time/space. We could mark a particular moment in the Netherlands

as representative of certain circumstances involving space, real estate, power, money, etc. Said's work on audience and the circulation of information allowed us to strategise a social praxis, and to propose this process as an alternative mode of representation.

An appropriate response to any invitation might be simply to ask, Why this invitation? Why now? The Paraeducation Department was set up in acute awareness of a present context, one that revealed real power (to echo Said, Who asks? For whom is the asking being done? In what circumstances?). We choose to participate by seeking out others to join us, to experiment with us by activating a response, as opposed to responding reactively.

We discovered in our conversations, while developing the project that education, in this context, is perceived in a myriad of ways; as a space of learning, a means of instruction, a process of discussion, even as indoctrination. It frequently operates as a process relying on a hierarchical imparting of knowledge from the knowledgeable to the unknowing. What seems overt and constantly problematic is how education connotes very particular power relations. We wanted to explore why and how models of schooling (the academy) are interesting for artists and to explore this potential for ourselves.

The experience and exploration of education is, of course, politically loaded, in some cases explicitly so. Here, proposing educational models suggests knowledge exchange and development, but also the notion of invested responsibility in, and critical reflection on the contemporary and the local. Another important political aspect of this work is its communal nature (both formally and informally), which in turn questions the assumptions

of a singular artistic or curatorial authorship and suggests collectivity as an example of empowerment as well as one of exploration. It was this aspect, which appealed to us in forming the Paraeducation Department. However, this generation of autonomous, informal, uncontrolled, and shared production is particularly complex to maintain and manage within an art space against the demands of the art market and other professional expectations. Our project tries to look at these aspects specifically, to think through what would be the minimum requirements to maintain such a space or an activity within an active contemporary art institution, with all of the demands of the local and beyond. How can we support and expand on such developments, especially in the light of much external pressure not to, because they simply don't conform to traditional, visible 'image-commodity-culture'?

This notion of participation became interesting for us to think about as a space to occupy or to develop (when thinking about the artistic community) from within an institutional setting like Witte de With or TENT. It suggested a different dynamic than a distribution of information outwards, to the community associated with the programmed exhibition activity. We wondered what it would be like to initiate a kind of 'paraeducation' space, which would create the possibility of information and specialisation, knowledge and skills being brought in from the community at a local level. This would not just augment and extrapolate on the programme itself but also develop its own knowledge. It suggests a multi-directional dialogue and various types of communities or audiences who might contribute their own knowledge. Who would that be? What would that make the art institution into? What kind of function would it, in effect, develop for the art institution itself within the community? What would the acceptance of this information and its incorporation into programming say about artistic and curatorial authorship? It also asks, very simply, what are the ethics of practicing locally as an institution or as an artist – especially in an era of global visibility when one can potentially translate practice more easily outside of one's own context.

The discussion developed by Irit Rogoff about participation and collectivity in relation to artistic practice is particularly interesting in this context:

*“Collectivity is something that takes place as we arbitrarily gather to take part in different forms of cultural activity such as looking at art. If we countenance that beyond all the roles that are allotted to us in culture - roles such as those of being viewers, listeners or audience members in one capacity or another - there are other emergent possibilities for the exchange of shared perspectives or insights or subjectivities - we allow for some form of emergent collectivity. Furthermore that performative collectivity, one that is produced in the very act of being together in the same space and compelled by similar edicts, might just alert us to a form of mutuality which cannot be recognized in the normative modes of shared beliefs, interests or kinship. To speak of collectivities is to de-nativize community, to argue it away from the numerous essential roots of place and race and kinship structures that have for so long been the glue that has held it together.”<sup>1</sup>*

If we choose to understand and indeed nurture collectivity as formative of non-essentialising communities, then the shared site of an art space has extraordinary potential to produce affinities that might resonate locally through tapping into common interests and patterns of communication, shared histories and beliefs.

Marius Babias defined the issues of educational policies and knowledge production 'as socio-politically explosive' when discussing the project developed to explore these very questions at Campus 2002. He might be right. In the introduction to the International Summer Academy in Frankfurt this year, together with Florian Waldvogel he explained the political motivation behind their idea of education, and placed it firmly in the socio-political realm 'knowledge has always been closely associated with conventions of power, institutions, pedagogy, ethics, and politics. Consequently modes of passing knowledge have to be the central theme for any reflective practice.'<sup>2</sup> It is this political potential that artists and curators are actively pursuing. Something which Babias and Waldvogel describe as political because it is 'open knowledge production—contrary to the attempts of information service providers and multimedia-monopolists, who are eager for the privatisation of information, knowledge, culture, and training.'<sup>3</sup> Where is the curatorial role within this equation? Surely one would

hope it is in creating space and actively positioning oneself within the openness of such a process. Not an easy demand especially when a clearly demarcated and self-authored curatorial space makes for better career prospects and higher visibility.

At this point, we find ourselves looking at the ideas and the structures particular to the project in Rotterdam. The reading group is still meeting, sometimes in Amsterdam where half its members live, sometimes to discuss each other's work instead of a text. The Paraeducation Room continued in the joint custody of Witte de With and TENT. for about eight weeks after the exhibition *Tracer* ended. During that time several groups working in Rotterdam self-organised projects using the room. Now the institutions have made a decision to change the room back to the way it was, to remove Paraeducation in name, and in function. While we read this closure as a loss, it interests us that other institutions in other cities in the Netherlands have proposed setting up spaces for paraeducation. (2005)

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<sup>1</sup> Irit Rogoff, "We — Mutualities, Collectivities, Participations" in *Promise It's Political*, exhibition catalogue, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Marius Babias and Florian Waldvogel, "Political Art Practice", [http://www.internationale-sommerakademie.de/sak2004/en/03/00\\_01.htm](http://www.internationale-sommerakademie.de/sak2004/en/03/00_01.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

*Most learning happens casually, and even most intentional learning is not the result of programmed instruction.*

**Ivan Illich, 1970**

*You have to be able to knock ideas off of other people and hear them get beaten down in order to find out what you actually think. That's learning as distinct from indoctrination.*

**Noam Chomsky, 2002**

*We feel young, free and pure.*

**Novembergruppe Manifesto, 1918**

In 1996, Tom Finkelpearl, then Director of New York City's Percent for Art Program, interviewed Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationalist and philosopher well known for his approach to education and liberation outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. At one point, Finkelpearl noted the very broad influence of Freire's methodology, not just on education, and he asked Freire if he ever experienced people overlaying his process onto other fields. Freire responded that of course this happens; that the only way to avoid it would be not to produce and not to think.

By thinking and producing one risks being misunderstood. What Freire recognised is that the response to misunderstanding is not for the speaker, in his words, 'to commit suicide', but rather to recompose one's ideas in order to clarify one's position. A process of understanding requires testing information in both directions. When misunderstanding occurs, it is crucial that it is not the end point of a process, but is somewhere in the middle of an ongoing exchange between speakers and listeners. A process of education based on dialogue involves thinking and producing, reflecting, imagining, building, observing, sharing, translating, leading and following in a generative manner that does not always move along one path; there are u-turns, diversions and distractions along the way.

When artists strategically apply modes of practice or methodologies used by other fields such as social work,

education, community organising, etc. in their own work it is often to build certain relationships (social, economic, political) and/or to subvert others through what might be termed 'socially engaged' practice. In many ways, this transfer of technique is an unambiguous response to trends that emerge through the institutionalisation of art and its marketability, as well as to established patterns of trade regarding the instrumentalisation of artists under the welfare state and their subsequent disenfranchisement under neo-liberalism. The artist does not function outside of society, but under what terms the artist will/can/should function is open to debate. What we do know is that artists often use modes of practice relevant to, or originating through other fields in their own work. At times this process might lead to misinterpretations or distortions. At others, it can lead to understanding and respect. Here, practice is an ongoing channel, a way to learn from and relate apparently disparate pursuits (art-work and social-work) in order to impart common concerns.

An important step in this process requires pausing and asking: What is the role of the artist? How can the artist act in a given situation? What is the artist's purpose? Much of the criticism surrounding art-work that models the types of interactions rooted in social-work (or community-work, or education) either faults a generic instrumentalising of art, (which is sometimes but not always the case, especially in artist-led projects) or faults the artist through an assessment of their *effect*. Analysis of 'positive' effect habitually alleges that the artist is filling-in where social service providers, and thereby the state, have failed, and analysis of 'negative' effect usually lapses into a plea for artists to leave social-work 'to the professionals'. In each instance it is important to ascertain whether a particular discursive moment is looking closely at the project at hand or is speaking generally, and more importantly, whether it functions to further a dialogue between different models of social interaction or end one.

One aspect of 'paraeducation' is that a community relies on the input of volunteers to augment its resources. This often occurs in places that have little resources to begin with. The aim behind paraeducation is to build a network

whereby individuals in the community provide ‘back-up’ to local schools by offering in-school instruction, usually to small groups of children or in one-on-one sessions. In the U.S. paraeducation has developed into an established practice that does not simply manage a deficit in public schools, but that actively adapts curriculum generated by the paraeducator’s input.

When applied to a cultural institution in a city where very few artists are ‘left behind’, paraeducation takes on different meaning. In doing so it asks us to consider what our common goals are. In one aspect, the use of the Paraeducation Department has allowed us to consider the institutional agenda, which consecutively led us to evaluate what purpose we share in relation to institutions. While a definition of community might include a notion of the ‘local’ (shared backgrounds, common geographic location), through the Paraeducation Department we propose that community-forming bonds can occur among people from very different backgrounds. But what it takes is time, recurring encounters, dialogue, and a temporary yet communal space to nurture bonds that might occur as a matter of course elsewhere. A primary phase of our investigation included setting up a reading group that met regularly within the institution as an autonomous body to collectively pursue questions related to artistic practice, politics and society that arose from our reading. Much of our discussion revolved around the role of the artist, and how as artists we rely upon, perpetuate and even subscribe to precepts of behavior determined by institutions.

This small, self-sufficient body consisted of 10 people. We organised our meetings via email, and chose articles together to read as a group.

In thinking about our process as a parallel platform to the exhibition format, we began to understand Rotterdam

and the two institutions in question, TENT. and With de Witte, as generative of a communal activity which was not necessarily bound to the institutions’ shared architectural, administrative, or spatial/municipal parameters. While we could break down the group demographically (four Dutch, two American, three British, one Irish, or, four educators, three artists, three curators, or, five administrators, one educator, two dancers, one architect, one curator, etc.) the purpose of the group was to participate in a collective activity that did not subscribe to the limits of representation, and therefore of institutional promotion.

Three ground rules were set up in the first meeting with the aim of creating this collective space within the institution: 1) no one had to represent a given role in relation to their practice, meaning that those of us who worked directly with institutions did not have to speak on behalf of that institution, or on behalf of all independent curators, or on behalf of all artists, etc.; 2) in the course of conversation anything said could be retracted, taken back, questioned, and repositioned; and, 3) there is no audience present. Together these rules formed an ethics of group interchange, where the purpose of dialogue was to discover common points of reference as well as to discover what the terms outlined in various texts meant to us, the people in the room on a given day. This generated a high degree of affinity among group members, which we recognised as a counter balance to debates that occur within institutional and educational contexts that hinge on a distance between speakers and listeners.

