

Caspar Nieuwenhuis

## ***You must change your art!***

*Performative dramaturgy in the twenty-first century*

### **PART 1 TIDES**

*Who in heaven's name has stopped our swift ship out at sea as she was making port? Only a moment ago she was in full view. (Homer, *The Odyssey*<sup>1</sup>)*

#### ***The dramaturgy of this age***

You must change your art! Heed this imperative!<sup>2</sup> Let it resound through tiered theatres and flat-floored theatres. Let it echo through the corridors of broadcasting companies and teaching departments. Let it ring through parliaments and policy bureaus. Let it buzz on film sets, at festivals and in design studios. Let it reverberate on your type areas and music scores. You must change your art! This era requires it.

But what is it, 'this era'? As Jan Rotmans, Erasmus University Rotterdam's Professor of Transitions and Transition Management, grandly summarises it: '*We are not in an age of change, but a change of age.*'<sup>3</sup> As far as he is concerned, it is more than change that is taking place; this era is mutating on an evolutionary scale.<sup>4</sup> The change is taking place in every dimension of our society, at the micro and macro levels of the economy. It is a system change, a paradigm shift, a slow transition from one value system to another. It is like the 'deflation' of the standard kilo: a gradual process with fundamental consequences.<sup>5</sup> Consequences that combine to produce a crisis in the units of measure.<sup>6</sup> In this age of the digital revolution, Rotmans and other futurist romanticists see the same characteristics as the Industrial Revolution at the end of the nineteenth century. A period of new, unprecedented possibilities and, at the same time, a period of chaos and revolt. Join together the Mandarin Chinese characters for the two extremes, and you have the word for 'crisis'.

The chaos is visible, audible, tangible. In conversations on the street. On television, on social media. All over the world, the number of Angry Letter Writers, Occupiers and indignados is increasing. There

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/126460040/The-Odyssey-Homer-Full-text-pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The original line, written by Rainer Maria Rilke, is: '*Du muss dein Leben ändern*' ('You must change your life') and is the last line from the poem *Archaischer Torso Apollos* (Archaic Torso of Apollo, 1908).

<sup>3</sup> *Gaan kunstenaars en Creatievelingen ook kantelen?* [Are artists and creative people going to change direction too?], 'Staat van de Creatieve Stad 2015', Jan Rotmans speaking on 7 January 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The Italian philosopher and journalist Alessandro Baricco has written of an 'incomprehensible Apocalypse': '*At first I thought of titling this book Mutation. [...] What I mean is that it's the very thing I'm trying to understand. I want to know what the mutation I see around me consists of.*' *The Barbarians*, Alessandro Baricco, 2009, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> The International Prototype of the Kilogramme (IPK, or 'Big K'), a 118-year-old cylinder made of platinum and iridium, is kept in a safe in Paris. In recent decades, however, it has become several microgrammes lighter than its exact copies. See: <http://www.kennislink.nl/publicaties/de-kilo-krimpt>.

<sup>6</sup> Paolo Virno, *The Dismeasure of Art – an interview*, see: [http://chtodelat.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Virno\\_Dismeasure.pdf](http://chtodelat.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Virno_Dismeasure.pdf).

is a rising tide of antagonism towards institutionalised organisations. The European Union, the police, the major educational institutes, the banking sector, the car industry - all powerful examples of targets of resistance. The leaders of institutions are being put in a corner like King Ubu, challenged to reject their results-driven policy. *'There has been a great deal of commotion in recent weeks.'*<sup>7</sup> Yes, the more often this is said, the greater the commotion. Especially if it remains nothing but rhetoric that is destructive rather than constructive. Who, in their criticism of the system, has offered a structured vision for the future? Has the Occupy movement proposed a fundamentally new system? Did the protesters occupying the Maagdenhuis in Amsterdam fry the Golden Egg? No. Definitely not. That is why a sense of chaos predominates. I am trying as much as possible to look beyond the chaos. What interests me more than anything else is the opportunities that chaos brings. I see an era for 'constructive barbarians'.<sup>8</sup> This era calls upon us to discover structural impulses in the currents of barbarism. This era should draw futurists and iconoclasts out of their houses - with an appeal to themselves to surf the currents, explore the depths from time to time, and then defy the surface tension once again; with an appeal to themselves to continually adapt to their surroundings, like partisans hiding in the forest. Where this succeeds, a new paradigm for art will emerge. Where this does not happen, art must be changed in order to achieve the new paradigm.

The boundaries of the arts are shifting. Cultural plate tectonics. Aesthetic standards are mutating<sup>9</sup> or dying out. Following the modern 'death of god', the postmodern 'death of the author' and 'fragmentation of the conventional narrative', it is now most definitely the turn of the traditional reception model. The spectrum of forms has exploded and the spectator is dead. In the coming decades, the discourse on the traditional, anthropocentric system ('you watch while I stage myself') will irrevocably lead to a new model, a new allocation of roles between maker, artwork and spectator. Why? Because the evolution of technology is transforming the essential characteristics of man. If man can be largely reproduced using artificial intelligence, robotics and 3D printing, how am I still supposed to appreciate the original? Every era has its own portrait. The need for an ethical and aesthetic portrait for the post-human situation grows with every project that has its foundation in high-tech. At the same time, this transformation is accompanied by artistic apathy. So many changes are taking place – technological, economic, demographic, financial, humanitarian, ecological, biogenetic, medical – and so rapidly, that in the chaos people tend to see a tsunami rather than a sea of opportunities.<sup>10</sup> The solutions proposed are mainly for the short term, and criticism of the system is punctuated by nostalgia and a longing for 'home'. To give an example: the call by the Dutch actor Ramsey Nasr to dismantle result-driven approaches in arts education, results in a yearning for earlier failure, a *'[...] softer, non-practical society.'*<sup>11</sup> This is not enough to break through the apathy. A vision for the future is needed. Courage is needed to dismantle the strategically constructed architecture. Humility is needed. A view of mankind that, instead of celebrating human hegemony, gives us a place in the equilibrium of nature. We crave a dramaturgical framework for the post-human context. That is why I am directing my imperative mainly to the artists of the interval, to those who specialise in making a transition between positions, sectors, layers of the economy and artistic dimensions. I am

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<sup>7</sup> *Wat wil dit beleid eigenlijk van ons* ['What does this policy actually want from us?'], speech by Wouter Hillaert at the Grand Parade in Brussels, organised by 'Heart over Hard' (HbH, *Hart boven Hard*). From: *De Morgen*, 28 March 2015; <http://www.demorgen.be/opinie/wat-wil-dit-beleid-eigenlijk-van-ons-a2267489/27jct7/>.

<sup>8</sup> Baricco, 2009, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Baricco, 2009, p. 5-11.

<sup>10</sup> In this context, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek speaks of *Living in the End of Times* (2010), and Francis Fukuyama previously used the same apocalyptic rhetoric in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

<sup>11</sup> *Trap het rendementsdenken van school* ['Get rid of the results-oriented approach'], speech by Ramsey Nasr, during the ITs Festival in the Netherlands, June 2015; <http://www.theaterkrant.nl/nieuws/nasr-trap-het-rendementsdenken-van-school/>.

addressing my command to the masters of interactivity, recursivity, diversity and humility. I am appealing to the dramaturgs of our day. They can transition from the past and the present to the future, they can transition from man to nature and technology. They must – yes, *must* – take up the task of creating a portrait for the new era. A portrait that can serve as a mirror of the future. An image that is a catalyst for ethical and aesthetic reappraisal, that defines a new unit of measure<sup>12</sup> that is also applicable and for which empathy can be felt. Every era has its own portrait. Let the artists of the interval now take on the responsibility of shaping the future.

Today, more than ever, the ball is in the dramaturg's court. Why? The portrait of the 21st century is composed of two predominant questions: 'Where am I?' and 'How does it work between us?'<sup>13</sup> These are quite different questions to the nineteenth-century 'Who am I?' and the twentieth-century 'How am I?' People of this era organise themselves in networks, from person to person, from image to image, from position to position. Heideggerian *Dasein* has acquired a different dimension. Today, *Dasein* is 'intermediality', 'being in-between'. People of the twenty-first century move in the mediatised reality like vision mixers. '*Video ergo sum.*'<sup>14</sup> In the twenty-first century *Dasein* has become a relational process, open to interaction with other individuals, other images, other positions.<sup>15</sup> '*We are inter-viduals.*'<sup>16</sup> In fact, the individual travels from relationship to relationship, and maintains these relationships without structuring them in a hierarchical way. The traveller creates his reality as he travels; he is the designer of his own consciousness. '*First and foremost, we are a relationship.*'<sup>17</sup> When the GPS coordinates change, so does the perspective on the situation. In fact: when the traveller changes his position, he designs a new situation and a new role for himself. In this mediatised reality, man is a designer.<sup>18</sup> Design thus becomes an existential instrument in all sorts of respects. There is a good reason why DIY design is so enormously popular. Interior-design programmes, shops and magazines are overflowing with ideas for self-design interiors and gardens. In this context, the use of disposable materials such as waste timber, driftwood or the concrete pillars of buildings is also a trend: it is '[...] *turning consumers from discarders into designers.*'<sup>19</sup> Not only in terms of the homes they build, but also in terms of those homes in relation to the world as an ecosystem. The same is true of talented singers and dancers who want to design their future by

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<sup>12</sup> The Italian philosopher Paolo Virno describes this age as a 'crisis in the units of measure': '*It is as if the metre, the standard set to measure cognitive and affective experience, no longer works. We see the same crisis in the fields of politics and history.*' Paolo Virno, *The Dismeasure of Art – an interview*, [http://chtodelat.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Virno\\_Dismeasure.pdf](http://chtodelat.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Virno_Dismeasure.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> The Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling summarises the transition: '*Over a century, there has been a shift from form via content to context, from syntax via semantics to pragmatics - from: "How does it look?" via "What does it mean to me?" to "How does it work between us?"*' From: *Dasein als Design. Or: Must Design Save the World?*, Premela Lecture, given on 1 April 2009 by Henk Oosterling, p. 3. See: [www.premela.org/sbeos/doc/file.php?nid=1673](http://www.premela.org/sbeos/doc/file.php?nid=1673).

<sup>14</sup> Henk Oosterling; lecture at the IETM Meeting, Sofia, October 2014.

<sup>15</sup> The identity theories of Judith Butler and Zygmunt Bauman attribute a fluid quality to this relationality. Butler makes frequent reference to the performative aspect of identity, thereby also indirectly attributing a fluid quality to performativity: '*We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start.*' <http://bigthink.com/videos/your-behavior-creates-your-gender>.

<sup>16</sup> Henk Oosterling; lecture at the IETM Meeting, Sofia, October 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Oosterling summarises the difference between *Dasein* and Design as follows: '*Authentic Dasein is an unceasing attempt to give a decisive turn to our state of thrownness in the world by moving together to design a society. Design, then, equates to making decisions about form in order to liberate ourselves from the arbitrariness of life.*' From: Premela lecture, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Oosterling, 2009, p. 15.

taking part in *The Voice*, *Idols* or *So You Think You Can Dance*. We are living in the *Anthropocene*.<sup>20</sup> An age in which man wants to be the definitive designer of the universe. Seen in that light, the formula for twenty-first century dramaturgy is as simple as it is complex: '*Dasein = Design*.'<sup>21</sup> Or is the discovery, made by a robot, of a possible medicine against malaria, a sign that man has designed a new designer?<sup>22</sup> How long will it be before we move from the Anthropocene into the Cybercene?

