

Editorial

Anke Hoffmann and Yvonne Volkart

Since its reorientation in 1994, the Shedhalle sees itself as a venue for dealing with political, socially relevant and uncomfortable questions. The curators who have been active at the Shedhalle since have examined relations of production and representation and opened it up as a space of discourse and articulation for socially marginalised and underexposed realities. Our curatorial work was also committed to this approach and was devoted to issues that have received too little attention socially or have been distorted. We, too, also attempted to develop adequate practices and aesthetic formats that subvert the representative quality of the exhibition space on the one hand, while on the other hand seeking to explore its qualities more deeply than has been done in the past. Our attempt to revitalise the exhibition space as a space of experience as well was bound to the desire to place different and previously excluded things alongside one another on an equal footing, and in doing so ultimately give the exhibition a new chance. We wanted to make the discursive site of the Shedhalle re-accessible and expand it to become a space of aesthetic experience, something that in our opinion is lacking in everyday life and which distinguishes itself considerably from the intellectual or discursive experience. In addition, it is situative and irreproducible, that is, it essentially contradicts representative strategies or poses the curatorial challenge of constantly seeking new ways and means of subverting representative monopolisation. We did this by relying on formats and extra-artistic collaborations that were expanded, discursive, performative, or intervened in the real.

Subverting Disambiguities

Subverting disambiguities was the theoretical leitmotif and practical challenge for three years of joint curatorial responsibility at the Shedhalle, and it is also the point of departure for this publication. The book sees itself as a reflection on those themes, exhibitions and artistic projects we developed between 2009 and 2012, and it also attempts to render in book form the hybrid, heterogeneous, and conflictive aspects we gave preference to in our practice.

At the start of our activity we made a case for the Shedhalle as a site 'of pausing and interrupting': 'Pausing and interrupting does not mean flight or recreation. It means stopping and temporarily shutting down the performance machine.' Thus, what we meant was something more fundamental than suggested by the buzzword deceleration. This statement made reference both to the long succession of projects and the respective dialogical mode of presentation as well as what were initially apparently very different themes, such as ecological aesthetics, which was specifically concerned with landscape or electricity, or the question of the portrayal of history, sleep as a model of resistance, community versus individual and society, media reflection or questions with respect to participation and current feminist practices. This means, for all their diversity we are basically interested in questions about taking a stand against contexts of neoliberal exploitation (also those that drive the art scene), the foundations of social co-existence, the subtle mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion as well as questions of representation and designing the future. And this also includes devising ways and means through which we can continually question and reflect on ourselves so that we for our part do not produce those exclusions that we discursively reject. We solved this

by, among other things, seeing ourselves as collaborative accomplices who formed a joint curatorial team despite differing methods and references—and thus had to permanently sound ourselves out.

The themes dealt with in practice and in the present book are a kind of intersection of our subjective ‘desires’ and priorities, which we believe have social and personal relevance and will meet and challenge the everyday reality of critically minded people. We want to make that visible which is off the beaten track; the remote, suppressed, irrational; that which is on the dark side or traumatically recurs; but also the flip side; the absurd, humorous, and cheerful, which can be equally as tenacious. Grasping this resistance in things and in contexts was and is our declared aesthetic undertaking, not only on a thematic level.

In 2009 we wrote the following:

‘In our opinion, developing the necessary tenacity with respect to our ideological patterns means subverting the dual system of disambiguity. It means promoting practices, constellations, and aesthetics that allow for ambiguity or even meaninglessness beyond conventional assignments of meaning. It is about the cultivation of the production, which always brings along non/sense. We appeal for a diction that is always a contradiction as well. It is about forms of not understanding, contra/dictions as objections, practices of dissent. These focus on the fact that our culture has problems with differences. It not only has problems conceiving of difference beyond dual hierarchies but also tries to exaggerate or, conversely, to relativize them. The catchwords are familiar: the clash of cultures or multiculturalism. Our brave new world of consumption and technology furthermore likes to homogenise and simplify materialities and their associated contexts. By allowing the incomprehensible or even disparate with respect to content as well as form, material, or scenography we appeal for an openness in which, by way of constellations and assemblies, possibilities open up and become perceptible that lie beyond social dictates of simplicity. Not to make things more complicated but to render their complexity and thus their tenacity visible. We also achieve this by treating all artistic formats and media equally, such as installations, performances, videos, new media, or painting. We seek equivalence, not balance.

‘We want to add the dimensions of poetry, mysteriousness, experience, corporeality and paradox to the radical, political and critical facets of the Shedhalle. In order to break open the smooth surfaces and allow the intractable to become tangible. We want to introduce a world of nuances and oscillation that enables different spaces for thought and action. This can occur through interventions, media shifts, aesthetic disruptions, unintelligibilities, mysterious condensations, or inconsistencies. It is about saying things again and again, each time in a different way; finding languages and translations that take account of the small changes and differences in the course of things.’¹

Thus, countering disambiguity does not mean semantic confusion or political indifference, which the ambiguous often proves to be, but the attempt to embrace conflict and create openings. The collision of the different and incongruous blasts the representative and becomes an event, a performative gesture. As such, it remains singular, challenges us in our self-confidence or even jolts us: an aesthetic experience.