As part of the Paraeducation Department’s activities, we organised a one-day seminar on 18 September 2004 that included presentations by others involved in the process of applying systems of education to an art practice, including Bik van der Pol’s involvement in Nomads in

Residence and the School of Missing Studies, and the Cork-based collective Art/Not Art's development for the Cork European Capital of Culture 2005, called Caucus. Each initiative stems from a base of self-organisation in relation to local context. Nomads in Residence reproduces a sense of participation particularly in relation to transient populations of artists in large urban centres such as New York. The SMS seeks to uncover lost knowledge through unofficially and officially instituted moments of education, specifically in regions where there have been dramatic shifts in population. Art/Not Art is an independent artist initiative based in Cork, Ireland concerned partly with exploring the potential of art activity in a localised context. Organised by the National Sculpture Factory, the Cork Caucus mobilises the language of political representation to set up a framework for group learning within a European-wide cultural imperative. All of these projects reveal varied articulations of the 'local' by producing invested moments of participation.

The aim of the day was to gather people together with similar interests in collective learning, whose art practices involve models of education or who organise projects around unofficial or alternative frameworks. In order to encourage a focused discussion the number of participants was limited to 45. While the focus of the day was in part to think about how autonomous moments of collective learning can occur within institutions, it became apparent during the day that we needed to decide how this group of 45 understood the term 'education.' Is education itself always a form of institutionalisation? Does a process of education imply a set goal? Can an educational experience occur informally? Education is a fundamentally cultural experience, one that rarely occurs spontaneously, or autonomously, but is mediated through any combination of inter-governmental, political, clerical, cultural and economic inputs. The agencies that moderate an experience of education, effectively limit 'agency' as regards to an individual's potential to 'educate' and intervene in the very systems that manage education. In recent years an important, yet often uncharted function of the artist within arts institutions has been a bi-lateral construction of 'educational' programming, where the artist's output in an exhibition

serves as a temporary, and continually replenished source of educational material for the institution. Indeed, education and outreach often function as a dual strategy for enlarging an institution's points of public contact, all the while using the exhibition's visual and conceptual substance as a pedagogical 'aid'. The role of education within the cultural industry needs further deconstruction. For our purposes, the use of the TENT./Witte de With framework is crucial not only to consider artistic output as it is subsequently 'revealed' and reused by the cultural institution in (public) education, but also to radically reposition the role of the artist in this equation.

During our initial research between April – June we met informally with individuals and groups living in Rotterdam. Throughout these exchanges, and again in the seminar in September, people spoke about a lack of critical debate happening right now in Rotterdam. While the explanations vary, many read this shortfall as part of a pervasive anti-intellectualism operating at present throughout Holland. As a result, there exists a sense of urgency among those interested in participating in platforms for serious, in-depth, and ongoing cultural analysis. Perhaps the Paraeducation Department is one way to make sure these debates happen, and to locate them within a building that is shared, not just by two institutions, but also by a trans-cultural community of artists, curators, students and educators. The institutions are only part of an equation—the other part involves those within this community who want to self-organise, self-program, and self-educate. (2005)

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A central issue for critical artists today is the question of interactions with the apparatus surrounding art production: the parameters for reception (institutions, audiences, communities, constituencies, etc.) and the potentials and limitations for communication in different spheres (the art world, the media, public spaces, the political field etc.). How connections are made and how they are, indeed, broken. This can be discussed in a number of ways, ranging from the practical and methodological, that is, discussions regarding the use of signs and spaces in installation, about conceptions of tools and politics of representation, the role or function of the artist/author in the construction of other spaces and subjectivities, that is alternative networks or even counter-publics. Such discussions must focus not only on the interface between the institution of art and the individual artist, both politically and artistically, but also on bodily relations in political spaces, the advent and usage of technologies, and finally the establishment of networks, communication lines and escape attempts.

The artist as a producer is thus dependent on the apparatus through which he or she is threaded, through specific, historically contingent modes of address and reception. The artist is, in other words, a specific public figure that can naturally be conceived in different ways, but which is simultaneously always already placed or situated in a specific society, given a specific function. This was, of course, what Michel Foucault was driving at when he wrote of “the author-function” in his essay “What is an Author?”. “What is an Author?” is an institutional and epistemological analysis of the figure of the author, which can be read as a problematisation of both Walter Benjamin’s politically motivated imagining of the author as producer, as well as Roland Barthes’ equally polemic and instructive essay, “The Death of the Author”. Rather than eliminating or transforming the

author, Foucault wants to suspend or bracket the author as a specific function, invention and intervention (with)in discourse:

We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject [such as an author or artist, supposedly] penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning; how does it accomplish its design by animating the rules of discourse from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through which forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.

According to Foucault the author-function is a measure that differentiates and classifies the text or work, which has both legal and cultural ramifications. This also means that any potential reconfigurations of that function require a reconfiguration of discursive institutions surrounding it. In this both Benjamin’s notion of the author as a politically involved figure questioning relations of production in modern industrial society, a.k.a. Fordism, and Barthes’ post-industrial call to arms, where the death of the author should lead to the birth of the reader, which is a radically different notion of activating the public and presumably deepening democracy, are, in effect, attempts at reconfiguring the function of the author. This reconfiguration of the author/artist function was to take place through new modes of address, which would in turn configure new modes of receivership or spectatorship in the sense that a mode of address is always an imaginary stranger relationality, an attempt at developing an audience, constituency or community. So if we are to understand the artist as a public intellectual,

we also have to understand how this potential public is constructed and reconfigured through the historical and contingent placing or function of the artist, through his or her specific public sphere, which is also termed the apparatus through which the artist is threaded.

Now the classical conception of the artist, or the public intellectual, as an Enlightenment figure in a bourgeois public sphere seems less and less up to date and purely historical. The notion of the bourgeois public sphere as a space to be entered with equal rights and opportunities as rational-critical subjects, which has always been a projection of course, is also an increasingly receding horizon today. There no longer is “a” public, but rather either no public at all (as understood as free exchange), or a number of fragmented, particular publics. The enlightenment model of the west, which was tolerant, to some extent, of avant-garde art, of representing values other than bourgeois values of conduct, order and productivity, has now been superseded by a more thoroughly commercial mode of communication, by a cultural industry. Where the Enlightenment model tried to educate and situate its audience through discipline, through various display models identifying subjects as spectators, the cultural industry institutes a different communicative model of exchange and interaction through the commodity form, in turn identifying subjects as consumers. For the cultural industry, the notion of “the public”, with its contingent modes of access and articulation, is replaced by the notion of “the market”, implying commodity exchange and consumption as modes of access and interaction. This also means that the idea of the Enlightenment, rational-critical subjects and a disciplinary social order, is replaced by the notion of entertainment as communication, as the mechanism of social control and producer of subjectivity. The classic bourgeois spaces of representation are likewise either replaced by markets, such as the mall replacing the public square, or transformed into a space of consumption and entertainment, as is the case in the current museum industry. Similarly, the former communist public sphere, which was no public sphere as such, but a matter between state and party, has been replaced not by the former citizen-model of the west, but by the market/consumer-group formation as just described.

As such, we then also have to reconfigure the role of the public intellectual as a rational-critical subject, a universal subject, not as a thoroughly particular subject, which — as I see it — would only be an affirmation of the consumer-group model, but rather as an involved instead of detached figure: at the same time as Benjamin’s thesis dealing with the mode of address, Antonio Gramsci was defining a different model of the intellectual, the so-called “organic” intellectual, which was a figure that was involved not only in struggles, in causes, but also in production itself. According to Gramsci all men were intellectuals, although not everyone had that role (the potential of mass intellectuality), a role that had to do with involvement, organising and movements. As such, marketing and advertising men as well as journalists were the new organic intellectuals of capitalism, whereas teachers and priests could not be considered organic intellectuals, since they were repetitive. Today, precarious workers could certainly be considered this kind of intellectual, although it remains to be discussed whether they are in the service of capital or the cultural industry or in its counter-movement, a struggle for the multitude. We must therefore begin to think of artists and intellectuals as not only engaged in the public, but as producing a public through the mode of address and the establishment of platforms or counter publics, something that has already existed in both the east and west, clandestinely and underground respectively, but in opposition to the reigning cultural and political hegemony of the specific society.

Counter-publics can be understood as particular parallel formations of a minor or even subordinate character where other or oppositional discourses and practices can be formulated and circulated. Where the classic bourgeois notion of the public sphere claimed universality and rationality, counter-publics often claim the opposite, and in concrete terms often entail a reversal of existing spaces into other identities and practices, most famously as in the employment of public parks as cruising areas in gay culture. Here, the architectural framework, set up for certain types of behaviour, remains unchanged, whereas the usage of this framework is drastically altered: private acts are performed in public. According to Michael Warner, counter-publics have many of the same characteristics as normative or

dominant publics — existing as an imaginary address, a specific discourse and/or location, and involving circularity and reflexivity — and are therefore always already as much relational as they are oppositional. In recent art history the notion of “self-organisation”, for example, is most often an oppositional term, and certainly a credible one, but it is not itself a counter-public. Indeed, self-organisation is a distinction of any public formation: it constructs and posits itself as a public through its specific mode of address. Rather, the counter-public is a conscious mirroring of the modalities and institutions of the normative public, but in effort to address other subjects and indeed other imaginaries:

Counterpublics are “counter” [only] to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to stranger circulation in a way that is not just strategic but constitutive of membership and its affects.

Of particular interest here, is not only the transformation of “bourgeois” art institutions by particular agents, but also the current movement of wilful self-institutionalisation seen in such art related platforms as 16 Beaver group in New York, b\_books in Berlin, Center for Land Use Interpretation in Los Angeles, Center for Urban Pedagogy in New York, Copenhagen Free University, Community Art School in Zagreb, Institute of Applied Autonomy in Boston, The Invisible Academy in Bangkok, School of Missing Studies in NY, Belgrade and Amsterdam, University of Openess in London, and Université Tangente in Paris, that all somewhat mirror and reverse educational facilities. Here discourses are established and circulated not through a negation of publicness, but through a deliberate and tactical self-institutionalisation. Societal machines for knowledge production become subjective ones — produced through identity rather than producing identity. As stated by one of these self-institutions: Copenhagen Free University is one voice in a mumble of voices. We are not two or three individuals, we are an institution drifting through various social relations, in the process of being produced and producing. We are the people in the house. This position establishes an ever-changing formation of new contexts, platforms, voices, actions but also by inactivity,

refusals, evacuations, withdrawals, exodus. According to the situationist Asger Jorn, subjectivity is a point of view inside matter, “a sphere of interest”, and not necessarily that, which is equitable with the individualised ego. [...] Copenhagen Free University is a “sphere of interest” arising from the material life we experience and will always be politicised before any citizenship. Our scope is both local and global, looking for fellow travellers around the corner and around the world.

We are dealing here with a notion of the everyday, with an attempt to deal with living conditions within the knowledge economy of the post-fordist world, a tactic of double movement, both contestation and withdrawal. We can also describe this movement as a politics of everyday life, rather than of representations, deliberations and/or aggregates. This entails, then, a different notion of “the political” that is not only about movement, but also moment, the here and now, as in the words of another author-producer Stephan Geene:

What b\_books is up to, according to my point of view (although this is not very consensual in the group), is to maintain a specific kind of “option” for “the political”, an option that is explicitly not utopian in any way. The option is based on the premise that the political does not mean to work for a defined political aim + that it has nothing to do with sacrificing one’s own (life)time, but rather investing in the “machine” that generates “one’s own life” in a political process.