### ***The dramaturgy of dramaturgical practice***

Dramaturgs of our day: you must change your art! In order to do this, you first need to change your position in the creative process. The role of the dramaturg as a walking bookcase, as a concept guardian, with the watchful eye of the director, needs to be redefined in our era. The imperative - you must change your art! - is a weapon in the struggle against artists and art managers who deny or ignore the imperative. Today, more so than in the past, you will need to be the designer of the creative process. This era calls for a proactive, creative form of dramaturgy. A mediated reality is a fragmented reality, and this requires users and designers to be not only flexible (you should relate to different positions) but also assertive (you *must* relate to different positions). If you work in theatre, fictional film or television drama, this could be an artistic Golden Age. So long as you stay flexible. So long as you are assertive. So long as your designs transcend boundaries. So long as you dare to break with the conventional position of the dramaturg as serving the autonomous artist or the artwork. Provided you dare to break aristocratic patterns.<sup>23</sup> To give one example: imagine you are the artistic director of a twenty-first century theatre company, with the matching artistic dynamism, and the Head of Programming of the capital's City Theatre asks you to put on a traditional large-scale production; you will have to match his institutionalised question with a return question and an instruction: '*Are you asking me a nineteenth-century question? Break with this aristocratic, institutional impulse. You must change your art!*'

Dramaturgs of today: your task is to assertively - overtly, that is - renew the paradigm. Design your own context, and don't be tempted to be absorbed into someone else's context. Why? Because the mutation is irreversible.<sup>24</sup> You have the opportunity to delve independently into the depths of this era, rather than running to keep pace with empty hype and trivial trends. You have dramaturgical abilities that align with the inter-vidual character of this era. Sometime in the coming decades, to a greater extent than in the past, directors, writers, actors, dancers and choreographers will call on people with strong dramaturgical abilities, or will themselves mutate into dramaturgical beings. The capacity to create a functioning relational network from fragmented patterns will steer social processes, particularly in artistic journeys. The ability to connect the artistic product with mediated reality in a relational sense<sup>25</sup> will soon be worth its weight in gold. Whereas the nineteenth century

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<sup>20</sup> A term coined by ecologist Eugene Stoermer and chemist Paul Crutzen, among others. For more context, see: [http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/11/confronting-the-anthropocene/?\\_r=0](http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/11/confronting-the-anthropocene/?_r=0).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Oosterling, following Peter Sloterdijk.

<sup>22</sup> See: <http://www.nu.nl/wetenschap/3986234/robot-ontdekt-mogelijk-medicijn-malaria.html>.

<sup>23</sup> For examples, see: *De aristocratisering van onze infrastructuur* ['The aristocratisation of our infrastructure'], Tobias Kokkermans, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Baricco poetically summarises this irreversibility principle when he writes: '*Perhaps this is one such moment. And perhaps those we call barbarians are a new species who have gills behind their ears and have decided to live underwater. Obviously to us, with our pathetic little lungs, it all looks, from the outside, like an imminent apocalypse. Where they breathe, we die. And when we see our children gaze longingly at the water, we fear for them and lash out against the only thing we can see - namely, the shadow of a barbarian horde on its way. Meanwhile those abovementioned children, under our wings, are already having a hard time breathing, and keep scratching behind their ears, as if there were something back there to set free.*' Baricco, 2013, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Boenisch emphasises the one-to-one relationship it requires in order to be able to establish new frame works: '*Today, the principal concern of dramaturgy is therefore to define the aesthetic value of theatre perform*

was still the pipe dream of the romantic hero and tragedy actor, and the twentieth century was the idiosyncratic battlefield of the artist-director, the twenty-first century is the design platform of the dramaturg. This is the age of the brave, smart *Tom Poes* (Tom Puss): he is the agent of change,<sup>26</sup> the change coach for directors, actors and dancers, the co-author of the writers' guild and *primus inter pares* of the audience.<sup>27</sup>

### ***The dramaturgy of the slack water***

Where is Tom Poes, the 'constructive barbarian' who is changing the portrait of our era? Even Alessandro Baricco, the greatest barbarian-spotter since Walter Benjamin, can see *them* approaching from a distance.<sup>28</sup> They're on the way, but they're not here yet. It is not yet clear who or where the barbarians are. Baricco identifies all manner of characteristics and acts of barbarians but it is not clear whether, in his thinking, the wish is the father of the thought. In the meantime, since he has described the barbarians and announced that they are on the way, the genie is out of the bottle and we await their arrival - with hope or trepidation. The waiting feels like the calm between two storms, a phase of hesitation. It is as if we are experiencing the passage from *The Odyssey* quoted above, in which the swift ship of the Phaeacians is turned to stone by a jealous Poseidon, while Odysseus awakens on the beach of Ithaca and doesn't recognise his home because it is shrouded in mist. In that case we, children of Odysseus, are backpackers on an artistic journey. We have arrived home after a long, lucrative voyage, but we do not realise it yet. Is that really the case?

To explore the situation further, I make a detour to the Wadden Sea. Between its islands and the mainland there is a zone of shallow water: the slack water. It has evolved over the centuries as the incoming and outgoing tides try to push through the inlets at the same time and with the same force. In fact, the two cancel each other out, creating a zone without currents. Because the subsurface of the Wadden Sea is soft, this area becomes silted up. It is a shallow, superficial area. It is a good place for mudflat hikers and resting seals, but impossible for sailors, surfers and other dynamic seafarers. Boats become beached there or bob about until the islands 'migrate',<sup>29</sup> a wait that can last for centuries if the boatmen and lock operators do nothing.

Back to the question: are we, like children of Odysseus, stranded on an island that we no longer recognise as home? If so are we bobbing about on slack water? That would mean the past and future are being pushed into the tidal inlet simultaneously and with equal force. Two forces that, with the same intensity, are attempting to shape the here and now. The Dutch-Italian cultural philosopher

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*ance in our 'end times' – which by that token is always already an ethico-political value as it insists on the direct relation of theatre (art) and life: a relational dramaturgy, thus, first and foremost rejects any claim of separation of these domains as two.'* From: *Poetic Relations with the Real: Notes on the Actuality of Dramaturgy in the End Times*, Peter Boenisch, 2014; published in: *Dramaturgies in the new Millennium – Relationality, Performativity and Potentiality*, Katharina Pewny/Johan Callens/Jeroen Coppens, 2014, p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> A term that is frequently used to refer to the work of Daan Roosegaarde or Merlijn Twaalfhoven, for example. They are both regarded as artistic gamechangers, given their social impact and the fact that they both make disciplines fluid and blend them, allow styles and genres to interact, and hence push aesthetic boundaries.

<sup>27</sup> In his work '*De kunst van de interventie: Zoektochten naar een performatieve dramaturgie.*' Bart Dieho makes a methodological plea for strengthening dramaturgical intervention in creative processes in the theatre, discussing at length the role of the dramaturg as a creativity developer and change coach.

<sup>28</sup> Baricco, 2013, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> The phenomenon whereby, over a long period of time, the islands shift as a result of sand drift, silting-up and human intervention.

Rosi Braidotti does indeed see a historic paradox: *'I do think that one of the most pointed paradoxes of our era is precisely the tension between the urgency of finding new and alternative modes of political and ethical agency for our technologically mediated world and the inertia of established mental habits on the other.'*<sup>30</sup> New modes, new codes, new frameworks, new dramaturgy: the overt declaration of faith in the fact that a new portrait of change can be created, is increasingly heard.<sup>31</sup> The opposing force, the aristocratic impulse to slow up and to conserve, is immutably strong. Whatever the case may be, no-one has yet been able to offer a new portrait for our age. Perhaps this is because of the multiple complexity of Braidotti's paradox. During the 2013 Venice Art Biennale, the German art historian Jörg Scheller curated the influential Salon Suisse. In the catalogue he in fact describes the multiple complexity of Braidotti's paradox: *"I have dedicated the Salon Suisse 2013 to the legacy of the European Enlightenment in the contemporary art world. [...] You might ask, however: "Enlightenment"? Isn't this a worn-out concept of the 18th century – way too idealistic, Eurocentric, and self-righteous in the face of today's globalized, hybrid cultures? [...] Well, I wish things were so easy.'*<sup>32</sup> He sees problems from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment resurfacing: the relationship between politics and religion, freedom of speech and the function of art in society. As far as Scheller is concerned, the paradox requires a transcendent approach, and the one of the main questions is *'How to develop new forms of Enlightenment beyond naive belief in progress, humanism or multiculturalism.'*<sup>33</sup> I would go a step further: how do we design cybercene art forms that are free of the nostalgic longing for man as a thinking superhero? In this inter-vidual age, the formula 'I think therefore I am' is not sufficient to explain Braidotti's paradox. Hence the hesitant thinking. Are we actually floating on slack water?

### ***The dramaturgy of a disease***

We, ourselves, are also ailing. We are burnt-out by an overload of information, production, achievement and visibility: *'Every age has its signature afflictions. [...] In contrast, the achievement society creates depressives and losers.'*<sup>34</sup> According to the South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han, the disease is mainly neural. It is an immanent tiredness resulting from an excess of positivity, because 'otherness' is excluded. The harm does not come just from the Other or the foreign, but also from the Same. The affliction is not viral or bacterial. *"They are not infections, but infarctions. [...] It is not the imperative to belong only to oneself, but the pressure to achieve that causes exhaustive depression.'*<sup>35</sup> From that perspective we are experiencing the Kantian liberation from our self-incurred immaturity, an adolescent emergence from the shadows. According to Han, this step has been too big and the exposure too great. Every subject emerges from the darkness straight into the light of a followspot, into a shop window. It is a choice that has dramatic consequences: *'In the society of exhibition, every subject is also its own advertising object. Everything is measured by its exhibition value.'*<sup>36</sup> According to Han, the neurotic zeal for the ultimate visible success is leading to

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<sup>30</sup> *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti, 2013, p. 58.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, my letter to Jet Bussemaker, Minister for Education, Culture and Science, in which I refer to this tendency. <http://likeminds.nl/likeminds/open-brief-aan-de-minister/>.

<sup>32</sup> Jörg Scheller, *Salon Suisse – Out of the darkness, into the shadow*, 2013, pp. 7-8; [http://issuu.com/artupdate/docs/programme\\_salon\\_suisse\\_2013](http://issuu.com/artupdate/docs/programme_salon_suisse_2013).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han, 2012, p. 7 and p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7 and p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> *The Transparency Society*, Byung-Chul Han, 2015 p. 11.

exhausted, burnt-out souls.

Does that also apply to you and me, the dramaturgs of this age? Yes. We, children of Odysseus, are experiencing a fatigue that is just as great as our apparent urge for visibility. Here we lie, on the beach at Ithaca - our heads full of hybrid information, our bodies exhausted and souls eroded from all the exhibiting and improving - and we do not recognise our home. Is it because we are shrouded in mist, or because our own vision is clouded? Are we using the mist as a smokescreen to confuse doctors who want to heal us? The affliction is something like the Dunning-Kruger effect: the more knowledge we have at our disposal, the more we doubt its accuracy. The more enlightened we are, the more we crave the shadows. In the view of Byung-Chul Han, healing is possible through non-doing, through the rejection of the obvious<sup>37</sup> and in the acceptance of inspiring tiredness: *'The tiredness of exhaustion is the tiredness of positive potency [...] Tiredness that inspires is tiredness of negative potency, of not-to.'*<sup>38</sup> He advocates a metaphorical sabbatical, the 'interval', referring to Peter Handke, who perceives the 'in-between time' as a period of peace and tiredness. *'Tiredness is disarming. In the long, slow gaze of the tired person, resolution yields to a state of calm'*<sup>39</sup> In short, the in-between zone as a place to change, a zone where one can change course. Where one can switch from an unashamed urge to achieve to a passive state of deepening. The slack water has escape routes. Dramaturgs, we do not need to become bogged down in the silt. Immanent tiredness is not necessarily permanent - provided you deepen the fairway, provided you open the lock gates, provided you regularly move out of the spotlight. And provided you draw inspiration from negation and non-doing. Then the slack water becomes a zone in which the opportunity to change your art lays exposed.