¹ Anke Hoffmann and Yvonne Volkart, ‘For a Practice of Pausing and Interrupting’. Curatorial Profile 2009–12. www.shedhalle.ch/en/profile.

Thinking Things from Their Possible End

Between 2009 and 2012 we worked together to organise six thematic group exhibitions as well as various event formats, such as ‘CrossTalks’, performances or collaborative projects with people from Zurich.² In our final year we wanted to further develop our curatorial approach by means of close co-operations with artists, and so we had sole responsibility for the last two exhibitions. Because we were able to mount the exhibition *Connect. Art between Media and Reality* (2011) in collaboration with the BAK, which was accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue, the present publication documents only seven instead of eight of our exhibition projects.

The chapters reflect our thematic strands—they sometimes deal with several exhibitions, other times only one. The chapters are arranged according to a fixed scheme: our introductory texts are followed by theoretical positions by people who accompanied the realisation of the projects. Artists’ pages by selected artists, interviews, statements or manuscripts from the respective projects heighten the insight into past projects and their heterogeneity. The long contributions are in both German and English, the short ones in only one language or the other. The decision to do this was based on practical considerations and emphasises the multilingual and multiperspectival qualities that had such a major influence on our work.

The chapter *Pausing and Interrupting* supplies the programmatic prelude for our concern, in which we are always interested in the unapparent, elusive, and unnoticed forms of the intractable. Based on our exhibition *Dump Time. For a Practice of Horizontality*, we start off with the question of whether in our 24-hour society sleep does not harbour intractable elements, inasmuch as it is one of the last possibilities for conscious time out, idleness, and devotion. Alexei Penzin’s contribution embeds this discussion in philosophy. He examines the historical and biopolitical implications of sleep in capitalism and prior to that and opens them up for scrutiny in terms of intractability.

In the chapter *How Art Writes History* we attempt to get to the bottom of the different historiographies and the artistic depiction of the historical. Making reference to our exhibition *Cross-fades. Reconstructing the Future*, as being of a non-narrative, fragmentary, non-linear and antiheroic character, we expose artistic practices as a necessary rewriting of historical consciousness formation. Ute Vorkoeper makes a case for forms of representation that enable the updating and interpretation of the past instead of its simple reconstruction.

The chapter *Ecologics* sees itself as an appeal for a political concept of the ecological that essentially does not grasp questions with respect to our way of life and environment either nostalgically or sentimentally. Art can, must make things visible, a point that gains disproportionate importance precisely in this discussion, which is so strongly dominated by the natural sciences, and can be a first step in the direction of our becoming aware of existing injustices and relations of exploitation in a completely new way and thus changing them. The virulence of such questions is pursued based on apparent matters of course such as landscape or electricity.

Im/Possible Community is the title of the fourth chapter and thus bears the name of the project with which we commenced our work at the Shedhalle. Elke Bippus suggested the idea for the project, and it met with our enthusiastic response in view of the difficult period at the time—marked by the financial crisis, insecurity

² There is a complete list of all of the events and participants on page p.312

and rage—and the question of solidarity. In her essay, Elke Bippus applies the question of community to the relation between the production of theory and art that is so often discussed at places such as the Shedhalle. It is about the alliance of theory and practice, about their becoming, which, like the development of communities or aesthetic experiences, takes place outside conventional signification. In doing so, for us the paradoxical term of im/possibility has continued to remain a central concept for our curatorial activity as it essentially bears the disposition of becoming possible and yet does not stipulate anything.

The final chapter is a conclusion and outlook: *Acting Out and Opening Up*. It focuses on artistic practices that give priority to the social, the communal, but also deals with identification and self-reflection as well as performative and eventful strategies. The concluding essays in our book by Rachel Mader and Gerald Raunig again take up the question with respect to subverting disambiguities. Although both of them have very different artistic practices in mind and present different arguments—Rachel Mader for temporary openness and Gerald Raunig for a disambiguity that adds something to multiplicity—both of them make a case for aesthetics and practices that force open conventional definition patterns. Many of the projects dealt with in this chapter stand out due to the fact that they proceed by way of hybrid social constellations; physical practices such as dance, movement, and singing; as well as productions, fantasies, and stories that have been told one another instead of by way of the intellect and logic. In doing so, they do not only initiate a variety of processes of meaning but once again also expand the boundaries between theory and practice, discussion and production, artefact and dialogical process. The exhibition format and the things that occur there become an all-embracing event that combines aesthetic experience and criticism. Hence, we would like to open up the field for reflection, discussion and carrying on at a site like the Shedhalle, this place that was always many venues simultaneously.