Let me also offer another definition along the lines of counter-publics: what is at stake here is the articulation of experience. It is assemblage rather than performance. Where the institutions of the cultural industry only offer endless “new experiences”, the production of self-institutionalised bodies notably tends to appear boring, unspectacular in the organising of experience.

In these times of an expansive global capitalism, corporatisation of culture and criminalisation of the critical left, it is not only appropriate, but indeed crucial to discuss and assess modes of critique, participation and resistance in the charged field between the cultural field and the political sphere. Or in other words, the charged field between political representation and

representational politics, between presentation and participation. It is our firm belief that the cultural field is a usable tool for creating political platforms and new political formations rather than a primary platform in itself; that art matters, or at least should matter and not only be a playground for self expression and/or analysis. However, such a project requires thinking, analysis and, not least of all, a consideration of what these terms, politics and culture, implicate in the current situation. First of all, it is obvious that both arenas have been pluralised and fragmented, if not dispersed and dissolved throughout the current postmodern era. We can no longer talk of homogeneous categories in the singular, but rather of several political spheres and several cultural fields that sometimes connect and/or overlap and sometimes strives towards autonomy and/or isolation. Both arenas imply a large subdivision of networks, agents and institutions.

In Western welfare states the cultural field has traditionally been seen as ideally autonomous from the political sphere, and has thus been structured, financed and institutionalised as a separate entity, something apart from the political as an independent public sphere. Strangely, it is also this relative autonomy that has supplied the cultural field with its potential for political critique and discussion - that it has been removed from direct political representation and control, allowing for a different production of knowledge and reflexive processes. Unfortunately, it is also this relative autonomy that has led to a depoliticisation of cultural production and the configuration of the art world as an elitist, exclusive club. However, with the current neoliberal onslaught throughout the West, culture is increasingly being privatised and corporatised, both in terms of funding and production. Corporate culture creates dominant imagings and subjectivities rather than so-called alternative or counter-culture. And neoliberalism is now aligning itself seamlessly with the current wave of European “velvet” fascism in democratically elected governments in Austria, Denmark, Holland and so on, leading to a vilification of left-wing intellectualism and political activism, in some instances even criminalising activists in the wake of 9-11.

This current state of affairs, in both the cultural field and the political sphere, leads to a possible radicalisation rather than a mainstreaming of critical practices

within art and activism, sometimes strategically and sometimes involuntary. It is a struggle on two fronts, directed both towards the current political mainstream and inwards in the making of political identities and platforms: What can we do for ourselves? Such an endeavour, however, certainly requires more rather than less thinking about notions of culture and politics, but also about identity constructions, notions of locality or, if you will, the mediating between particularity and universality, public spaces and activist strategies, networks and constituencies. In the creation of equivalence and translation, we can learn from AIDS activism as suggested by artist/activist Gregg Bordowich: *MEDICINE INTO MY BODY NOW*. It requires an ongoing negotiation, translation and articulation between interested agents and groups. It is necessary to establish networks, to compare and mediate practices as well as theories. Art matters, certainly, but art is not enough.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”, 1969, reprinted in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1977, pp. 113-138.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer”, 1934, reprinted in *Reflections*, Harcourt Brace Joanovich: New York, 1978, pp. 220-238. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, 1967, reprinted in *Image-Music-Text*, Hill & Wang: New York, 1977, pp.142-148.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, op.cit., p.137-8.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “Intellectuals” Prison Notebooks Q 12, 1932, reprinted in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1999, pp.301-311.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York: Zone Books, 2002, pp. 121-22.

<sup>6</sup> Copenhagen Free University, “All Power to the Copenhagen Free University”, in: Katya Sander and Simon Sheikh (Eds.), *We are All Normal (and we want our freedom)*, Black Dog Publishing: London, 2001, pp. 394-395.

<sup>7</sup> Stephan Geene, “self-portrait of more than me: a group - or its fragments”, in: Simon Sheikh (Ed.), *In the Place of the Public Sphere?*, oe / b\_books: Berlin, 2004, p.215.

LONDON

September 2004

I have, in subsequent emails, been told of the death of a close friend's parent and also received the invitation to join in a discussion event in Rotterdam at the Paraeducation Department. I answer both emails with concern and enthusiasm, sharing my tone of excited, feverish questioning between them. Once my replies have been sent I make the necessary arrangements for my travel and bereavement. Dutifully in the former, virtually with the latter.

I sense the timing of the emails to be of coincidence. I have never attempted to share my condolences in such a specific ritual, as the Shiv'ah my friend will hold in her home. Shiv'ah ("seven") or "sitting shiv'ah" refers to the weeklong period of grief and mourning for seven types of first-degree relatives: mother, father, sister, brother, wife or husband, or child. The shiv'ah ritual is referred to by English-speaking Jews as "sitting shiv'ah". If prayer services are organised in the house of mourning, it is customary for the family to lead the services themselves. It is considered a great mitzvah (religious act) of loving kindness and compassion to pay a home visit to the mourners. Traditionally, no greetings are exchanged and visitors wait for the mourners to initiate conversation. The mourner is under no obligation to engage in conversation, and may in fact, completely ignore his visitors.

I have never been to Rotterdam either, and, with the exception of being aware of a few "art" institutions located there (V2 for example) know very little about the city. I take on a physical and psychological burden to learn as much as I can about both the Shiv'ah and Rotterdam. I make a list of necessary deeds, a single set establishing personal priority and need.

A Preface to Extension and Communication

In the 1974 (English) publication of Paolo Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness*, the author outlines a system of education he feels is necessary to bring about a new, critically active and intellectually strong (literate) society. Freire describes this type of education as bringing about the advent of society's "new birth" in which critical attitudes are facilitated by "critical education." (1974:32) Such an education he declares will be that which prepares society for a "passage from naïve to critical transitivity." This education is intended to prepare the individuals in a society to resist emotional power through the strength and learned burden of critical thinking, acting and discussion. In support of his objectives Freire quotes the Hungarian-born Sociologist Karl Mannheim:

"In a society in which the main changes are to be brought about through collective deliberation, (...) a completely new system of education would be necessary, one which would focus its main energies on the development of our intellectual powers and bring about the frame of a mind (...) which does not panic when many of the thought habits are doomed to vanish."

Freire's "passage" therefore extends the user of education to the space of discursive and ascetic events. Through these they will act with urgency. Freire then provides the stages or "situations" which structure the passage of the illiterate to the literate through education.

## FIRST SITUATION

Being In the World and With the World,  
Nature and Culture

In the first situation, society is the "being of relationships." The individuals in such a society arrive (through these relationships) to a conscious distinction between nature and culture, that which will differentiate in

the “normal situation” (of society) as that between “being in the world and being with the world.” (1974: 63)

I consider this distinction on my short flight from London to Rotterdam. In what world am I deciding to be in? What world(s) am I reconciled to being with in a dialectical relation? Without emotional expression can I not help but tie into my “situation” a relationship to nature and culture? On the one hand I am making a trip to help contribute to the “cultural” work of the moment, on the other I am tested by the physical limits of duration; the time structure of natural occurrences. Freire knew this contradiction to be real. His first situation defines a being who “is creative and re-creative, and who, through work, seeks to constantly alter reality.” (1974: 63)

## SECOND SITUATION

### Dialogue Mediated by Nature

The landing in Rotterdam is smooth and I hurry to purchase tickets for a bus ride into the city centre. I look around for fashionable handbags, backpacks or shoes in anticipation of finding other persons arriving for the Paraeducation event. I am eager to start the talking. Eager to share my excitement for being there, in that world with the others, facilitated by relationships. As I leave the bus, alone, I loosely follow the Google maps I made for the journey on foot to the hotel. En route I listen to conversations occurring on the street. I brush by mobile phone users, stare silently at car drivers singing to themselves and imaginary (or unrealised) passengers. A man offers me an “alternate” place to stay for the night; I decline using only physical gestures. Soon I arrive at the hotel. This walk, the physical passage across a new territory, is my first creative dialogue with Rotterdam. The Paraeducation event has not started and I am already deeply motivated to analyse language. I assume this to be quietly intended by the event’s organisers.

## THIRD SITUATION

### Unlettered Hunter

I check into the hotel, drop my bag off in the room and head across the street to buy three litres of bottled water. Returning immediately to the hotel I store the water in my new digs and then return to the street. My remaining Google maps highlight a route along an unnamed canal. This should lead me to the location of the Paraeducation

event. I walk along the canal, considering its depth and dimensions. Along its banks are scattered numerous sculptures. I try to recall the dialogue I overheard when I first arrived but it has now escaped me. I realise this perhaps is due to the unfettered dialogic fervour of the canal and its sculptural partners. They are a system. They are transmissive. They put forth a space of flows and they are evidence of the work of tools, locals and knowledge.

Yet, like those Freire calls “unlettered” I cannot really speak of this space. I am not really in or with what it transmits. I am alongside it, in a non-participatory, non-committed and unrelated state. I am simply moving past, pointing-out, dominating temporarily the technologies of manufacture which built this physical environment. The work I am here to do with the others is to build upon this grace, to transform the concept of space, to build it into a recognizable and useful structure. I must hurry; I’ll be late for the dinner.

## FOURTH SITUATION

### Lettered Hunter (Lettered Culture)

Moving on from the canal I make it to a quiet, merchant-filled street. I feel as if I have broken through a virtual barrier and that I am now “in” the zone. I notice that the V2 offices are on my left and I go inside pretending to know people who work there. I find no one present.

## FIFTH SITUATION

### The Hunter and the Cat

In Freire’s fifth situation he describes a distinction between “hunting” and “pursuing” to grasp the fundamental point about creating culture. Describing a cat that pursues his prey but never transforms it, Freire cites a story of the hunter as a being who “not only knows, but knows what he knows.” (1974: 71) This being transforms what he knows in his process of “becoming authentic.” As in the Mannheim statement, where previous thought might vanish at the point which intellectual power emerges, the hunter is committed to transformation as the creation of culture. In all the stages of work and to the effectiveness of collective deliberation, the hunter remains committed. The hunter is a being consciously reflecting and applying intellectual prowess upon the world. Reflection and application are the working through of the before-during-after. Reflection and application are

not the characteristics of the nomadic being in its typecast roles of inconclusiveness and constant vulnerability.

Instead, Freire's hunter symbolises the transformative power of creative intellect, that which distinguishes the hunter from the pursuer. The "Hunter" exemplifies for Freire the activity and affect possible through critical education and active training.