Dramaturgs of our day: accept the inspiring tiredness, change your art, deepen your fairways and open the lock gates, so that you do not become bogged down in the silt and will soon be sufficiently equipped to navigate your way out of the slack water and travel on the rising waters.

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<sup>37</sup> Han does not refer specifically to the Polish theatre maker Jerzy Grotowski, but there is an obvious similarity between his concept of 'non-doing' and Grotowski's idea of 'rejecting the obvious'.

<sup>38</sup> *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han, 2012 p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

## PART 2 FAIRWAYS AND CLOUDS

*Shouldn't we, just like the whale, take a few steps backwards again, seek some distance, retreat into the sea, in search of the right biotope to regain our clout?*

(Frie Leysen during the presentation of the 2014 Erasmus Prize)

*The Odyssey contains it, changing like the sea, distinct each time we open it.*

(Jorge Luis Borges, *Clouds*, 1943)

### ***The need to make (clean)***

I took my command literally and went in search of the interval. I spent my sabbatical in Gaza. Although, because of security and newsworthiness, it is one of the most spotlit places in the world, I was able to step out of the glare of the self-justifying spotlight. Here, I can 'not-do'; there are none of the usual work obligations or managerial cares to fill my day.<sup>40</sup> Here I can deepen the fairways, open the lock gates and attempt to change my art.

Beware! Non-doing must not be confused with doing nothing. I am as active as I would be in the spotlight at home. During the day I coach young theatre directors, in the evenings I work on this essay, and in between I talk, read, listen, ingest and digest images of war and poverty. I am active, but I am making use of the sabbatical as Byung-Chul Han advises. '[...] *the day of in-order-to is not sacred, but rather the day of not-to, a day on which the use of the useless becomes possible. It is a day of tiredness. The interval is a time without work, a time of, and for, play [...]*'.<sup>41</sup> I play, so therefore I am not-doing. I go in search, playfully, of the useless and the aimless. I am playing, because in Gaza I am in an in-between position. I am a flaneur in what Slavoj Žižek calls the *desert of the real*.<sup>42</sup>

What strikes me in this interval is that it is full of all sorts of contradictions. I write about designing one's life, while during the day I work with directors who have survived three wars. I philosophise about the constructive effects that the technological tsunami is having on the performative media – what is possible with technology in theatre, fictional film and television drama? – while the effects of this tsunami are ever-present in Gaza, and restricting for the people who live here. At the same time, the questions of the twenty-first century – 'Where am I?' and 'How does it work between us?' – are not up for discussion; they have already been answered. Even before I reach Gaza, there is an idea of 'where I am' and 'how it works between us'. An idea in my own mind, in the minds of the authorities involved, but also in the minds of the people I work for, the directors I work with and any passer-by in the street. It is like painting according to Gilles Deleuze's definition: '*It is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface. [...] Now everything he has in his head or around him is already in the canvas, more or less virtually, more or less actually, before he begins his work. They are all*

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<sup>40</sup> Byung-Chul Han also talks about to work and responsibilities, referring to Heidegger's interpretation of 'Do!', namely a time of care and work. Han considers different aspects from Heidegger in his interpretation of the 'interval', and focuses on a time of play and tiredness. See: Han, 2015, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han, 2015 p. 34.

<sup>42</sup> *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, Slavoj Žižek, 2002.



*present in the canvas as so many images, actual or virtual, so that the painter does not have to cover a blank surface, but rather would have to empty it out, clear it, clean it.*<sup>43</sup>

In the interval in Gaza, I 'make clean'. The 'use of the useless' works like a catalyst on my impulse to clean. 'I make, therefore I am' becomes 'I can make, therefore I must make'. This 'becoming necessary' is fed by two things: the inescapable confrontation with war and poverty, and the existence of censorship. They are both evident, wherever I look, in the eyes of everyone who speaks to me. It lends the theatre that is made here a sense of necessity that goes beyond the European desire for authenticity and individual urgency. Destruction and censorship fire the urge to design. War, poverty and dictatorship are like a red rag to the bull of the creative impulse. In Gaza, productions have to be made because it is the political reality, not individual self-determination, that requires it. Every theatre medium there is 'coordinated', a result of censorship. This gives theatre media a double value: an artistic value (it adds *what* it adds) and a political value (it adds *because* it adds). I, too, am therefore *coordinated*, and this also gives my coaching a double value. Here, Peter Brook's 'empty space' is not only an artistic premise, but also a political proposition whereby a theatrical performative act becomes an act of defiance. When the Dutch composer and theatre maker Merlijn Twaalfhoven orchestrated seventy-five musicians to perform from rooftops between Ramallah and Bethlehem, it was a musical performance *and* an act of defiance. '*It's a symbol that the world doesn't respect everything.*'<sup>44</sup> I recall a follow-up discussion ten years ago with the Flemish theatre director Lucas Vandervost, in which he said that theatre is by definition political, because it is overt.<sup>45</sup> That is evident in Gaza, but in modern-day Europe we have forgotten that it applies to us too. After all, the history of European theatre is rooted in the wish of the people to conduct political discourse openly, in public. Is that not a form of overt non-doing? An example of making clean as a political and artistic act?

### ***Becoming clouds – a strategy for reception and creation***

Years ago I bought a tourist guide to the ancient Forum in Rome. It was a flip book, with two pages devoted to each important building. One of the pages was paper and showed a photo of the ruins as they are today. On top of this there was a transparent plastic page with an artist's impression of the original buildings. In order to see how the Forum has disintegrated over the course of time, I had to let my eyes switch from focusing on the ruin in which I was standing to the photo of the same ruin, and then to the plastic page with the crayon drawing. I had to flip the pages quickly to see the speeded-up version of the buildings eroding. My imagination then filled in the empty spaces between what my eyes were seeing in my physical surroundings, the reproduction of this in a photograph, and the historical impression that was presented as a drawn layer.

For the time being, this sounds like a manageable strategy for bridging the gaps between what one observes and the many possible reproductions of it. In this era, however, I see only its limitations. The scale and complexity of image-making today leave hardly any space for the imagination. The old-style flip book no longer provides a satisfactory reception strategy. If I want to keep pace with image reproduction and be able to clean the condensation from the window of the imagination, I need a strategy that is fast, flexible and accelerative. I need a strategy that is fluid. Why? Because there has been an explosion in the number of possibilities for reproducing images using photography, film and

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<sup>43</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, 2003 (first pub. 1981), p. 86. Deleuze does not refer directly to Jerzy Grotowski's idea of rejecting the 'obvious' in acting either, but this via negativa is like the clearing and cleaning that Deleuze referred to.

<sup>44</sup> See: <http://merlijntwaalfhoven.com/en/muziekprojecten-in-conflictgebieden/carried-by-the-wind>

<sup>45</sup> Vandervost said this during a discussion of his production of *Woyzeck*, in 1997 at the Kaaithheater in Brussels.

new computer techniques. Because there has been an exponential increase in images that make multiple allusions to all manner of possible reproductions in all manner of possible dimensions and on all manner of possible levels.<sup>46</sup> This has resulted in a misted-up window that obscures our view of the origin of the image, the non-reproducible *appleyness* of the apple.<sup>47</sup> It has become misted up as a result of all the densities of meaning in the images.<sup>48</sup> Misted up by our own huffing and puffing and perspiring in the followspot, with which, time and time again, we create new referential relationships to the images. In this way Odysseus deprives himself of visibility by creating mist. Empiricism and all manner of copies are increasingly merging with each other. Jacques Rancière respectfully calls this the *metamorphic, unstable nature of images*,<sup>49</sup> but it results in absurd situations. When there is a fight in the street, who doesn't think about *Fight Club* (1999)? When viewers watch the news, who only sees the facts? I need a strategy that is fast, flexible and accelerative and, above all, fluid. It is not sufficient to wipe the window clean with my sleeve. The empty space has become so small, the interval between observation and possible reproductions so brief, that the window begins to mist up again as soon as my sleeve has passed over it. I am searching for a reception strategy that allows me to move around in condensation. I want to be absorbed by the mist. Drop by drop.

In the Gazan village of Beit Hanoun, a small piece of wall survived the heavy bombing in July 2014. The wall was part of a house that has now been reduced to rubble. In front of the wall is a tangled ball of metal. A white kitten with a red bow is painted on the wall. This is graffiti-art by Banksy, the anonymous British artist. The kitten appears to be playing with the ball of metal as if it is a ball of wool. The image forms a playful contrast to its surroundings: concrete rubble, mangled metal, ragged items of clothing and half-collapsed buildings. It is a cheerful image amid devastation. As the American author Teju Cole has stated: '*No single image stands alone, they are all related, directly or via a very circuitous route, to other images.*'<sup>50</sup> That applies to Banksy's kitten too. This image alludes to all manner of emotions and other images, in all manner of dimensions and on all manner of levels. It alludes to the kitten, to the bitter destruction of war, the deaths, the artist's story - he risked his life by entering Gaza through an illegal tunnel. It alludes to the children of Gaza who play barefoot in the rubble around the wall. It alludes to their future. It alludes to political decisions made in the past, to the origin of the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis. It alludes to the panic that probably broke out during the bombing. It alludes to the screams of the fleeing or wounded residents of Beit Hanoun. It alludes to *The Silence of the Lambs*. It alludes to all possible war films and images of violence and destruction. It alludes to Picasso's *Guernica*, Bruegel's *Mad Meg*, to Goya's *The Third of*

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<sup>46</sup> In this context, Deleuze distinguishes between fact and cliché. He defines a fact as '*the relation of the Figure to its isolating place*' and a cliché is a prepictorial or postpictorial reconstruction of the fact. See: Deleuze, 2015, p. 2 and 86-99. He thereby isolates the fact from its representation, which can be compared to what Walter Benjamin calls the 'aura' of a work, and what Rancière calls 'the naked image'. A cliché always retains its connection to the actual fact, or, as Rancière puts it: '*Let us call it hyper-resemblance. Hyper-resemblance is the original resemblance, the resemblance that does not provide the replica of a reality but attests directly to the elsewhere whence it derives.*' From: *The Future of the Image*, Jacques Rancière, 2007 (orig. 2003), p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Deleuze cites D.H. Lawrence, who made a thorough analysis of Cézanne's still lifes: '*It's the real appleyness, and you can't imitate it. Every man must create it new and different out of himself: new and different. The moment it looks "like" Cezanne, it is nothing.*' Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, 2003 (first pub. 1981), p. 89; quote by Lawrence from: *Introduction to These Paintings*, in *Poets on Painters: essays on the art of painting by Twentieth-Century Poets*, 1988).

<sup>48</sup> Deleuze does not mince words: "*Clichés, clichés. The situation has hardly improved since Cezanne. Not only has there been a multiplication of images of every kind, around us and in our heads, but even the reactions against clichés are creating clichés.*" From: *Francis Bacon – the logic of sensation*, 2003 (orig. 1981), p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> *The Future of the Image*, Jacques Rancière, 2007 (orig. 2003), p. 26.

<sup>50</sup> Teju Cole, *Soms zegt een voorwerp meer dan een gezicht* ['Sometimes an object tells us more than a face'], published in 360, no. 80, 2-16 July 2015, p. 50.