#### SIXTH SITUATION

Transforming the Material of Nature through Work

I leave the vacant techno-sphere and cross the street. Quickly I find the Witte de With. It is a grand building. Today the weather is beautiful and shadow/highlight contrasts animate its façade. There are several stereo headphones hanging at head-height along the museums front; moving ever so slightly as walkers pass-by or the breeze blows. I make a conscious decision not to listen to what is playing through them (assuming of course that something is being transmitted). Instead I go into the museum as if obligated to punch in the time clock. I happen upon a photography friend and we share warm greetings. He tells me about a recent project in which he recreated stage sets by Rodgers and Hammerstein. He describes the set and installation of the recreation in such convincing detail that I visualise my hometown, Norman Oklahoma. Norman is home to the University of Oklahoma and the various athletic and sports teams that the University boasts. The football programme is one of the oldest organised sports teams in the Southwestern United States and has claimed six national championship titles in its history. An estimated population increase of 95,000 takes place in the town during every "home" game played in Norman. I wonder about the impact that sports have on its local economy....

#### SEVENTH SITUATION

A Discussion, the Product of Work Upon the Material of Nature

"Culture" as Freire describes it can be analysed on the level of "spiritual necessity." (1974: 75) One must first recognise the presence of a thing in nature to transform its essence into that of culture. Describing partially the production of value accumulated through the transformation of that which already exists in this world, Freire's model of "culture" is one which describes the

"passage" of educated individuals from the naïve to the critical.

My homesick-laden daydream has reminded me of the Shiv'ah taking place now at the home of my friend. I wonder who is there. Is anyone talking? Is there food? My thought moves back to Oklahoma and I realise the football game has just kicked off and in another three hours the plight of the shop keepers adjacent to the stadium will be transformed. It's all right, I decide, that I might shift so quickly between thoughts for my friend and those for my hometown. I can work equally upon both my emotional servitude to the Shiv'ah and my unbridled homesickness brought about by the game.

#### EIGHTH SITUATION

Poetry

My photography friend and I check in with the Paraeducation organisers before leaving the Witte de With Museum to have a drink at a café nearby. We sit at a sidewalk table, among the bicycles and ashtrays, and ask one another why we think we are there in Rotterdam, and what we anticipate will happen during the event. My friend and I have been together in such situations before. Sitting among strong intellectuals and cultural producers, together, in a circle. In these situations we created discussions out of the energy produced through individual's vocal responses to previously distributed texts and publications. My friend and I don't mention this shared experience to each other now, in Rotterdam, but I know we are both thinking about it. I can feel it. We know we are already two of many others providing content within a structure that is not of our design, but to which we must contribute. It is a structure both based on and defined by our relationship and the relationships we will have with the others. The creation of such a structure is why we have been asked to be here. Contributing and being present here, in Rotterdam, means we both feel "literate" enough to participate.

#### NINTH SITUATION

Patterns of Behaviour

In Freire's text the Ninth Situation seeks to analyse "patterns" of behaviour that exist as a "cultural manifestation." Such behaviour is brought about to discuss and create a discourse system which engages any

“resistance to change.” The situation weighs the visible elements of cultural production against their originary structure, the need to be in or with relation to nature. Freire explains that this need may sometimes pass, but that “tradition” will continue; that the words and languages used in discussion will already have a tradition. Before the tradition (of their use) was formed the words and languages existed only because there was a natural need for them to do so. Freire encourages us to perceive of these words and languages as the both the raw material of nature (without tradition) and transformed material of culture (with tradition). As a society we give form to language. In our discussions we establish tradition and as a result we form critical attitudes towards the possibilities of such a “cultural” reality.

As users, makers and participants engaged in the passage from need to tradition, we will perceive and have the opportunity to articulate the challenges of our specific time. These challenges are the nature to which we address our own criticality and intervene, like hunters. We recognise the vulnerability of critical concepts. We establish traditions. We act together in a “situation” and by doing so may call attention to such transformative states of “being.”

#### TENTH SITUATION

##### A Culture Circle in Action-Synthesis of Previous Discussions

The first day in Rotterdam ends with a group dinner. Present at the table are the Paraeducation organizers and many of the persons participating in the event at the Witte de With the next day. We are seated around a large table. All around us are other diners, and beyond them, through dozens of rectangular panes of glass, is the horizon of Rotterdam demarcated with streetlights. I feel like we are eating in a gunner’s turret.

We dine on a variety of wonderful ideas the chef has prepared. Throughout the meal we are discussing what we “do” in our everyday lives. We talk about why we have come to Rotterdam. In many cases we are introducing ourselves to others for the second or third time. Social mannerism seems to be the key conscious operation of the evening. No one speaks too seriously. No claims or exclamations for “democracy” or “collective action” are noticeable at the table. No one seems concerned with

what is left to be accomplished by coming together like this, here, and now. We are, after all, already together. We have shown our commitment, as a group, through the multiple passages that we have all endured to arrive together like this, in a circle around the dinner table.

Freire concludes in his tenth situation that “literacy” only makes sense as the “consequence of (society) beginning to reflect about their own capacity for reflection.” (1974:81) Just as this was true among the sculptures on the banks of an unnamed Rotterdam canal, it seems this is true for those of us seated around the table. We are together, reflecting. There is the quiet, individual reflection and there is the discursive reflection. A mirroring of presence that defines why we can be there and how we know to be there. Each of us also seems to know that this reflection through introduction is to initiate a creative transformation that has not yet taken place. Like the family members I can only imagine are present now at the Shiv’ah, those at the dinner table with whom I am speaking and listening are recounting their passage only to transform themselves into new, re-energized and more literate individuals. A situation, which, as Freire describes it, requires that we reflect about ourselves just as we do about the world in which we are located. Through this we will “discover” a world which we already knew, as it was always there. Our work in Rotterdam is not to be the time spent in or with this discovered world, but the work we will do upon this world. It will happen through the mannerisms we employ together and the self-perceived altruisms we apply to tomorrow’s situation. It will conclude with the manufacture of productive interventions and by the accumulation of a circle of social “beings,” all functioning as critical operatives prioritising our continued education.

LONDON

July 2006

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## "BEATING THE SYSTEM"

IN REIFIED CULTURE, SOCIAL LIFE IS FULL OF STRANGE PARADOXES. SOCIETY FEELS FIXED FOREVER, YET IT FEELS CONSTANTLY CHANGING. THE RULES, DEMANDS, COMMODITIES AND CHANGES SEEM TO COME AT YOU FROM EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE AT THE SAME TIME.

WHATEVER THE WHOLE THING IS ABOUT, FIXED OR CHANGING, YOU ARE NOT IN CONTROL OF IT. LIFE TEACHES YOU TO SETTLE INTO A SMALL CORNER OF EXISTENCE, WHICH AMOUNTS TO THE FULL-TIME PREOCCUPATION OF "MAKING ENDS MEET." STUCK IN SUCH A CORNER, YOU LEARN HOW TO MINIMIZE YOUR VICTIMIZATION BY SMALL-SCALE MANIPULATION OF RULES, MARKETS, AUTHORITIES, AND INSTITUTIONS.

THE SURVIVAL SKILLS NEEDED IN DAILY LIFE EXPOSE YET ANOTHER CONTRADICTION ABOUT CONSCIOUSNESS IN REIFIED SOCIETY. THE WORDS "STATIC", "FROZEN", AND "FIXED" ARE APPROPRIATE TO DESCRIBE THE LOSS OF DYNAMIC, CRITICAL AND TRANSCENDENT THOUGHT. ALIENATED LABOR AND ATOMIZED SOCIAL RELATIONS, DO RESULT IN MODES OF THOUGHT AND FEELING TOO FRAGMENTED TO ORGANIZE POPULAR LIBERATION. NOW, WHILE PEOPLE DOMINATED BY REIFICATION DO NOT THINK CRITICALLY, OR MAKE SOCIAL CHANGE, OR EXPERIMENT WITH SPACIOUS ARTISTIC AND SEXUAL LIVES, THEY ARE NOT ZOMBIES, AUTOMATONS, OR ROBOTS. THEY ARE VERY ACTIVE, VERY BUSY. THERE IS A BUSTLING QUALITY TO DAILY LIFE. THE CULTURE KEEPS PEOPLE AS BUSY AS POSSIBLE. THEY ARE ENERGETIC, AMUSING, ASPIRING. THEY SHREWDLY LEARN THE RULES AND HOW TO BREA THEM FOR PERSONAL PROFIT. THEY BECOME HIGHLY SKILLED IN SURVIVING SITUATIONS WHICH OPPRESS THEM. THEY CON BOSSES FOR RAISES, TEACHERS FOR GRADES, COPS FOR NO TICKET.

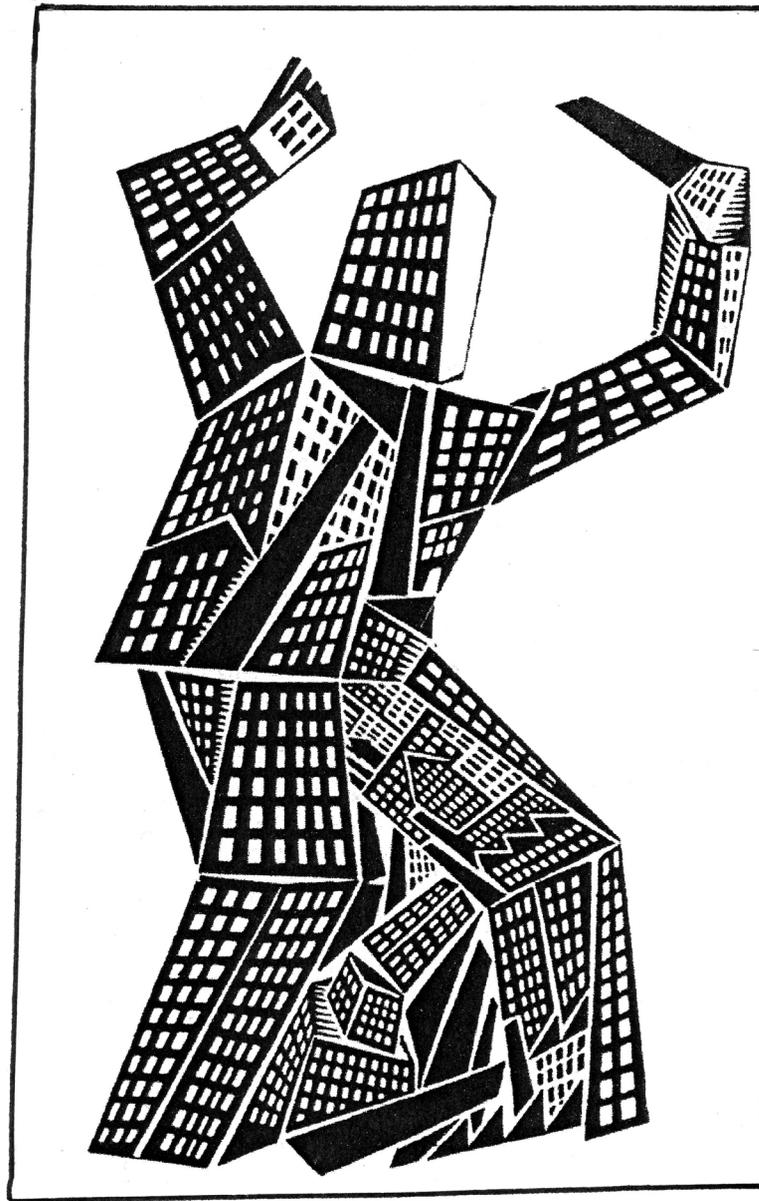
ONE OF THE MOST ENERGETIC AND PARADOXICAL THINGS PEOPLE DO IS THE GAME CALLED "BEATING THE SYSTEM."

IN THIS SOCIAL PRACTICE, YOU LOOK TO BUY CHEAP. YOU SEARCH OUT CONNECTIONS WHO CAN GET YOU A CAR, OR A

CAMERA WHOLESALE. YOU DEVELOP A NOSE FOR LEADS INTO GOOD APARTMENTS OR REASONABLE CAR INSURANCE.

SEVERAL FORCES CONVERGE TO PROPEL THE NEED FOR "BEATING THE SYSTEM": AN AFFLUENT SOCIETY WITH SURPLUS GOODS PILED EVERYWHERE, A CONSUMERIST CULTURE MANIPULATING HIGH-LEVELS OF MATERIAL NEEDS, A NATIONAL LIFE BUILT ON A DREAM OF RISING EXPECTATIONS, A CLASS SOCIETY WHERE WORKERS ARE PAID LESS THAN THEY NEED TO BUY "THE GOOD LIFE", AND WHERE CORPORATE MANAGERS CAN ENGINEER PRICE INFLATION MUCH EASIER THAN LABOR CAN NEGOTIATE WAGE INCREASES. MASS LIFE IN SUCH A COMMODITY CULTURE INVOLVES A SEARCH FOR BARGAINS, SHORT-CUTS, DEALS, HOT GOODS, FIRE SALES, CLOSE-OUTS, MARK-DOWNS, SPECIALS-OF-THE-DAY. THIS PRACTICE IS A SHORT-TERM ANSWER TO THE ECONOMIC RIGORS OF CAPITALIST SOCIETY WITHOUT SOLVING THE ROOT PROBLEM. IT KEEPS PEOPLE BUSY CHISELING A HIGHER STANDARD OF LIVING OUT OF AN ORDER SUPPORTED BY JUST SUCH CONSUMER ACTIVITY. IN THIS CONTRADICTIONARY WAY, "BEATING THE SYSTEM" IS A VERY ACTIVE WAY TO STAY FROZEN IN THE SYSTEM. IT IS A MEANS TO OUTSMART CAPITALISM BY PLAYING WITHIN THE RULES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD. IN THE END, YOU WIND UP DEVOTING HUGE AMOUNTS OF TIME LEARNING THE ROPES OF THE SYSTEM, AND NONE TO REJECTING THE SOCIAL MODEL. YOU CAN DO ALL THIS KNOWING THAT THE RICH CONTROL EVERYTHING, THAT BIG BUSINESS HAS THE GOVERNMENT IN ITS POCKETS. YOU CAN KNOW THAT LANDLORDS WRITE THE PROPERTY CODES AND THAT TAX LAWS FAVOR MILLIONAIRES. THESE RECOGNITIONS ARE NOT MOBILIZED INTO COMBATIVE CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS. THE SENSE OF POWERLESSNESS CONVINCES YOU THAT THE SYSTEM CAN'T BE CHANGED.

"BEATING THE SYSTEM" IS AN ACT OF REIFIED FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS IN WHICH YOU EXPERIENCE ILLUSORY POWER — A DEAL, A RIP-OFF, GETTING MORE FOR YOUR MONEY. THE POWER IS ILLUSORY BECAUSE YOU MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE NEEDED THE COMMODITY IN THE FIRST PLACE, MOST LIKELY IT'S A DEBASED PRODUCT ANYHOW, AND NO SOONER HAVE YOU CLINCHED ONE



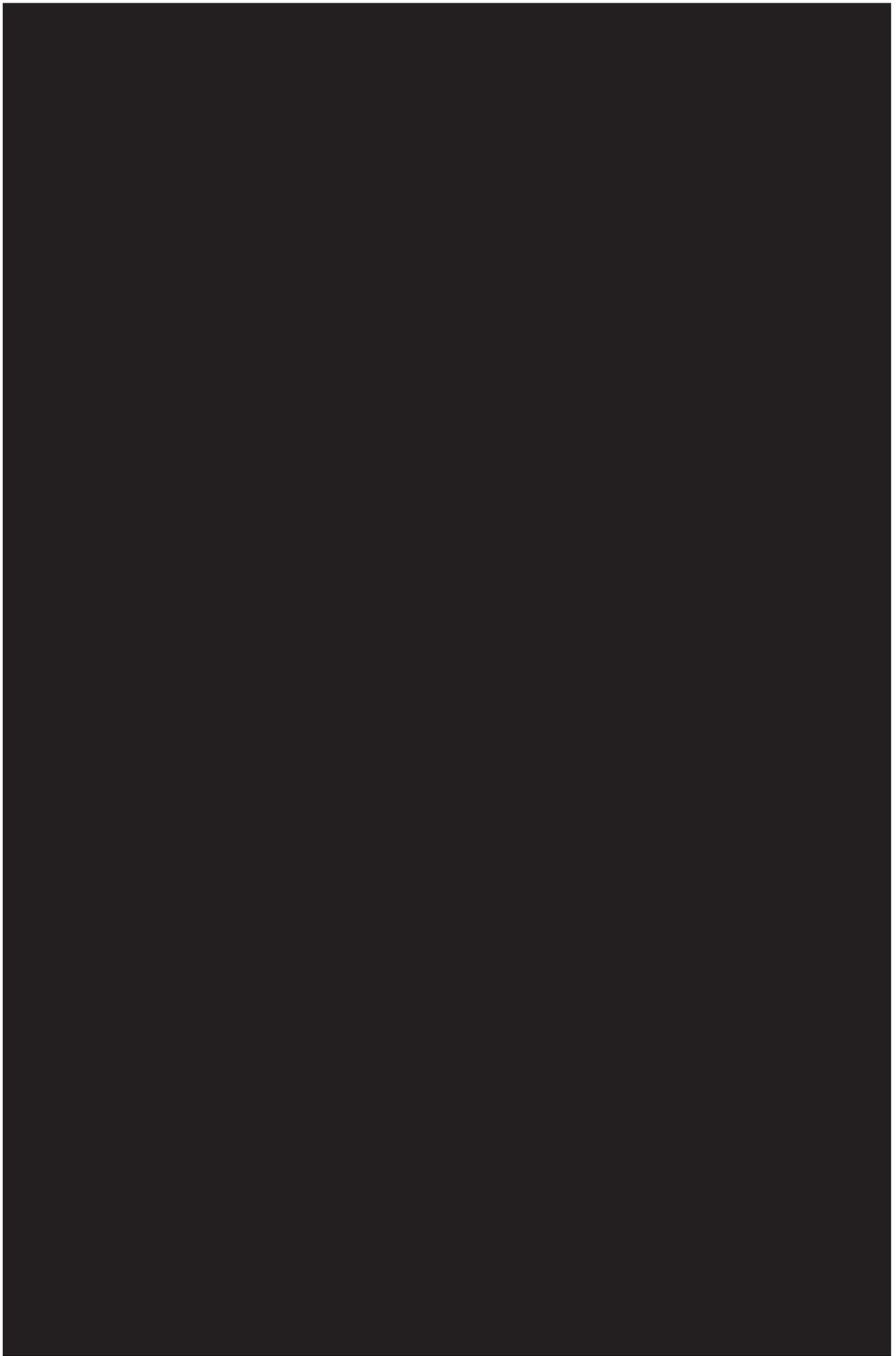
DEAL THAN YOU'RE BACK IN MOTION NEEDING ANOTHER. THIS SOCIAL GAME RETARDS POLITICAL RESISTANCE TO THE SYSTEM, BUT IT ALSO PRESERVES A MENTAL AGILITY, A SHREWD WATCHFULNESS IN PEOPLE. IT FORCES THOUGHT TO BE NARROW, IMMEDIATE, AND PRACTICAL, THUS CROWDING OUT CRITICAL THINKING, BUT IT DOESN'T DESTROY THE CAPACITY FOR CRITICAL THOUGHT.

THIS FORM OF CONSUMERISM IS, HOWEVER, A MONSTROUS DISTRACTION TO LIBERATORY REFLECTION, IN A CONSUMER CULTURE WHERE CRITICAL SCRUTINY OFFERS NO IMMEDIATE MATERIAL GAINS. WHEN YOU PLAY "BEATING THE SYSTEM", THE CARROT HELD OUT IN FRONT OF YOU IS THE PROMISE OF SOME DIRECT ACQUISITION. IN CONTRAST, THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION IS OBVIOUSLY A LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO DAILY PROBLEMS; REIFIED CONSCIOUSNESS CAN LOOK TO AN IMMEDIATE REWARD FROM CONSUMER LIFE WHICH THUS INTERFERES WITH THE FUTURITY OF CRITICAL THOUGHT.

IN THE ABSENCE OF A MASS LIBERATORY OFFENSIVE, THE DEFENSIVE MANEUVER OF "BEATING THE SYSTEM" IS ONE WAY TO GET MORE OF WHAT YOU NEED (AND DON'T NEED) WITHIN THE TERMS OF THE CORPORATE ORDER. A LIBERATORY CULTURE CONTENDING FOR THE FUTURE COULD CONCEIVABLY CO-EXIST WITH SHORT-RUN DEFENSES, BUT THAT IS NOT THE CASE NOW. PROTECTING YOUR IMMEDIATE SELF-INTEREST INVOLVES SURRENDERING THE FUTURE. FUTURE-MAKING OR UTOPIAN CONSCIOUSNESS, AS FEATURES OF CRITICAL THINKING, HAVE BEEN EMPHASIZED BY FREIRE AS FUNDAMENTAL TO LIBERATORY CULTURE. THE MASS DISSOCIATION FROM A SELF-DESIGNED FUTURE IS ANOTHER DEFINITION FOR FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS IN GENERAL AND FOR REIFICATION IN PARTICULAR. THE LIQUIDATION FROM UTOPIA FROM HUMAN THOUGHT WILL PROPEL SOCIETY FARTHER DOWN THE PATH TO BARBARISM; A LINE OF DYSTOPIC NOVELS, OF WHICH 1984 AND BRAVE NEW WORLD ARE THE MOST PROMINENT, OFFER VISIONS OF THE TRIUMPH OF DOMINATION OVER LIBERATION. CRITICAL LEARNING IS ONE FRONT IN THIS WAR FOR THE FUTURE. IT HAS A PART TO PLAY IN UNFREEZING POPULAR CONSCIOUSNESS FOR ITS UTOPIAN POSSIBILITIES. IN REGARD TO REIFICATION, THE CRITICAL CLASSROOM CAN PROMOTE A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE IN A NUMBER OF WAYS. IT CAN ADDRESS FUTURE-DENIAL IN MASS CULTURE BY FOCUSING ON UTOPIAN THOUGHT ON IMMEDIATE REALITY; IT CAN MAKE ORDINARY ROUTINES THE SUBJECT OF TRANSCENDENT INQUIRY. FURTHER, THE CLASS CAN INVESTIGATE THE ECONOMIC LAWS AND MEDIATIONS WHICH ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MAKING OF EVERYDAY LIFE. SUCH A STUDY CAN DEAL WITH THE SENSE OF POWERLESSNESS BY SHOWING JUST HOW SOCIETY IS MADE. ALSO, BESIDES TRACING THE ROUTES OF PRODUCTION AND DECISION-MAKING, THE CLASS CAN QUESTION THE APPARENT INVULNERABILITY OF THE SYSTEM. IT CAN PROBLEMATIZE THE SEEMING POWER OF THE OLD ORDER AND THE WEAKNESS OF PEOPLE. THE LONG HISTORY OF VICTORIES THROUGH RESISTANCE TO OPPRESSION ARE INVISIBLE TO DAILY LIFE. THESE HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE MAKING OF EVERYDAY LIFE CAN STIMULATE THE KIND OF SYSTEMIC REASONING

WHICH IS BY ITSELF A HOLISTIC AND DYNAMIC REVERSAL OF REIFIED CONSCIOUSNESS. IN FACT, A CONCEPTUAL EXAMINATION OF A FAMILIAR FEATURE OF CULTURE SUCH AS "BEATING THE SYSTEM" CAN PROVOKE THE CRITICAL DETACHMENT ON SOCIAL LIFE OUT OF WHICH RECONSTRUCTIVE THINKING GROWS. THIS EDUCATIONAL ATTACK ON REIFIED THOUGHT CAN DEAL WITH ONE SERIOUS INTERFERENCE TO CRITICAL THINKING, BUT MASS CULTURE IS HYDRA-HEADED, AND OTHER OBSTACLES REMAIN.