May 1808. It alludes to all Banksy's artworks: to the characters from *Pulp Fiction* (1994) holding bananas instead of guns, to the kissing coppers, to the balloon girl floating over the wall in Ramallah, to the dystopian theme park *Dismaland*. The white kitten with her red bow alludes to so many other images, that the strategy for experiencing this density of meaning must necessarily be a fluid one. Fast, flexible and accelerative. So that the sleeve glides more quickly over the window. So that the overview of all the possible allusions hints at an empty space. A space that creates tension in the reception of the image.

In my view, the main challenge in twenty-first-century art is to introduce tension into the reception process, into the process of signification. But what strategy should we use? Rancière makes a worthy attempt. He describes three forms of 'imageness' that relate to each other in a dynamic way: the naked image, the ostensive image and the metaphorical image. He sees these as '[...] *three ways of coupling or uncoupling the power of showing and the power of signifying, the attestation of presence and the testimony of history* [...]'.<sup>51</sup> This image-forming model leads to an assertive strategy not only for the artist, but also for the spectator: '*It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the "story" and make it their own story.*'<sup>52</sup> The same assertiveness can be found in the image-forming model of Gilles Deleuze, who sees in the work of the Irish painter Francis Bacon an active attempt to escape inevitable clichés. '*The photograph "creates" the person or the landscape in the sense that we say that the newspaper creates the event (and is not content to narrate it). [...] photographs seem to him to cut across ages and temperaments, to come from afar, in order to fill every room or every brain. [...] Consequently, one cannot leave the photograph behind or escape from clichés simply by transforming the cliché.*'<sup>53</sup> In this, Deleuze sees a usable – but note: not a universal – strategy. He then sees the painter submit to the clichés, which Bacon immediately rejects by literally smearing them into a *desert of the real*. It is a combined process of becoming and non-being, in which both artist and spectator are involved, in different roles. It is not only artists who have work to do; spectators do too.

Are these strategies fit for purpose? Is the active and dynamic structuring of images à la Rancière, or the submission to à la Deleuze, sufficient for you and I, the dramaturgs of today? Not entirely, I fear. The density of meaning is growing by the day, with every reproduction of an image. Apple and *appleyness* are increasingly forming themselves into an amorphously assembled amalgam, in a continuous unification process that erases any differences, thereby also involving spectator and artist in a perpetual fusion. God and the author have already died. Now the spectator will join them. Long live fusion! No, thank you. We need a fluid strategy that emphasises differences; a strategy to halt the threatening singularity and stimulate a continuous, conscious process of positioning from a *now* to another *now*.<sup>54</sup> It is a continuous transformation. It is the strategy of *morphing*<sup>55</sup> that enables us to set sail and take on the waves, and just as easily become waves by being water, then evaporate into aeriform dimensions. This strategy will enable us to change in the same way that clouds do. From air

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière, 2015 (orig. 2008), p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> 2003, pp. 91-92.

<sup>54</sup> Han describes this process as a *hypercultural* shift from one here to another here: '*Surfing or browsing in the Hyperspace of Attractions are distinct from the mode of movement of the both the Pilgrim and the romantic Tourist. In Hyper-cultural Space, "there" is only another "here". It is symmetrical. There is no painful asymmetry. The Hypercultural Tourist moves from a Here to another Here. Hyperculture is a Culture of being-Here.*' Byung-Chul Han, *Hyperkulturalität – Kultur und Globalisierung*, 2005, pp. 45-46; trans. CN.

<sup>55</sup> Morphing was originally a filmic technique, derived from the Ancient Greek *morphosis* (literally: process of becoming), whereby one image fades into another. The word also derives from the mythological Morpheus, the Ancient Greek god of dreams who has the ability to mimic any human form. He appears in Ovid's *Metamorphose*, and more recently as an associative character in *The Matrix* (1999).

into water, from water into *floating mountains*<sup>56</sup> and back into air. This is to be understood as: becoming clouds. Clouds constitute a continuous process of sublimation and maturation. From moment to moment they form, move and change colour as the light changes. They are like the liquid metal Terminator T-1000 from *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), who can deliberately take on any form or dimension – man, thing or gas – and morph back into the old state.<sup>57</sup> It is a matter of continuous perception. Continuously reading and processing meaning, fast, flexibly and while gathering speed. Continuously switching assertively between Rancière's three image-forming processes. In this era we are already learning to deal with what web theorist Nathan Jurgenson means by '*We can't log off.*'<sup>58</sup> By which he means that, in fact, the difference between on/off and present/absent, is not conspicuous by its absence, but simply doesn't exist at all! Whereas Byung-Chul Han sees the in-between time as a breathing space, Jurgenson no longer sees an in-between. Above all, I think that, whether the difference is virtually or entirely absent, we have to adopt our own reception strategy that teaches us how and to what extent we are embedded or disembedded. The morphing strategy provides us with this learning process. So that, if we can no longer be absent, we can at least change form. Just as clouds can evaporate and immediately become absorbed into a new sublimation process.

This reception strategy is also a creation strategy. Artistic morphing is the same process of conscious positioning in the 'here-and-now and being-everywhere'<sup>59</sup> or, as the Dutch author Joost Zwagerman calls it in his final book *De Stilte van het Licht*: present absence. It is a movement that unfolds in the opposite direction to what he calls the '[...] *the inward-folded alienation – that nineteenth- and twentieth-century affliction par excellence.*'<sup>60</sup> Artistic morphing is an outward-folded alienation of sensation. The sensation that a cloud can be in a solid state one moment, and the next moment the water molecules become air. It is a continuous process of abduction. The artist (or rather: kidnapper), steals the perception of one part of the cloud by emphasising the perception of another part of the cloud, in the same way that Jan Fabre's statue *The Man who measures clouds* maps the process of becoming cloud like '[...] *a utopian encyclopaedist*': '*Many forms suit him, and this statue is so attractive if only because the man, in all his bombast and fairytale-ness, is as pluriform and ambiguous as the things he is measuring.*'<sup>61</sup> The emptiness left by the evaporated cloud provides room for the imagination, stimulates a search for the difference between on/off and absent/present. The fluid movement of the clouds is the morphic dynamic between production and reproduction, presence and absence, the portrait of becoming or not-being.

If this strategy is implemented in the creative process, it will give rise to tension in reception. I have argued before that '*Art has the effect of exposing deficiencies. In space, language, engagement, irony, love, and so on. Art is like homesickness: the value of home is determined by the fact that it is*

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<sup>56</sup> Joost Zwagerman, *De Stilte van Licht – schoonheid en onbehagen in de kunst* ['The Silence of Light – beauty and unease in art'], 2015, p. 146.

<sup>57</sup> It is what Byung-Chul Han calls a '*hypercultural here-and-now that coincides with being everywhere*'; *Hyperkulturalität – Kultur und Globalisierung*, Byung-Chul Han, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> See: <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/the-irl-fetish/> and <http://nathanjurgenson.com/> for other articles by Nathan Jurgenson. He takes action against the principle of 'digital dualism' by critics such as Sherry Turkle. In Jurgenson's view, the binary distinction between physical and virtual reality rests on a flaw. As far as social media is concerned, for example, he argues that we can never separate ourselves from this reality: "*That is, disconnection from the smartphone and social media isn't really disconnection at all: The logic of social media follows us long after we log out.*"

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Byung-Chul Han. See note 54.

<sup>60</sup> *De Stilte van het Licht*, Joost Zwagerman, 2015, p. 25.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p 149.

absent.’<sup>62</sup> Or, as Jorge Luis Borges poetically proclaims: ‘And you are cloud, ocean, oblivion’s mist. And you are also all that you have lost.’<sup>63</sup> In this strategy, the art image can be constructed like a crime scene, carefully manipulated by the artist-kidnapper. A temporary zone, pregnant with *present absences*, into which the spectator is lured: look, there’s something going on here, search, search for what is lacking, have fun and search for the difference. The experiencing of art is not only politically loaded, educational, aesthetically pleasing or intellectually challenging. Experiencing art is also a pleasure. Learning is also storing through play. The spectators of this era are more than Byung-Chul Han’s ‘hypercultural tourists’. He describes these twenty-first-century artistic travellers as backpackers without homesickness or fear, who are engaging in cultural sightseeing and making culture into a *Cul-Tour*.<sup>64</sup> I agree with him that the element of enjoyment has become an increasingly important factor in experiencing art. Art is making-beautiful, as art lovers of this era not infrequently suggest.<sup>65</sup> I would like to add the ‘urge to seek’ to that, evoked by the strategy of morphing. With this urge to seek, the hypercultural tourist becomes a *Cul-Tourist+*. Not an artistic backpacker, but an artistic detective. A Sherlock Holmes trying to solve a mystery. He is not searching for perpetrators, but for clues to the disappearance. He is not seeking to solve the case; the investigation process is sufficiently rewarding for the *Cul-Tourist+*. The popularity of *locked games* and *escape rooms*<sup>66</sup> is testament to the need for these new quests. The cloud-becoming *Cul-Tourist+* wants to change form continuously; he wants to continue seeking and enjoy himself. He experiences the abduction of sensation as a pleasurable stimulus. That is precisely why I am in Gaza. It is the *modus operandi* of today’s dramaturgs.

An example. During the exhibition *Digital Revolution – an immersive exhibition of art, design, film, music and videogames*,<sup>67</sup> I come to the theatrical performative installation *The Treachery of Sanctuary*<sup>68</sup> by the American artist Chris Milk. In front of the triptych there is a container of water in which the work is reflected. As I stand in front of the first screen, which is spewing out white beamer light, my silhouette appears on the screen. The guides have told me to stand still, but I want to see how the system works, so I lean to the left and to the right. My silhouette makes exactly the same movements. A Kinect system makes my physical here-and-now into an everywhere-at-once. At the moment I become aware of the composite image I form with my silhouette and the reflection in the water, silhouettes of birds appear on the screen. They start to eat me, assailing me with their beaks. My silhouette disappears in a forceful *present absence* and it feels very much as if I am in a scene from *The Birds* (1963). A person torn to pieces and plundered by flying beasts. A phantom sensation

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<sup>62</sup> From: *Tweede open brief aan de minister*, Caspar Nieuwenhuis, 2014; <http://likeminds.nl/media/tweede-open-brief-aan-de-minister/>.

<sup>63</sup> Borges, Jorge Luis; Richard Barnes; and Robert Mezey. "Clouds." *The Iowa Review* 22.3 (1992): 72-72. Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview/vol22/iss3/15>.

<sup>64</sup> Han refers to Zygmunt Bauman’s explanation of the modern-day ‘tourist’, the counterpoint of the pre-modern ‘pilgrim’. In Han’s view, Bauman still uses the concept of ‘being at home’ in his analysis, so the tourist is not hypercultural but a romantic tourist alias pilgrim. See: *Hyperkulturalität – Kultur und Globalisierung*, Byung Chul Han, 2005, pp. 44-47.

<sup>65</sup> For a lighthearted dissection of the subject of art as beautification, see the edition of *De Snijtafel*, in which a conversation between journalist Matthijs van Nieuwkerk and artist Job Smeets is analysed. At minute 11:50, the men on *De Snijtafel* [‘The Cutting Table’] discuss the talkshow host’s dubious remark that artists are *beautifiers*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ht1Ahbq1E48>.

<sup>66</sup> Even for Amsterdam, you practically trip over the websites with escape rooms. These days you can not only escape from rooms, but also break into them in a game, stimulating your desire to enter an unknown space without knowing whether anything of value is concealed inside. See, for example: <https://saveamsterdam.com/?gclid=CME-n8uE0ccCFYccGwodaUcl3w>, <http://phobia.nl/> and <http://www.roomescapeamsterdam.nl/>.