TEXT BY IRA SHOR FROM "CRITICAL TEACHING AND EVERYDAY LIFE", BLACK ROSE BOOKS, MONTREAL, 1980  
ILLUSTRATION BY CLIFFORD HARPER



Annie Fletcher will invite Sarah Pierce to work with her in Rotterdam. Sarah runs The Metropolitan Complex currently in Dublin. It was devised as a way of thinking about the new city in which she found herself. As she explains, her strategy is to view the city as a discourse, as expressed through its institutions, its artists, its schools, its bureaucracies...

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THE PROJECT IS:  
TO MANIFEST A PERIOD OF RESEARCH

Part of this research involves looking at education strategies used by TENT. and Witte de With to negotiate their exhibitions with the city of Rotterdam. Instead of being a place where information is given out by the institution to the public, Paraeducation will be a place where knowledge enters the building. What is particular about 'education'? How is its role concealed and revealed within and through each institution? Is education a way to organize a response to a larger cultural situation?

**What producing art in a local context means?**

Who produces the (spoken or unspoken) aesthetic, academic and bureaucratic expectations for art within Rotterdam? We should talk to everyone from students to established artists to curators and cultural politicians, including the institutions who invited us.

**Is education an activist position?**

In combinations that allow meaning to run amiss, we shall begin the Paraeducation Department on the first floor of the shared building belonging to TENT. and Witte de With. Organised along the lines of an unofficial agency, the Paraeducation Department is distinct from, but analogous to the outreach and education offices of

TENT. and Witte de With. Leading into and throughout the exhibition the Paraeducation Department becomes the third entity, a personification of the collaboration between the institutions at this particular moment. This is less about fetishising or critiquing the institutions, their identities, their roles, their administration, and more about enacting another point of transaction with the building.

In our experience, conversation in both group and one-to-one situations provides a useful condition for reflecting upon collective experiences. We will conduct a number of informal meetings with people living in and outside of Rotterdam, who in some way or another describe Rotterdam's discourse in The Netherlands (artists, administrators, foreigners, educators, students, organisers).

The Paraeducation Department is an unofficial force with an unofficial role. Its patterns of communication, denoting alterations, u-turns, reflection and personal experience, form a methodology where contacts made at one meeting lead us to the next. One question we will ask is, "Are artists organised?"

**Can education produce affinity?**

We will develop the Paraeducation Department along the lines of an affinity group.

We have been thinking a lot about how education disseminates, where education occurs. This research has led us to Ivan Illich, Noam Chomsky, Joseph Beuys, Hannah Arendt, republicart.net, etc. (a little strange to mention these in one breath.)

We have also been thinking about educational systems in arts institutions and the transfer of information using

#### AFFINITY GROUPS

ARE SELF SUFFICIENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS OF ABOUT 5 - 15 PEOPLE. A NUMBER OF AFFINITY GROUPS MAY WORK TOGETHER TOWARD A COMMON GOAL IN A LARGE ACTION, OR ONE AFFINITY GROUP MIGHT CONCEIVE OF AND CARRY OUT AN ACTION ON ITS OWN. SOMETIMES, AFFINITY GROUPS REMAIN TOGETHER OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME, EXISTING AS POLITICAL SUPPORT AND/OR STUDY GROUPS, AND ONLY OCCASIONALLY PARTICIPATING IN ACTIONS.

AFFINITY GROUPS SERVE AS A SOURCE OF SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY FOR THEIR MEMBERS. FEELINGS OF BEING ISOLATED OR ALIENATED FROM THE MOVEMENT, THE CROWD OR THE WORLD IN GENERAL CAN BE ALLEVIATED THROUGH THE FAMILIARITY AND TRUST WHICH DEVELOPS WHEN AN AFFINITY GROUP WORKS AND ACTS TOGETHER.

EVERY AFFINITY GROUP MUST DECIDE FOR ITSELF HOW IT WILL MAKE DECISIONS AND WHAT IT WANTS TO DO. THIS PROCESS STARTS WHEN AN AFFINITY GROUP FORMS.

[WWW.ACTUP.ORG](http://WWW.ACTUP.ORG)

informal open-questioning from within the institution to the outside world. While a point of research might begin with personal exchanges, somehow these are lost or embedded beyond recognition or somehow devalued within the constructs of an exhibition.

In a day-long session on 18 September, we'll open our group up to 45 guests whose particular experience would be valuable in this context, to stage what Chomsky might refer to as a 'teach-in'.

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THE ROOM

One 'complex' surrounding *Tracer* [the exhibition we have been invited to participate in], is that it marks the first official collaboration on an exhibition between TENT. and Witte de With. This links to the ongoing issues of a shared building and the separate identities of the two institutions.

We choose a particular space in the building: a public space shared by both institutions. Between April – November, 2004 the Paraeducation Department will occupy the first floor reading room at Witte de Withstraat 50, 3012 BR Rotterdam. We are keen to have the room remain a cooperative one, used by both TENT. and Witte de With and a larger public after the exhibition ends. Instead of treating the space like an artwork, or a temporary installation, we view it as a contribution to the life of the building, a place where outside groups can interact within the auspices of education and learning. We invite the institution to use this resource beyond our role in the exhibition.

**Does local narrative produce its own internal ethics?**

This will provide the key focus to our investigation. We want to note in all the people we talk to what imagery their choice of words produces is it nostalgic, futuristic, proletarian, etc? . How do they dress, What accessories they surround themselves with? This is about looking at how an aesthetic manifests (socially, bureaucratically, politically, etc.) and how this connotes the ethics of the situation.

Our process will approach the art-world of Rotterdam as a community, and we will develop a process with the city's residents that values informal sensibilities over official facts and information. In our "investigations" the city is open to a range of possible representations. With this in mind, the project becomes a form of 'dissemination', that uses conversation and personal encounters as a kind of social art practice.

We wish to try and apply the methodologies of the Metropolitan Complex to Rotterdam, there are currently several possibilities of how to visibly manifest this research. We can decide is appropriate after a certain period of research – it is important that in the first months this is left open, and that we produce a publication after the period of research. (2004)

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Van: FGA-Fucking Good Art <[mail@fuckinggoodart.nl](mailto:mail@fuckinggoodart.nl)>

Datum: Tue, 20 Apr 2004 09:21:35 +0200

Aan: Annie Fletcher <[anniefletcher@planet.nl](mailto:anniefletcher@planet.nl)>

Onderwerp: OCD/FGA

What is Rotterdam about? Rotterdam is the city of festivals. Here we have a top-down policy which leaves little room for bottom-up small initiative. We even had a broad public discussion about the regulation of top-down and bottom-up cultural entrepreneurship. Everything is over regulated and molded into one format: Festivals. The kickoff of the new cultural season in September has been transformed into a big public event. Everybody; museums, galleries, initiatives, individual artists alike want to participate in order to get exposure. My perception is that it shows the desire of getting public attention in order to justify art. If a project is not embedded in one of the festivals it is simply more difficult to get funding and an audience. You could argue that it means they are successful, meaning the city council, but the downside is that the festivals became an excuse for commercialization and exploitation of art (culture). This is not about art! It's an illusion that works. Once you step out of this space -- the time in-between -- there is nothing but a dry bare landscape. Maybe I'm one of the few dinosaurs left fighting and resisting the experience society. I love the silence that surrounds a true individual experience and encounter with art. For others festivals are probably a high spirited group experience. Art has become an economy of exposure and it's success is determined by the number of visitors, and great numbers visitors means we still believe in art (culture).

Maybe it is unfair to say but sometimes I have the feeling that Tent. adopted the artist-initiative-style; a multi dynamic programming mixing art with fun. Doing this they paralyzed the initiative of artists for a few years. In a way it is very convenient for us, but it also made us lazy, it killed the energy that is so important for a city and an art community. The last two years this changed. In Rotterdam there are more than 2000 artist, and we have just a few interesting galleries. But what is really important at present we have four artist initiatives that are really active and visible; Wormmm, de 5er, De Player and Wohlfart.

On the 1st of March I met Annie in the Video Lounge of Smart project Space at the Art Rotterdam where they organized lectures and screenings and artist presentation. Her lecture about The Art of being Careful was attended by a disappointing number of four people. This is also Rotterdam! A beautiful and sad example. What seemed to be a good

strategy turned out to be less successful. Visitors of the Art Rotterdam are obviously not interested in this intellectual debate. A good idea for next Art Rotterdam is to relocate the venue where people can get free access, 12 euros is a lot of money, and Smart Project Space still gets the advantage of the publicity. It is sometimes and mostly all the time very hard to get an audience. I don't know why, but sometimes I have the feeling that the artists who live and work in Rotterdam are more into trying to get out of the city and dissociating themselves from what is really happening in their own city, than getting involved and create some sort of discourse. Maybe it has to do with ambition, I don't know, and maybe it is not just Rotterdam.

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Rob Hamelijnc, initiator and editor of Fucking Good Art (2004)

EDITOR'S NOTE: On August 31, 2006 Rob wrote a short post script, explaining how much has changed in Rotterdam since 2004. To paraphrase his correspondence: The cultural landscape and the cultural players of Rotterdam have radically shifted: Catherine David left Witte de With and was replaced by the board with "watchdog" Hans Maarten van den Brink. Nicolas Schafhausen is the new director. Arno van Roosmalen left TENT. and is now director of Strom Hcbk den Haag, and after more than a year, Mariette Dölle from Beyond Leidsche Rijn is now running TENT; Sjarel Ex also came from Utrecht to Rotterdam to "restore the pride" of Museum Boijmans, and "surprise surprise, he is also planning a renovation and wants to relocate the entrance." Artist-run space De Player has to relocate, Peter and Annemiek are planning to start a magazine BIG MAG. For more see Fucking Good Art #10, ([www.fuckinggoodart.nl](http://www.fuckinggoodart.nl))

May 1, 2004

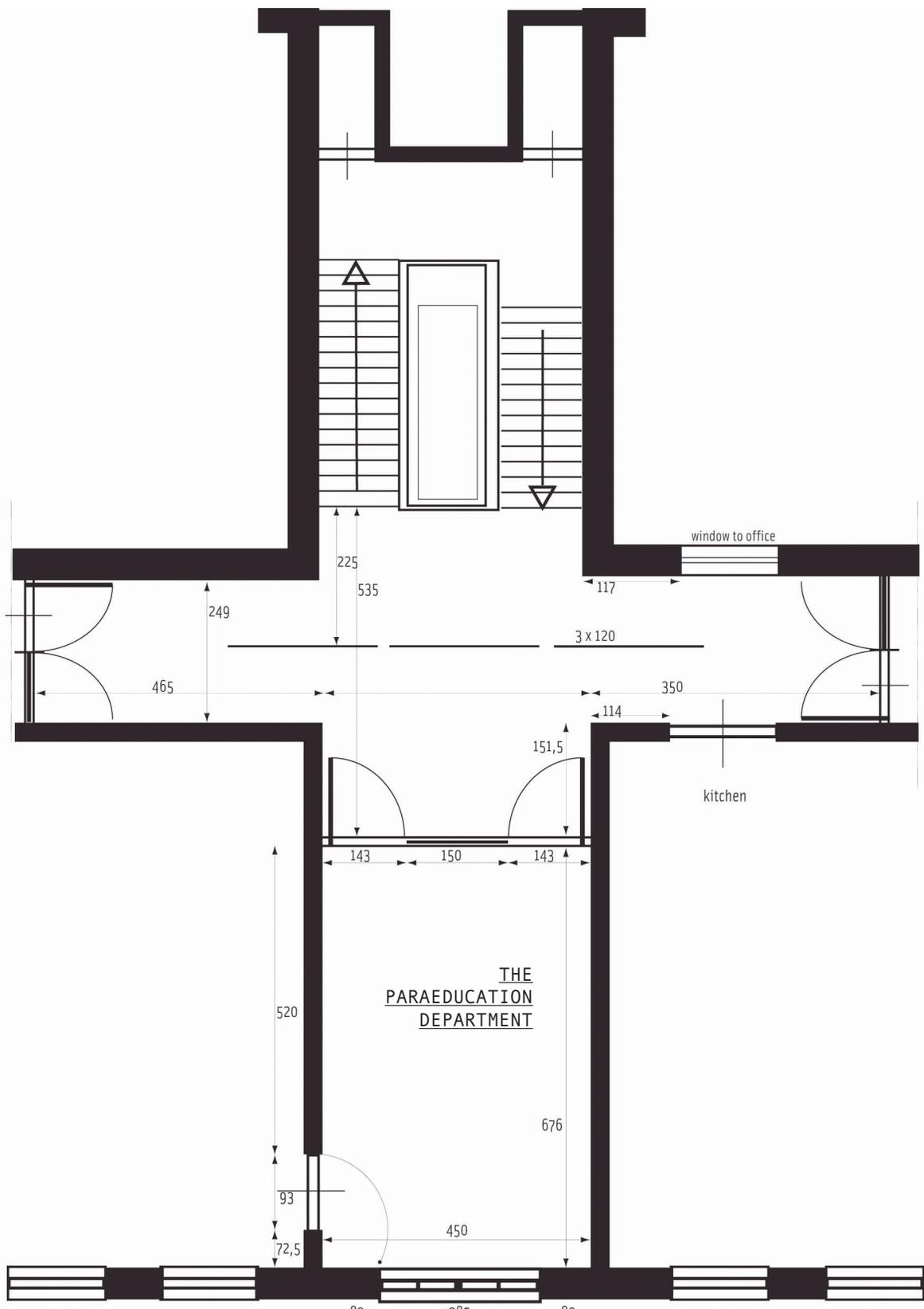
Dear Renske and Tanja:

We hope you are both well. It has taken a couple weeks to get organised. We are writing now to fill you in on what is happening with the Paraeducation Department.

We need the dimensions of the room as we plan to change it slightly. Nothing too complex, just a shift to make it a more comfortable place. The furniture in the basement is perfect; we need to buy a carpet and put up a curtain for privacy/acoustics.

We are keen to have the room remain a cooperative one, used by both WdW and TENT after the exhibition is over. Instead of treating the space like an artwork, or a temporary installation, we view it as a contribution to the life of the building, a place where outside groups can interact in the spirit of education and learning. We thus invite the institution to use this resource beyond our role in the exhibition.

Best,  
Sarah and Annie



28 June 2004

We'd like to invite you to join our Paraeducation reading group.

The focus is, very broadly, education and institutions, and the ethics of educational exhibitions and (discursive, research-based, office/work) aesthetics. We have been thinking about how education disseminates, where it occurs, whether education is an activist position, and how to practice education as a way to organise a response to a larger cultural situation.

We propose meeting 5 times between 15 July - 18 September.

Our suggestion is to read a short article before each session to discuss as a group. We've been looking at Noam Chomsky, Joseph Beuys, Ivan Illich, among others. It would be nice to choose readings as a group and so all of your suggestions are most welcome.

Finally, in the spirit of an open-ended discussion:

- 1) There is no audience. We do not need to 'perform' this reading group. The conversation is recorded for posterity, and will not be transcribed or circulated publicly.
- 2) Please don't feel that you need to speak from a fixed position. You are not here as a representative.
- 3) Say anything. This is all about making the u-turns needed to discover common points of reference.

Please let us know if you can make it to the first session.

All the best,  
Sarah and Annie

---

MEMBERS

Anke Bangma  
Jason Coburn  
Jeremiah Day  
Tanja Elstgeest  
Aletta de Jong  
Annie Fletcher  
Annabel Howland  
Maria Pask  
Sarah Pierce  
Apolonija Šušteršič

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READINGS

Dick Hebdige  
“A report on the Western Front:  
Postmodernism and the ‘Politics’ of  
Style.”

Christian Höller  
“Imag(in)ing Globalization Or: How can  
something be made comprehensible, when  
there are contradictory images of it?”

Hannah Arendt  
“The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its  
Political Significance.”

Brian Holmes  
“A Rising Tide of Contradiction: Museums  
in the Age of the Expanding Workfare  
State.”

Slavoj Žižek  
“Multiculturalism or the Cultural Logic of  
Multinational Capitalism”

Giorgio Agamben  
“The Politicization of Life”

Elisabeth Mayerhofer, Monika Mokre, and  
Paul Stepan  
“The New Trials of the Young CW or:  
Cultural Political Responsibility in the  
Age of Globalized Neo-Liberalism”

1 September 2004

In September the Paraeducation Department will open on the first floor of 50 Witte de Withstraat, Rotterdam. As part of the department's activities, we are organising a one-day seminar on 18 September 2004 that will include presentations and a seminar to discuss education, activism, and arts practice.

Over the last three months, the Paraeducation Department has pursued questions of whether education is an activist position, how institutions operate along the lines of education, and what potential education presents for art practice. In July, the department held the first session of the Paraeducation Reading Group. This small, self-sufficient body consists of 10 people meets with the underlying purpose of acting as a source of support and solidarity for its members.

With the seminar we would like to develop our methodology further by opening up to a larger group. The aim of the day is to gather people together who have an interest in moments of collective learning, whose art practice involves models of education.

We would be grateful if you would let us know whether you are interested and would like to attend. To RSVP, please contact Annie Fletcher [anniefletcher@planet.nl](mailto:anniefletcher@planet.nl) or Sarah Pierce [sarah@themetropolitancomplex.com](mailto:sarah@themetropolitancomplex.com). We hope to see you on the 18th.

Kind regards,  
Sarah and Annie

Wapke Feenstra  
Chris Evans  
Phil Collins  
Leslie Robbins  
Thomas Michelin  
Karin Arink  
Laurie Halsey Brown  
Anton Hoeksema  
Suzanne Kreiman  
Hans Maarten van den Brink  
Renee Turner  
Femke Smelting  
Rieke Sijbring  
Renee Kool  
Nous Faes  
Craig Bell  
Paul O'Neill  
Craig Smith  
Gerard Byrne  
Fergal Gaynor  
David 'Dobz' O'Brien  
Sean Kelly  
Tara Byrne  
Hinrich Sachs  
Barbara Visser  
Hilde de Bruijn  
Catarina Ochio  
Gabrielle Sleijpen  
Amalia Pica  
Elisabeth Mayerhofer  
Liesbeth Bik  
Jos Van der Pol  
Renee Ridgway  
Suzanne Van de Ven  
Birta Gudjonsdottir  
Anke Bangma  
Jason Coburn  
Jeremiah Day  
Aletta de Jong  
Annie Fletcher  
Annabel Howland  
Maria Pask  
Sarah Pierce  
Apolonija Šušteršič

**CALLING ALL ARTISTS, CURATORS, GROUPS, CLUBS, INDIVIDUALS,  
AND ENTHUSIASTS!**

**SYMPOSIUM**

**Saturday 18 September 2004 11.00 - 16.00 (lunch provided)**

**Paraeducation Department**

**Witte De Withstraat 50 3012BR Rotterdam**

**Witte de With/TENT.**

*Too often art that has 'authentic' political content is expected to be first and foremost politically "effective". This notion, itself in need of deconstruction, mechanically calls for art that is instrumental, unplayful, even pedantic.*

**-Gregory Sholette**

*Where academic, artistic and political practices appear in union, an actual perspective of political participation emerges.*

**-Marius Babius**

*Artistic research should be a way to undo the separation between learning and doing in both directions.*

**-Anke Bangma**

*Ignorance is very big these days, but I can't recommend it.*

**-Adrian Searle**

*There is no reason for you to leave the house. Stay at your table and listen.*

**-Franz Kafka**

**ALL ARE WELCOME!**

## PARAREFLECTION

RENÉE RIDGWAY

**Paraeducation Department** - *why 'para' education? is it like 'pataphysics'?*

**forming a group** - *What is precisely an affinity group?*

**using Act Up as a model - 15 people as maximum is shown to produce the best results.** *Act up, always wanted to join in.*

**Teaching model or theory model** - *are rhetoric and dialectics still the basis of education?*

**lernen und erziehen as translations for the word education**  
*I like using German words; sometimes they are better in saying exactly what you mean*

**lernen ist Process, not educational education-protection and compartmentalisation education-potentiality learning-effect or product**

*or is it the other way around?*

**education - product learning - potentiality**

**Hybridpractitioner** - *is this analogous with a cultural producer?*  
**postcolonial term for hybrid identity**

*Cultural production exists in dialectical relationship between society and the individual as well as between the artist and the community and beyond the boundaries of citizenship and nationality.*

**The grey area of critique-institutional critique-**

**institutions critiquing themselves**

*another word for academia?*

**Knowledge Production** - *isn't this where we are going with this?*

**Reading Room** - **needs very good navigation**  
*yep and having a map is even more important*

**Are artists organized?** *those I know are seeing yourself as community. who is community? how do you define your community?* *the marginalised around here*

**The artist in community...radical democracy????**  
*marginalised people, foreigners, migrants, that is my community*

**Why study? skills, diploma, community, broadcasting T.V.?** *does everything eventually lead to documentation and media? Media plays a prominent role because it represents the conditions of the public.*

**Ethics of local context = real politics in real time**  
*choose the correct media*

**Why educational models? Because I couldn't get through the text**

**Learning words (nomenclature), cultural politics** *to be able to define what you are talking about is half of the problem*

**Administrative/Compartmentalisation/Programming**  
*look at the bright side, it forces you to organize your thoughts*

**Unofficial Moments-Education is about process, 'multidifferential' process**  
**The way it is mediated or interfaced with the public**  
*will determine the amount and quality of reception.*

During the second session of the seminar I tried to make some basic statements about the nature of what we were undertaking that day, and to identify an implicit tendency in the various and often very different conversations that had unfolded and were continuing to unfold. As a response to the seminar I would like to reiterate what I said there and expand upon certain points. These topics have remained with my thinking since then and therefore constitute a major part of the day's legacy for me.