<sup>67</sup> From July to September 2014 at The Barbican in London.

<sup>68</sup> See: <http://milk.co/treachery>

takes over my arms, my head, my shoulders, my upper body, my lower body, my pelvis, my thighs, my knees, my calves, until I disappear into the water, precisely where I just saw my silhouette reflected. I move across to the second part of the triptych. Again, I see my digital silhouette and my reflection in the water. Quickly my body begins to disintegrate from top to toe, and every fragment of 'me' changes into a bird and flies away. Within a few minutes there is nothing left of my silhouette. My reflection has become submerged in the mysteriously calm, dark water and, again, I experience phantom pain. I move to the next screen. A guide suddenly appears next to me – outside the Kinect sensor – and shows me what to do: pretend my arms are wings, and fly. My silhouette appears again and, with every beat of my 'wings', more feathers appear on my silhouetted arms. I am busy flapping my wings like mad when suddenly my silhouette stops moving, as if it is Icarus, as if I myself am Icarus. For a fraction of a second I am a man-bird in triplicate: my physical here-and-now, my digital silhouette and the reflection in between us. I am a man-bird, here and now and everywhere. I keep flapping my arms, and suddenly the silhouette takes off. It is flying. I am flying. The reflection is flying.

Later, I read in the exhibition catalogue: '*These actions are reflected in a still pool of water that divides the space between viewer and screen suggesting notions of peaceful contemplation as well as active spiritual self-empowerment.*'<sup>69</sup> The reception strategy of Chris Milk's installation demands the direct involvement of the spectator. I become part of the image. I am experiencing a continuous process of morphing, of continuous transformation, a process of becoming or not-being in which I can choose my own position. I could walk away from the installation, and then my silhouette and its reflection would have to disappear too. I could flap my arms more vigorously, so that Icarus flies faster and higher out of the digital image. The effect that the maker appears to be seeking, goes a dimension further. The interactivity prompts us to experience the morphic in-between time, and stimulates self-reflection and contemplation.

Another example, with a different effect. On Naoshima, the Japanese island of art, a man-sized bright yellow pumpkin with black dots stands on a small, stone pier. It was created by Yayoi Kusama. The artwork has a cute name: *Pumpkin*, and is a fusion of different images into a single quasi-static image. It is a radical, artificial intervention within a natural panorama of the Seto inland sea, with volcanoes in the distance.<sup>70</sup> Without *Pumpkin* the panorama would refer to itself – nature, as tourists like to photograph it. Without the panorama, *Pumpkin* would be art for art's sake.<sup>71</sup> The shared positioning gives both a multiple value, a reciprocal form of 'showy pumpkin-ness'. By together forming a single composite image, both are shown to be mortal and reproducible at the same time, as if unfinished and plastic fantastic. The absence of the on/off antithesis, due to the indivisibility of the composite image, gives the impression of a crime scene. Something is missing here, but what? This calls for morphing as a reception strategy. Seeing is becoming a cloud. Observing becomes tracking down. The urge to seek out makes the deliberation enjoyable.

*Pumpkin* and the Cul-Tourist+. What a dynamic marriage! *Pumpkin* is a postcard full of affirmation and gluttony that you can be part of by taking a selfie. In the selfie you can no longer distinguish between the ostentatious pumpkin panorama and the questing spectator. There is no longer a

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<sup>69</sup> From the exhibition catalogue *Digital Revolution – an immersive exhibition of art, design, film, music and videogames*, Barbican, 2014, p. 103.

<sup>70</sup> The artificial intervention is taken a dimension further, namely in the merchandising relating to the artwork. *Pumpkin* is printed onto all manner of zany trinkets and gadgets, and sold to fans. See: <http://www.yayoi-kusama.jp/e/goods/index.html>.

<sup>71</sup> This can be seen from the copy of *Pumpkin*, which stands, lonely, next to the entrance of the Fukuoka Art Museum.

difference between actual pleasure and the cliché of violence. Violence? Yes, *Pumpkin* is also a multiplied allusion to violence. It alludes to the moment when plastic can violently transform a natural environment into an artificial primeval soup. Conversely, it alludes to a time when nature can devour the plastic artwork. As in the past when, according to legend, other events of this type occurred. Included in this *mise en abyme* of reproductions, the Cul-Tourist+ is part of the violence. My *Pumpkin* selfie is therefore also a portrait of the end of anthropocentrism. My *Pumpkin* selfie makes me, caught up in the frenzied wedding dance of pleasure and violence, feel insignificant in the extreme. Yet something still gnaws at me. Something is missing from this *plastic fantastic* picture. The lack, a present absence, awakens a questing urge in me. I feel a desperate need for flesh and blood. For lifeblood. For taste. For sensory appetite, in all its goriness. *Pumpkin* evokes in me a zeal that Žižek – following Alain Badiou – calls *the terrible passion for the real*. A passion for the reality that we have lost as a result of digitisation and virtualisation: ‘*On all fronts we are increasingly faced with things that are devoid of their essence. We have beer without alcohol, meat without fat, coffee without caffeine, and even virtual sex without the sex. Now we even have virtual reality, [...] which is actually a completely regulated and commodified reality. [...] because we live in a universe of lifeless conventions, authentic experience cannot be other than extremely violent and shocking.*’<sup>72</sup> My *Pumpkin* selfie awakens the urge for that shocking experience. A violent and spectacular perspective on the figurative facts, the revelation of the *passion for the real*.

I am still in Gaza. In the in-between time. For me it is a time of making clean, thinking, and shedding layers. The sabbatical is really not a period of non-doing, but of using the as-yet-unused. It is the zone in which I can morph. And enjoy it. With a passion for the real. With the vital force of taking on the waves that lift me and engulf me, then becoming a wave and air.

### ***The passion for the real and its perversities***

There is a problem with the passion for the real. It can be deceptive. It can be a false desire for the real as an ultimate phenomenon. Žižek refutes this pseudo-transcendence when he writes: ‘[...] *the very idea that, beneath the deceptive appearances, there lies hidden some ultimate Real Thing too horrible for us to look at directly is the ultimate appearance [...]*’<sup>73</sup> He regards this process as an instrument of power – wherever it may be vested. It is a paranoid perspective on barbarian impulses, because barbarians disrupt the system that has become decadent.<sup>74</sup> According to Alessandro Baricco,

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<sup>72</sup> See: interview with Slavoj Žižek, *Hartstocht voor het Reële* [‘Passion for the Real’], published in the *De Groene Amsterdammer*, Saturday 8 December 2001, <http://www.groene.nl/artikel/hartstocht-voor-het-reele>. For a further explanation of the *terrible passion for the real*, see: *The Century*, Alain Badiou, 2005.

<sup>73</sup> *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Žižek, 2005, p. 36.

<sup>74</sup> In *The Next 100 Years*, the American geopolitical forecaster and strategist George Friedman wrote about the dynamic between barbarism, civilisation and decadence as cultural climatology. Every culture, he wrote, has three states. All three are permanent, usually latent and sometimes superficial. Barbarism, civilisation and decadence predominated at different times, undulating like the sea. Each phase in the cycle has distinctive characteristics, such as the extent to which criticism is lacking. Barbarism is an unpredictable and primitive phase in which the customs of a community are the laws of nature. It is similar to the process that Marshall McLuhan calls ‘tribalization’. The members of the tribe are in connection with each other. No questions are asked within the small community, but are directed to the wider system of values outside the community. If the wider system is modified as a result of these critical questions, the culture moves into the next phase in the cycle: civilisation. It is a Janus-faced phase. On the one hand, there is a lack of trust in the predominating value system. On the other hand, this is constantly raised for discussion from within, and modified where necessary. Civilisation is a brief, dynamic phase that, according to Friedman, inevitably collapses into decadence, which takes hold when the predominating value system is no longer questioned. From this point on, there is no more negation in society. The consequence of this ‘disappearance’ is an atmosphere of nihilism in which no other system is worth advocating or fighting for. In other words: decadence. See: *The Next 100 Years*, George Friedman, 2009, pp. 29-30.

it is a matter of old wine in new bottles. That is why he uses a quote by the historian Schivelbusch as a motto for his study of barbarians: *'The fear of being overwhelmed and destroyed by barbarian hordes is as old as the history of civilization. Pictures of desertification, gardens and palaces looted by nomads in disrepair in which graze their flocks are recurrent in the literature of decadence from antiquity to the present day.'*<sup>75</sup> Is giving the impression that the barbarians are invading the barbaric trick of a decadent ruler? Yes. See the generalising terminology that is used to describe the current stream of refugees. See the previous sentence, in which the word 'stream' sets a negative tone - as if all refugees are passing through Europe at the same time in a never-ending stream. See the less recent example of the March for Civilization (June 2011), an attempt by those in the Dutch arts sector to join forces and protest against the planned cutbacks. The March was intended as an antidote to the poison of neoliberal cultural barbarians. The arts sector protested with the same rhetoric and methods as the so-called cultural barbarians. It was already evident in the name. Claiming a moral monopoly over civilisation was a sham. Hollow rhetoric. Aristocratic pedantry, whereby – yes, here he is again – Ramsey Nasr revealed his nightmare to the crowd. Yes, dramaturgs, I confess that I was there too. At the time it was impossible not to be there. During Nasr's deadly serious speech, a jolly colleague came up to me and thumped me congenially on the arm: *'Great, isn't it?'* Truly, the March for Civilisation was nothing more than a pill prescribed by a paranoid doctor to treat an illness of which the pill itself was a symptom. The demonstration was not an uncontrolled outburst of public indignation. There was not a substantial proportion of the Dutch population standing at Malieveld (the Dutch 'Speakers' Corner'), but a well-behaved – partly cross, partly cheerful – cross-section of subsidy-dependent art makers. It was an officially authorised mini-show of resistance that proceeded according to a tightly *coordinated* plan, where ten thousand art professionals gave resilient speeches to each other and sympathised with themselves about the cutbacks that had been announced. It was alcohol-free beer. It was virtual sex. The arts sector countered the barbarian attack by the neoliberal cost-cutters with a paranoid claim to civilisation. In reality it was a febrile convulsion caused by the aristocratic disease that had been creeping over the arts sector for decades.

Although the aristocratic disease has different names, the symptoms are identical. Byung-Chul Han names the disease after its characteristics: *'The past century was an immunological age. The epoch sought to distinguish clearly between inside and outside, friend and foe, self and other. [...] The immunological dispositive, which extends beyond the strictly social and onto the whole of communal life, harbors a blind spot: everything foreign is simply combated and warded off.'*<sup>76</sup> The blind spot is mentioned again in the diagnosis by Žižek, who attributes the disease to *'[...] the deadlock of today's Last Men, 'postmodern' individuals who reject all 'higher' goals as terrorist and dedicate their life to survival, to a life filled with more and more refined and artificially excited/aroused minor pleasures.'*<sup>77</sup> In his view, the real patients are the people who refuse to question the system and who settle for a false passion for the real. They are suffering from a chronic lack of negation and criticism, or dialectic. There is no place for otherness in the system that they, the patients, have managed to construct. In the words of Han: *'The object of immune defense is the foreign as such. Even if it has no hostile intentions, even if it poses no danger, it is eliminated on the basis of its Otherness.'*<sup>78</sup> The patient himself has initiated a treatment process. He's a smart doctor, that patient. Modern-day quackery. The epidemic is perpetuated for the benefit of the patient. He deludes us – fellow patients – into thinking that life is a dividend and therefore worth fighting for, but it is not exactly clear against whom or what. Nor it is clear where this piece of wisdom comes from. If you look closely and listen to

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<sup>75</sup> Alessandro Baricco, *The Barbarians: An Essay in the Mutation of Culture*, 2013.

<sup>76</sup> *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han, 2015 p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Žižek, 2002, p.88.

<sup>78</sup> *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han, 2015, p. 2.



his diagnosis, you see that: *'The opportunistic political economy of biogenetic capitalism turns Life/Zoe – that is to say human and non-human intelligent matter – into a commodity for trade and profit.'*<sup>79</sup> We are being offered a placebo, which will result in any success in breaking away from modern-day 'just-do-it' dogma being perceived as a Pyrrhic victory. In short, the false passion for the real is perilous.

A good example of modern quackery is Dutch multicultural theatre of the 1980s and 1990s. Nowhere was the false passion for the real so manifest. I have worked within this circuit for fifteen years and have seen the adjective 'multicultural' transform from well-intentioned to euphemistic, and from euphemistic to neo-colonial. Precisely in this circuit full of so-called tolerant theatre makers, I have seen Žižek's postmodern nightmare take place: *'On the one hand, it [multiculturalism] tolerates the Other in so far as it is not the real other, but the aseptic Other of premodern ecological wisdom, fascinating rites, and so on [...].'*<sup>80</sup> In essence, this is not tolerance, but exoticism or orientalism<sup>81</sup>, or, as it is popularly called: a Hawaiian hamburger. Take the well-meaning 'colour-blind casting' method. It began as an expression of the passion for the real, but gradually became a blind spot for negation and distinction. A sticking plaster in the event of a negative quality appraisal by a third party. Everyone deserves an opportunity to go on stage! Yes, yes, but in the meantime artistic choices are made on the basis of justifying earmarked subsidies – this was not admitted out loud, but was a policy. *'Result: actors who had difficulty with Dutch or, frankly, spoke it badly were put on stage without hesitation, under the guise of "new reality, own quality". Until, in the "noughties", multiculturalism became less sexy. That changed the casting method. The new magic word was not emancipation but quality. The multicultural circuit changed colour, under the guise of "colour-blind casting".'*<sup>82</sup> A persistent variant of the aristocratic disease. Modern-day quackery. Without criticising, they hopped from one boxed definition to another. If there was criticism from outside, the 'poor me' card was played and there was lobbying among like-minded social democrats. Žižek has a remedy for this: *'[...] when a multiculturalist replies to our criticism with a desperate plea "Whatever I do is wrong – either I am too tolerant towards the injustice the Other suffers, or I am imposing my own values on to the Other – so what do you want me to do?", our answer should be "Nothing!"'*<sup>83</sup> We are back to non-doing. Saying *no* in an age dominated by *yes*. The false passion for the real can be unmasked by pertinent refusal. The disease can be cured by not-doing. Not through compensation. Not through special subsidies.

Yet again, I would emphasise that non-doing is not the same as doing nothing. You must change your art! That involves deepening the fairways and opening the lock gates. The dialectical fairway in particular could use some deepening. The question 'how does it work between us?' requires research and resistance, not a simple answer that confirms the question. Drop by drop.

### ***The Netherlands-Theatreland subsidy fountain***

If there is one performative medium that is susceptible to the aristocratic disease, it is theatre. The sanctuary of the here and now, the locus of the lifeblood, reality and the smell of sweat, has degenerated into a postmodern *fata morgana*, into alcohol-free beer. I see many productions in cities all over Europe, and it pains me to see that today's institutionalised theatre is mainly geared to removing any desire for that which is truly Other. The average artistic quest is a variation on, and a

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<sup>79</sup> *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti, 2013, p. 61.

<sup>80</sup> *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, Slavoj Žižek, 2000, p. 219.

<sup>81</sup> See also Edward W. Said's book *Orientalism* (1978) on the paternalistic way in which the Other is represented.

<sup>82</sup> From: *Eerste open brief aan de minister*, Caspar Nieuwenhuis, 2013, <http://likeminds.nl/media/open-brief-aan-de-minister/>.

<sup>83</sup> *The Ticklish Subject*, Slavoj Žižek, 2000, p. 220.

confirmation of, the *known*.<sup>84</sup> As Umberto Eco has summarised it: “*We are giving you the reproduction so you will no longer feel any need for the original.*”<sup>85</sup> Theatre has become the victim of the reproduction effect that Walter Benjamin predicted back in 1936 in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*: from the moment authenticity is no longer the essence of the artistic product, the function of art shifts diametrically, from ritualistic to political.<sup>86</sup> Ironically, it is the most ritualistic medium - theatre - that, as a result of mechanical and digital reproducibility, has lost its soul in the de-ritualisation process. The criticism by the trans-European Comité van Roosendaal applies to theatre more than to other art forms: ‘*We don’t think. We have become nearly as smooth operators as anyone else.*’<sup>87</sup> In the Netherlands, every discourse on the substance of art is held hostage by the cultural-political frameworks. That is why, in Dutch theatre in particular, the shallow water has become so silted up. This works both ways, a reciprocity that is sometimes forgotten. During the National Dutch Theatre Festival 2014, dramaturg Tobias Kokkelmans criticised the ‘aristocratisation of the sector’. He referred to policymakers, who claim to refrain from interfering in the content of art: ‘[...] *structure is also content; it is intrinsically content.*’<sup>88</sup> A justified criticism. But he left the thought in mid-air. It is just as valid if you turn it round: content is also structure; it is intrinsically structure. The choices that artists and art managers make regarding the content of art determine the infrastructure and become political handles. One feeds the other. The other feeds the one. The patient plays doctor and prescribes placebos. Modern-day quackery. This is particularly true of the Netherlands, but I also hear it in policy discussions in other, prosperous European countries. There is a crisis in the units of measure. How did this come about? The Italian philosopher Paolo Virno called a spade a spade when he wrote: ‘*I think that the experience of avant-garde art including poetry in the 20th century is one of disproportion and of “excess”, of lack of moderation. [...] This emphasis on immoderation, disproportion and the crisis in units of measure is to be credited greatly to avant-garde art and this is also where it edges up to communism.*’<sup>89</sup> Theatre became a political instrument in the twentieth century, the mask of the false passion for the real. A weapon in the socio-democratic struggle, addicted to subsidy justification and policy-based approval. It makes theatre makers into aristocratic junkies and the authorities into opinionated drug dealers. Surely this can’t be the intention?<sup>90</sup>

Philosopher René Boomkens goes a step further than Virno. In his view, after the fall of Communism, a far-reaching process of commercialisation was set in motion. He describes this process as ‘McDonaldization’, a term borrowed from the American sociologist George Ritzer. Boomkens argues that the art sector in the Netherlands has taken on characteristics of the fast-food restaurant: ‘[...] *to produce a homogeneous product as fast as possible, using a standardised method and as little labour as possible: the same hamburger everywhere.*’<sup>91</sup> It is a bold observation, but his argument is justified in cases where art has become too embedded in cultural-political frameworks. Back to Netherlands-

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Marianne Van Kerkhoven, in *Van het kijken en van het schrijven: Teksten over theater* [‘On looking and on writing: Texts about theatre’], Halewyck, 2002, p. 238.

<sup>85</sup> *Travels in Hyperreality*, Umberto Eco, 1986, p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin, 1936. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>.

<sup>87</sup> The Comité van Roosendaal is an alliance of cultural institutions in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. See also: Pascal Gielen et al. *Institutional Attitudes – Instituting Art in a Flat World*, 2013, p. 231.

<sup>88</sup> *De Aristocratisering van onze infrastructuur*, Tobias Kokkelmans, 2014; <http://www.theaterkrant.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Tobias-Kokkelmans-De-aristocratisering-van-onze-infrastructuur-11-sept-20141.pdf>.

<sup>89</sup> *The Dismeasure of Art. An Interview with Paolo Virno*, 2009; <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eM20vIqFVdnZMHnqNHFi4Q1y4pXBcUdECEVqlbXpznY/edit?hl>.

<sup>90</sup> For further arguments, see: *Eerste open brief aan de Minister*, Caspar Nieuwenhuis, 2013.

<sup>91</sup> From: *Barbaarse Tijden? – democratie vraagt om een overheid die het afwijkende geluid de ruimte biedt*, René Boomkens, published in Boekman Cahier 94 *i-Cultuur*, 2013, p. 87.

Theatreland for a moment. The maxim for funding is: measurement by result. Requirements are leading, both in advance (will you achieve the number of performances?) and afterwards (did you achieve the number of performances?). Dramaturgs of today, you are brave subsidised theatre makers if you go against that maxim. If you ignore the requirements. Thanks to the result-driven model and its focus on output, art is even more an instrument of power than it already was. The relationship between the funding body and artist has the characteristics of a hostage drama. We can see this in the various parties' visions for culture. Across the political spectrum, they state that art is important for society. Although this is a well-intended assumption, it is flawed. Because '[...] *where benefit and added value are mentioned, it is not about the value of art at all. It is about safeguarding arts subsidies, about the appreciation that art can generate from within society, so that the community allowance can be justified.*'<sup>92</sup> In short: art as an instrument of power. The recent decision by the Dutch House of Representatives to include several named festivals and production houses in the Basic Infrastructure for Culture (BIS) is a sobering example of this.<sup>93</sup> Art embedded in a society that is based on economic efficiency. This results in art as a commodity, theatre as a trademark. With all the tragic consequences this entails. Every year, a crowd of Faustian figures graduate in the arts. They regard themselves as performing artists, but in reality the majority end up as shop-window dummies or guardians of the canon. Addicted parents give birth to addicted children, who in turn give birth to addicted children when they are older. Netherlands-Theatreland is a subsidy fountain of the most addictive sort. It is time for a spring-clean. Drop by drop. No: cold turkey.

### ***Resistance is a question of reversing reality***

We, dramaturgs of today, children of Odysseus, must push ourselves to deepen unused fairways. We must therefore ensure that we do not become part of the aristocratic system. It is a matter of making the fairways deeper. It is a matter of opening the lock gates. The point is to 'make clean'. The most important question is: what is the alternative? It is fine to sing, as Deleuze does, proclaiming '[...] *I'm changing my shape, I feel like an accident,*'<sup>94</sup> but if this is as far as it goes, it is abstraction rather than action. We need to be aware that the real can have an unexpected force. If it simply presents itself in a violent spectacle, it may be perceived as deception. In that case, the problem is much more serious than it now appears: '[...] *precisely because it is real, that is, on account of its traumatic/excessive character, we are unable to integrate it into (what we experience as) our reality, and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition.*'<sup>95</sup> In an age in which the foreign Other, including every nightmarish apparition, is involved in the positive reshaping of reality, the nightmares will eventually cease. If we resort to a sudden and spectacular return of the real, we will step deeper and deeper into our own distortion of reality. Then the question is whether there is such a thing as reality and, if so, how we can ever find it. Like the main character Dominick Cobb in *Inception* (2010), moving through a dreamland, searching for a way out, searching for the moment when the top stops spinning. The final scene offers a degree of comfort because, although the spinning top keeps spinning, it topples slightly just before the credits roll. Could it be that...? Yet, even if the top topples, we still do not know whether we have reached our reality. As in *The Matrix* (1999) – which world is fantasy and which world is real? No idea. Does Thomas A. Anderson (alias Neo) ever find out which reality is 'his' reality? No idea. '*This is how we should invert the state of things presented by The Matrix: what the film presents as the scene of our awakening into our true situation is in fact its exact*

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<sup>92</sup> From: *Tweede open brief aan de minister*, Caspar Nieuwenhuis, 2014.

<sup>93</sup> For a sharp analysis of this, see: <http://www.cultureelpersbureau.nl/2015/10/in-memoriam-de-culturele-basisinfrastructuur-2008-2015/>.