What was to occur and did occur that day was conversation of a more or less serious kind: a process of presentation, discussion and argument. Conversation, however, cannot exist without a subject of conversation - for a group to debate in a serious manner something must be at stake on the occasion, the group must be concerned with something about which the conversation will move. The structure of the seminar offered two possibilities for this position of 'subject of concern', both of which could be roughly designated by the rubric 'education'. On the one hand there was the concrete experience of a certain experiment in education of the participants in the paraeducation project, on the other there was the idea of education itself.

The seminar opened with presentations by the paraeducation participants, presentations which succeeded in giving a sense of how reading and discussion groups, organised outside of, or in a 'free space' within, an institutional structure, had much to offer to artists, whose practice often leads to isolation and a sluggishness of conceptual development. This experience, however, though valuable in itself, did not have the capacity to be expanded to the point where it might include the concerns of the large, international group gathered on the day: the size and character of the seminar grouping implicitly suggested that something of a less localized, more structurally essential, nature was at stake. What was it that might bring such a collection of professional individuals together? There were, of course, very immediate and practical answers to that question; nevertheless, the nature of the event continued to ask the question, as a matter of form.

The narrowly concrete experience of the paraeducationists was succeeded then by a more abstract affair: the subject of 'education' itself. This, however, proved to be too abstract a topic as it was clear that, among the groups and individuals gathered in the room, there were many different 'educations' involved. Language itself made the topic hydra-headed: 'education' in Dutch, French, Spanish or German, let alone in English, suggested different theories and concerns. In addition, institutions changed from country to country, as consequently did extra-institutional strategies. The discussion shifted back and forth, with speculative announcements giving way to personal experiences and these being interrupted by remarks meant to reflect back on the seminar itself. It seemed to me, nevertheless, that an almost constant undercurrent of concern could be heard beneath the flurries of assertion and counter-assertion.

I tried to articulate it in these terms:

*That an assumption appeared to exist among those gathered, that the institutions associated with the arts and education, be they art-college, university or public art gallery, had once possessed a certain freedom or independence from the direct pressures of their social environments, and that this independence was being dissolved by political and commercial forces. The fact that the discussion was taking place in Rotterdam, a city with strong right-wing political associations, and in an institution where an administrative change, apparently related to political demands, was taking place, brought this situation into focus. The question was begged as regards the question of alternative or para-education: might the dynamic of gathering for the sake of extra-mural education currently manifesting itself, very often on 'the grounds of art', be a direct response to this situation. Were artists, students and creative practitioners of all kinds attempting to make up for a growing absence at the heart of the public educational enterprise? Might not this explain why such gatherings tended to automatically have a political thrust?*

I was taken to task almost immediately for thinking that this might be an area of concern shared by all of those gathered. A participant from South America pointed-out that she had no illusions about the 'independence' of educational institutions, and that the groups of her acquaintance were certainly not operating according to the criteria I had outlined. No doubt she was right, but I think that her criticism simply sharpens the focus of the affair:

this is a concern, not of the world as a whole, or even of those parts of the world that might find themselves represented at a contemporary art-based seminar in Rotterdam, but specifically of the West, of Europe and North America. It is in the nations of the old heartland of colonialism that a rather one-sided struggle is occurring between a residual tradition of liberal education and a new phase of expansion of market and party.

In my reading since September I have found indications to suggest that belief in a free educational territory might be structurally integral to traditional Western thinking. In *Crises of the Republic*, for instance, Hannah Arendt, critiquing the politicisation of the administration of American universities that occurred in response to the student campaigns of the sixties, refers to those “curious institutions whose main political and social function lies precisely in their impartiality and independence from social pressure and political power”. More recently (1997) Pierre Bourdieu, in *Pascalian Meditations*’ intense critical analysis of ‘scholastic reason’, the distancing from everyday social concerns of the arts and humanities upon which the non-utilitarian educational institutions are built, comes to a conclusion that relates, I feel, directly to what is at stake in paraeducational groupings, knitting together questions of the socio-economic position of the artist, the expectations of the student, the expanding politico-economic order and the idea of an educational ‘free space’, now camped on the grounds of art. In the wake of his argument for strategies of engagement between educational institutions and the greater social reality (strategies, therefore, which undermine the autonomy of the ‘scholasts’) he turns surprisingly to an aspect of such autonomous space as a means of countering the drift towards alienation enstructured in Western societies. I will quote him at length, as a final contribution to that seminar in September, but certainly not the final moment in the process of reflection which it has started.

*The lack of a future, previously reserved for the ‘wretched of the earth’, is an extremely widespread, even modal experience. But there is also the relative autonomy of the symbolic order, which, in all circumstances and especially in periods when expectations and chances fall out of line, can leave a margin of freedom for political action aimed at reopening the space of possibles. Symbolic power, which can manipulate hopes and expectations, especially*

*through a more or less inspired and uplifting performative evocation of the future – prophecy, forecast or prediction – can introduce a degree of play into the correspondence between expectations and chances and open up a space of freedom through the more or less voluntarist positing of more or less improbable possibles – utopia, project, programme or plan – which the pure logic of probabilities would lead one to regard as practically excluded.*

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#### THE PARAEDUCATION DEPARTMENT

#### AS A POLITICAL PRACTICE

ELISABETH MAYERHOFER

After having participated at the Paraeducation Seminar in Rotterdam I perceive the project as a political practice. It represents a space which is free from the constraints of representation and (self-)marketing, a space where questioning and experimental thought is possible. As a sort of laboratory apart from PR-shaped communication. In a social framework where formalised education and any kind of intellectual and artistic content are getting more and more commodified, spaces like these are getting scarce.

But it is not only about space in general: It is about a specific space and a specific content. This content might belong to the realm of education or learning in a very broad sense. I prefer thinking of it as a practice of civil society. Civil society constitutes itself via an open discourse, which does not serve a particular ideological and/or corporate interest. The term “education” evokes a goal, thus a person or an institution, which has defined such a goal. According to what I have stated above, I consider this as far less interesting than creating a space where different approaches and ideas can be presented, discussed and learned from them.

But self-organised processes tend towards self-exploitation and thus have little sustainability. This can be learned from the history of many feminist activist groups for example. Therefore I am pragmatic and plead for institutionalisation on a small scale: Programming and a local infrastructure. The latter has been installed already, now let’s think about a program at the crossroad between art, science and politics.

All projects, which aim to be discursive and use education as a platform for discussion on the role of art and criticism within an institutional framework, should not result in solutions. Instead of closing down exploration in the form of agreed outcomes, they should both begin and end with a series of investigative questions. The difference between these two sets of questions is essential. These are a list of questions that I have been thinking about for sometime, which were amplified or affected by my experience of the Para-educational discussion group.

**How 'useful' can any project be in a given context?**

**Is there a system of, or a form of enablement that can be used as a creative strategy to produce an opening out, rather than a closing down of one's own 'usefulness' in this given context?**

**How can failure be incorporated and made visible as a disruptive ingredient within the over structure and conceptual framework of the project?**

**How can 'lots of people' continue to be involved after 'the event' aspect of the project?**

**What could we be doing right now instead of looking for solutions?**

**What do artists, critics and curators do when they are not making work in the form of production?**

**What is the difference between making work and not making work?**

**What are we doing when we are not making?**

**Is non-convention not just another convention?**

**Can a discursive critical-framework continue to mutate?**

**Are curated projects over-interpretive and over-interpreted?**

**Is being or getting lost a good thing?**

**Are exhibitions something to be looked at or looked after?**

**Can a project be used/ useful after it's representation as a 'temporal event'?**

**Are all cultural projects strategic?**

**Is strategy strategic?**

**Can education be taught?**

**Are 'institutions' and 'education' contradictions in terms?**

**Are art exhibitions (in whatever form they take) a representation of community?**

**Do art institutions produce or enable the formation of community?**

**Is 'community' self-organised or 'post-produced'?**

**How useful are questions in themselves?**

**Can exhibitions (in whatever form they take) be self-critical?**

**How can we make the differences between self-reflexivity and self-critique more apparent?**

**Was my participation in any project prescribed or performed?**

**Can I measure the expectation of the invitation to take part on behalf of the host against my actual participation as the invitee?**

---

## TWO THOUGHTS ON PARAEDUCATION

JEREMIAH DAY

1 .

After political meetings in art spaces, domestic life in art spaces, and of course pictures displayed in art spaces, the parameters of showing art in a cultural institution have been stretched every which way and back again. So, in order to explicitly pursue the possibilities of connecting art spaces to the citizenry, Sarah Pierce and Annie Fletcher tried to act upon and within a branch of the institution that is both traditional and contemporary – the education department. Rather than pursue a pedagogical aim through curation (a now familiar strategy which achieves topical relevance at the cost of reducing art works to illustrations or instruments), they decided to deal explicitly with the educational aspect of Tent and Witte de Witte by holding reading groups, seminars, and reclaiming an abandoned space of the building and turning it into a sort of function room, and then leaving it's possible functions quite open. How (on which terms) could we evaluate or measure or judge such an effort? As art, as social work, as design?

2 .

All this above is from the outside, but I was also on the inside (in the reading group), and from that perspective I have one other thought that I don't know how to connect – What struck me most about the whole experience was how it revealed to me the degree to which even my life as an artist had been reduced to private (love life, some friends) and professional (trying to get ahead). Reading groups are rare! The space to do things for their own sake seems to have disappeared into a maze where you chase the carrots and run from the sticks. As I said, I don't know how to connect these two lines of thought, so that is up to you.

---

## RESPONSE

CHRIS EVANS

A few years I co-organised a project called Free Tutorials, where we took artists on a bus around art colleges in the UK, stopping unannounced and uninvited at art colleges to offer free tutorials. Sarah Tripp was one of the invited artists and later that year organised her own project Education

in Reverse. She'd heard of a concept used by a group of sociologists in the Seventies called The Hidden Curriculum. Accordingly whilst in an environment where you are learning skills or learning a particular subject a person is also learning about social control and how authority structures itself. I think there are close parallels with the experience of visiting cultural institutions. Visitors engage and learn about the subject matter whilst at the same time, on initial visits, learn how to behave in such environments. Therefore there are a set of assumptions created which are inherently limiting, and strategies for un-doing such processes imperative be it through collective learning within the walls of an institution or through an open access situation for self-nominated people to present information. I'm drawn to the potential of not waiting to be invited.

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BOOK CONCEPT

ANNIE FLETCHER AND SARAH PIERCE

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EDITOR

SARAH PIERCE

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