<sup>94</sup> *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, Gilles Deleuze, (trans. Daniel W. Smith, 2003), p. 158.

<sup>95</sup> *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, Slavoj Žižek, 2002, p.19.

*opposite, the very fundamental fantasy that sustains our being.*<sup>96</sup> In my view, this should be the adage of defiance. The critical transformation of worlds is essential. It can end the hostage situation. How? It prompts the fundamental question: what if there was no subsidy fountain?! In an illness we must treat the cause, not the symptoms. Come on, dramaturgs of today, try swearing in church. It is bound to be tolerated, perhaps even institutionalised, but you and I know: it is vital. It will turn our world on its head.

Suppose the recent wave of cutbacks did not awaken us, children of Odysseus, into our true situation but into the fantasy that sustains our being. What, then, is the true situation? Suppose Ithaca is not our real home, but a copy manipulated by the gods. Why do the gods enshrine it in mist? In this context Žižek refers to the film *Apocalypse Now*, because it illustrates the perversion so precisely. *'The ultimate horizon [...] is this insight into how Power generates its own excess, which it has to annihilate in an operation that has to imitate what it fights [...].'*<sup>97</sup> In other words: Brutus kills Caesar because he thinks Caesar is too ambitious. Brutus is driven to this act by exactly the same ambition.<sup>98</sup> Imitation becomes an elimination strategy. Or, in order to make clean, I must imitate the aristocratic disease as best I can. Let me make an attempt. Suppose I accept the subsidy fountain as the true situation, how should I define the cutbacks? As an attack by barbarians? No. I have just rejected that option. The vital revolution, then. Suppose I define the cutbacks as the operation that had to produce the excess. What is the conclusion in that case, and how should I define the subsidy fountain? According to Žižek's reversal, that brings me to the conclusion that the subsidy fountain is the perverse imitation, the fantasy that sustains us artists - poor us! The subsidy fountain as a perverse excrescence of the aristocratic disease, an excess of power - wherever it may be vested. That brings me back to the hostage drama. Think about it: the irony is that subsidy is used as an instrument for dealing with the lack of popular support. At the same time, however, it is the proof of that lack. Once again: modern-day quackery. If we want to free ourselves of this perversity, if we want to end the hostage situation, then we need to dig out the fairways to an unpopular depth. Dramaturgs of today, try swearing in church. Heed the imperative - you must change your art! Heed the adage 'down with the subsidy fountain!' Recite Jorge Luis Borges: *'There is nothing that is not essentially a cloud. Cathedrals reared of massive stone / and biblical stained glass time will throw down / are clouds.'*<sup>99</sup>

### ***The overblown architecture of the funding fountain***

Rome fell because there were no more alternative fairways, because it was an inevitable consequence of the aristocratic disease. Rome had to be faster, higher, stronger. Until the limits had far been exceeded. The last emperors refused to acknowledge in time that the city had to change in order to keep pace with the changes it had itself unleashed. Today, the former metropolis lies there like a cultural snack, where tourists can wander with their flip books until they are ready for another Italian cultural snack, the pizza.

The same scenario threatens Dutch theatre. The snack culture is clearly evident in the popularity of festivals. In recent decades, the number of theatre festivals has seen a fivefold increase, with an

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 101.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>98</sup> Note the Shakespearean irony in the words of Mark Anthony when he says: *'But Brutus says he was ambitious; And Brutus is an honourable man.'* From: *Julius Caesar*, William Shakespeare.

<sup>99</sup> Borges, Jorge Luis; Richard Barnes; and Robert Mezey. 'Clouds.' *The Iowa Review* 22.3 (1992): 72-72. Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview/vol22/iss3/15>

estimated reach of almost twenty-three million visitors.<sup>100</sup> Theatre and music are consumed just as greedily as wheat beer and tapas. Policy is also being drawn up for this successful form of cultural enterprise with enormous enthusiasm. See the Dutch House of Representatives' aforementioned policy for sorting culture into the right 'traffic lanes', in which art, politics and the economy go hand in hand. Judging by the figures, the arts in the Netherlands seem to be doing well. *'Performing arts, media arts and film are seeing an increase in visitors to festivals [...].'*<sup>101</sup> But appearances can be deceptive. For years, returning audiences have accounted for no more than five percent of the working population. One in five people in the Netherlands occasionally visits the theatre, and trends among returning audiences are increasingly aligning with the dynamic of events: *"A culture of experience, festivalization, recreational shopping: we want everything, instantly and everywhere."*<sup>102</sup> During festivals, people go to many different performances in a short period of time, but hardly attend anything during the rest of the year. The group of committed theatregoers is greying and becoming smaller by the year.<sup>103</sup> Compared to film, for example, theatre is creaking and groaning, because it has made the most fanatical changes in recent decades. Politicisation has stimulated other processes, such as professionalisation, institutionalisation and bureaucratisation. No wonder. Think about it: funding requires accountability. It requires organisation, optimisation and presentation. It requires numbers and letters instead of spaces and blank lines. As a result, the volume of the subsidy fountain for the theatre has outgrown its substance in recent decades, because the business plan for almost every cultural organisation has been a growth model. The subsidy fountain has become part of an overblown resort, its buildings being left vacant and falling into disrepair since the cutbacks. A growing number of theatres and producers are in dire straits. The balance between supply and demand is completely distorted.

At the same time, as I wrote previously, there is another process going on. New-style freelance theatre makers prefer to design their own aesthetic and production contexts. The artistic journey is no longer mapped out by a travel guide, mode of transport or according to a route. A tailor-made approach is needed for the subsidy fountain, something that hardly exists yet. Dutch theatre maker and publicist Aniek Nuyens is right when she claims: *"You therefore need oceans and fairways through which you can move. And harbours, otherwise how can you disembark? Places will always be needed for developing, presenting and sharing what has been thought up. That infrastructure of roads and institutions is crucial. And that is perhaps the greatest challenge facing us today: how to integrate existing institutions into a world of temporary practices"*.<sup>104</sup> The challenge is indeed change. A change of form, to be precise. Morphing. This requires flexibility and assertiveness on the part of self-designing artists, but also on the part of policymakers and institutions. 'You must change your art' also means 'you must change your institution' and 'you must change your policy'. The consequence of this is the need to start imagining that the predominating institution - the funding fountain - does not exist. As Frie Leysen put it in her acceptance speech at the 2014 Erasmus Prize ceremony: *"[...] yet new life must go hand in hand with death. [...] More space is needed, mental and political space, to change structures from within."*<sup>105</sup> In the first place, new infrastructures require a radical way of making clean, thinking away the existing infrastructure. I advocate creative

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<sup>100</sup> See: <http://www.respons.nl/nieuws/respons-presenteert-branchecijfers-festivals>, including all updates of research data.

<sup>101</sup> From: *The Cultural Survey*, Council for Culture, 2014, p. 33 [https://www.cultuur.nl/upload/documents/tiny\\_mce/The-Cultural-Survey.pdf](https://www.cultuur.nl/upload/documents/tiny_mce/The-Cultural-Survey.pdf).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>104</sup> *Theater alleen is niet genoeg*, Aniek Nuyens, 2015; <http://www.e-tcetera.be/theater-alleen-niet-genoege>.

<sup>105</sup> Frie Leysen during the presentation of the 2014 Erasmus Prize; <http://www.theaterkrant.nl/nieuws/frie-leysen-majesteit-in-uw-land-kunnen-de-kunsten-nog-nauwelijks-ademen/>, November 2014.

destruction, not with a view to uncovering a new revenue model<sup>106</sup>, but to stimulate artistic innovation and deepening. We first need to think away the subsidy fountain. We need to do this before we can dig new fairways and build new harbours, where they are needed.

### ***The possible architecture of the subsidy fountain***

What if we think away the whole fountain? Like a *Minecraft* gamer deleting a structure with a click of the mouse. What sort of space will we be left with? Negative space? Fallow land? The desert of the real? If we then rig up a new structure, which architectonic parameters will we use?

In order to answer these questions, I return to Naoshima, the island of art. Naoshima is home to the underground Chichu Art Museum, designed in 2004 by the architect Tadao Ando and built into the cliffs. The building is constructed almost entirely of concrete. Polished, perforated walls and stairs, open to the sky or leading to the verandahs and patios of gravel and grass. Ando's museum was built underground to avoid affecting the natural scenery.<sup>107</sup> The natural spaces between the structures are therefore left intact. Ando has built around the natural void. Unlike Bacon, who cleans the white canvas by filling it with new images. Unlike Peter Brook's 'empty space', which assumes a standing structure, with an empty space allowed to exist within it.<sup>108</sup> Unlike the negative space in *Minecraft*, which the Japanese call *ma* – literally: the space between two structures. Here, too, the standing structures are the basis. Wrong. The void that we allow to exist if we dispense with the subsidy fountain is not an interval. It is not a space between two standing structures. It would be too vulnerable in the long term, too susceptible to repurposing by ambitious designers. The 'thinking-away' should follow the route of the Japanese concept of *kara*, an emptiness that replaces. An active, imaginative emptiness. As in *kara-te* (literally: 'empty hand', in which the emptiness replaces the weapon. Or as in *kara-oke* (literally: 'empty orchestra') in which the emptiness replaces musicians. We can use the same strategy to dispense with the subsidy fountain. *Kara!*

So what precisely will we be replacing? The artistic spaces? *We shape our buildings, then they shape us.*<sup>109</sup> While the creation of artistic space takes the form of institutions of brick and concrete, the inhabitants will not readily step outside to talk to their neighbours. The result: hikikomori in the polder. If we want to replace the conventional, closed-off artistic spaces, we must encourage the artists to change their practice. If that succeeds, they will eventually replace art centres, and hence the subsidy fountain. They will replace academy buildings, workshops, galleries, 'white cube' and 'black-box' art spaces, museums, rehearsal rooms, theatres, production houses, television and music studios, pop podia - any space that attempts to hold art hostage and keep it cooped up within four walls. The existing subsidy fountain is the culmination of these buildings, the representation of the politicisation, professionalisation and bureaucratisation of the arts sector; the face of the division between art and spectators. If anything needs to be replaced, then it is this opinionated, perversely overblown architecture. And this is precisely the time to do it, in an age where artistic backpackers are moving from position to position. In his day, the cultural philosopher Johan Huizinga wrote of *homo ludens*, (Man the Player) as an element of civilised society. Today we see a more enterprising, self-designing descendent of *homo ludens*: *homo crearis*. He bridges the gaps between making and breaking, between decadence, barbarism and civilisation. He asks questions. He has doubts. He changes position, because the situation requires it. A situation that he has designed himself and distorted on impulse. *Homo crearis* is a Cul-Tourist+ with an urge to make and make clean. He is "[...]

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. Schumpeter, but comparable to Nietzsche's concept of 'constructive destruction'.

<sup>107</sup> The literal meaning of the Japanese word *chichu* is 'underground'.

<sup>108</sup> See *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook, 1968.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Winston Churchill.

*a maker rather than a player. A maker rather than a dancer or soldier. A maker who can take on any colour he chooses, because he creates the situation. Sometimes he plays, sometimes he dances, sometimes he marches like a soldier, sometimes he grabs like a wolf. A new role for every situation.*<sup>110</sup> A morphic, fluid maker requires morphic, fluid spaces. This calls for natural, replacing spaces. So that the empty space is immediately repurposed in the form of new buildings or subsidy regulations. A morphic, fluid maker needs space for the essential in-between time.

*Homo crearis* will also have a need for physical artistic spaces. The question is: who will design them, and to what specifications? Which urban planner can we let loose on this? Ideally, in the first place, the artist of today should design his own spaces. See Oosterling's formula, referred to above: *Dasein = Design*.<sup>111</sup> *Homo crearis* prefers not to have a prefabricated subsidy fountain. No straitjacket is resistant to morphing. He does not need managers, directors, programmers, PR teams, policymakers, critics or heads of teaching departments. *Homo crearis* will not design a back office until he has no other choice. Until then he will manage alone, to minimise the distance between artist and spectator. So that his self-designed economy fits him perfectly. He - the supplier - takes the initiative, not the customer. When Van Gogh and his Naturalist contemporaries ventured outside into the open air with canvas, palette and brush, it wasn't because handy folding easels and folding stools had been invented. It was precisely the other way around. If the work becomes too much, *homo crearis* himself will take the initiative to form an army to protect its interests, a choir of curators. He will design the building he needs, and the funding will follow from every impulse that this *morphic* fluid maker concretely develops.

Then, if we notice in the long run that *homo crearis* cannot do everything alone, he will feel the need to work with others. On the business side as well as the artistic side. The movement has been visible for some time. More and more new artists are seeking each other out. They are sharing services, premises and manpower in order to stand strong as cooperatives. It is not that they are putting their artistic signatures on offer; *homo crearis* sees it as an enrichment, because collaboration generates an artistic dialogue. Because, from the point of view of marketing, it is smarter to advertise as a collective. Because it cuts costs. This is nothing new. It is a tendency that has been evolving into standard practice for a decade already. It is a process that strongly resembles what Marshall McLuhan called 'retribalization',<sup>112</sup> organising themselves at local level or designing global platforms based on like-mindedness and clan-forming. See the Dutch cooperative *Nieuwe Helden*, S.P.I.N. in Belgium, the North-Italian artists' residencies, and the Greek Libby Sacer project.<sup>113</sup> These artists believe in strength through unity. In leaving unused that which doesn't need to be used. Meanwhile, by doing, they are changing the architectural parameters of the subsidy fountain. Building because they need to, not because they can. It will not be long before policymakers not only recognise that this way of building can bring about an inevitable and essential change in the subsidy fountain, but also give *homo crearis* the scope to actually put the change into practice. It will not be long before policymakers realise that humility is required of them. Today, policymakers are thinking increasingly in terms of tailor-made approaches. It is now time for them to put their words into practice. Tailor-made approaches also involve separating production costs and the back office, so that production costs can be financed with project funding, and the back office with multi-year funding. If future

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<sup>110</sup> *Spelen? Maak liever!* ['Play? It's Better to Make!'], Caspar Nieuwenhuis, keynote speech at the launch of the book *Speloefeningen* ['Exercises'], Schra-Dieho-Deenik, 2014.

<sup>111</sup> See pages 3 and 4 of this essay.

<sup>112</sup> See footnote 73 on page 15 of this essay, but also: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan, 1964.

<sup>113</sup> For more information, see their websites: <http://stichtingnieuwehelden.nl/>, <http://spinspin.be/> en <http://libbysacer.blogspot.nl/>.

policy is to be tailor-made, institutions must be required to set up their business practises in this way. Yes, that means artists like Ivo van Hove and Johan Simons will apply for project funding, while at the same time making use of the funding mechanisms that are in place for *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* and *Theater Rotterdam*, the companies of which they are the artistic directors. In short, the artist is leading; *homo crearis* determines his own back-office needs. Theatres are becoming empty houses, cinemas are becoming bamboo. Artistic companies are becoming Artaudian ‘bodies without organs’, museums are becoming facilities centres without an artistic profile, production houses and national academies are again serving the artist. It is art that is being given primacy, not the artistic directors, agents, programmers, publicity staff, policymakers, civil servants or political officials. Art will therefore become disembedded as far as possible, released from cultural-political oscillations. If this means that the Dutch ‘Thorbecke principle’<sup>114</sup> must become enshrined in the Constitution, the Dutch arts sector will have landed in the future and will be in a position to serve as a guide for the rest of Europe.

How and where does *homo crearis* learn his trade? Does he need an academy? Is the phenomenon of the academy not, in itself, a nineteenth-century aristocratic moloch? As Marijke Hoogenboom, a professor at the Amsterdam Theaterschool, rightly points out: ‘*An art school is more than its walls and the volume space within them.*’<sup>115</sup> A morphic maker can adapt to any locale, just as he can take on any shape. Throughout the academic world, MOOC networks<sup>116</sup> are springing up like toadstools, so any global citizen with access to the internet can acquire high-quality academic knowledge. At the same time, arts education in Europe is retreating behind four walls. If we really want to take the performative arts into the future, we will need to bring down or break open the walls of art schools, so that the artists of the future do not become used to the cosy warmth of a house. Students might as well learn to morph straightaway. They need a fluid curriculum. They should be able to put up buildings if they need them, and break them down or abandon them if the student feels he should take on another form. This must be a possibility if, from day one of their courses, students are to learn by doing rather than by reading or listening. The academy should be a floating island that students can jump off or onto, spend time non-doing, learning through play, and then go on to become another floating island of knowledge. I do not mean only knowledge of the performative arts or any other arts. Knowledge, like art, should not be held hostage. In the twenty-first century, knowledge is *transversal*. As Hoogenboom summarises it: ‘*When art itself has become pedagogy – and pedagogy implies that you equip people for all the challenges they encounter, including nonartistic systems – then you must conceive the school as something far more expansive than the area between its four walls.*’<sup>117</sup> Yes, I can hear the schoolteachers and governors thinking: so who will link together the students’ learning processes; who will coordinate the learning traffic? We, dramaturgs of today, must take up this role! We must replace the managers without becoming managers ourselves. We have the capacity to put things together without glue. We can engage with students. We can morph with them, we can couple and uncouple without immediately filling in the empty space with new infrastructures. We can replace the empty space with temporary structures, temporary zones, temporary connections between floating islands.

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<sup>114</sup> During the parliamentary debate on 22 December 1862, the leader of the Dutch Liberals, Johan Rudolph Thorbecke spoke for the first time about the relationship between politics and art. He called on politicians to refrain from making judgements about the substance of the arts: ‘*Art is not the business of government as the government cannot judge art, nor yet control it.*’

<sup>115</sup> *The School Unbound*, Marijke Hoogenboom, published in *rekto:verso*, no.68, October - November 2015.

<sup>116</sup> See: <https://moodle.net/>.

<sup>117</sup> *The School Unbound*, Marijke Hoogenboom, published in *rekto:verso*, no.68, October - November 2015.



Soon, when the tsunami makes landfall and sea levels rise, *homo crearis* will need an archipelago of floating islands as well as a morphing strategy, in order to play, make, learn, present, to not-do and to experiment. Floating islands are solid, composed of lasting materials, but designed for temporary use. They are steerable, and can be put together and taken apart like K'NEX. They can adapt to natural surroundings, be constructed around empty space, in accordance with Tadao Ando's definition of architecture. Floating islands emphasise the lack of concrete quays, brick harbours and steel lock gates. *Homo crearis* is thus forced to keep changing, to keep creating, or to make a conscious choice in favour of a sabbatical on a self-designed island. An archipelago of floating islands, or a blanket of clouds that continually changes in volume and shape, provides precisely the flexible, unfinished, process-oriented routing that enables Zygmunt Bauman's 'liquid' individual to perpetually design his own process of identification.<sup>118</sup> The current achievement pyramid and its related system of appraisal can be consigned to the waste-paper bin. A new appraisal system is needed - one that is based on artistic values, not on a false passion for the real. Bauman reduces the artistic quest of *homo crearis* to its essence when he states that every striving for completion and perfection brings about the opposite effect: '[...] it is a curse of all identity construction that "I lose my freedom, when I reach my goal"; [...] And in a kaleidoscopic world of reshuffled values, of moving tracks and melting frames, freedom of manoeuvre rises to the rank of the topmost value [...].'<sup>119</sup> Morphic makers make use of the freedom to manoeuvre, as and when they can. This does not sit well with the quantification hype in European policy on arts and culture and the increasing influence of Big Data on the life of twenty-first-century man. The challenge for *homo crearis* is to free himself from infrastructural straitjackets and the false passion for the real. He must continue to morph until the abduction of sensation ceases to give rise to the urge to seek.

Dramaturgs of today, we have the noble task of ensuring that the skies and waters are not filled with brick, steel and concrete. It is our duty to open the lock gates, deepen the fairways, develop the morphing strategy for reception and creating, design temporary floating islands, use them and dismantle them. It is our mission to navigate the armada to a place where the water is flowing and the visibility is better. Somewhere beyond the slack water, without a blanket of cloud above us. Somewhere on the crests of the waves, where the horizon gives us a sense of space, a space that appeals to our imaginations, a replacing space. In the same way that the Dutch author Frans Kellendonk does not end his novel *Letter and Spirit* with a full stop, but with a replacing space after the comma,

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<sup>118</sup> *Identity in the Globalizing World*, Zygmunt Bauman, 2008; [http://www.sagepub.in/upm-data/24493\\_01\\_Elliot\\_Ch\\_01.pdf](http://www.sagepub.in/upm-data/24493_01_Elliot_Ch_01.pdf).

<sup>119</sup> *Identity in the Globalizing World*, Zygmunt Bauman, 2008; [http://www.sagepub.in/upm-data/24493\\_01\\_Elliot\\_Ch\\_01.pdf](http://www.sagepub.in/upm-data/24493_01_Elliot_Ch_01.pdf).

### PART 3 – FLOATING ISLANDS

*Being on the road has become the permanent way of life of the (now chronically) disembedded individuals.*

(Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity in the Globalizing World*)

*I wanted the viewer to be like a detective investigating someone's home, looking for clues.*

(Camille Henrot in *The artist after the internet*, Elephant – *What is Post-Internet Art?*)

*Nein, kein Ende! Kein Ende!*

(J.W. von Goethe)

It is 22 October 2015. I am back in Amsterdam. Not a lot has changed since I left. The city is still below sea level, and is not experiencing any insoluble problems as a result of this. It still trades stock and shares at Beursplein and prays to 'Our Lord in the Attic'. The city still breathes the classical liberalism of Spinoza and the socialism of Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis. The city still benefits from the graceful façades between the private interiors and public spaces. Amsterdam has a magnetic effect on tradesmen, artists, religious refugees, tourists. They come for the Zuidas business district, for the Amsterdam Dance Event, for the freedom of religion and expression, for Anne Frank or Rembrandt, for the bench in *The Fault in Our Stars* (2014), for the Prinsengracht Concert, for the pedal boats, drugs, Madame Tussauds or the red-light district. Amsterdam remains a place where people embark on a voyage of discovery when they arrive at Central Station, in a lighthearted attempt not to become lost in its rhizomatic structure. Today, more and more tourists take the ferry across the IJ lake, heading for Amsterdam-Noord, the second-hippest neighbourhood in the world. Where the EYE film museum gives a big fat wink to the elderly opposite bank of the lake. Look how beautiful we become here. Look how modern we are here. Next to the 'eye' of Amsterdam, the Shell tower will soon stand gleaming with pride, a composite building with offices, flexible workspaces and a theatre, restaurant and nightclub. Look how hip and innovative we are. I am back in Amsterdam. Amsterdammers see that their city is doing well. Oh yes, there is another unchanging element to the city. The eternal undercurrent of uneasiness. The never-ending moaning. About liquidations, construction sites, taxis, the rain, Ajax, English tourists... barbarians...

Baricco warned us in 2009 that the barbarians were on the way. He seemed to be telling us that we still have to wait a while for the change. They are close, they are heading in our direction, there is a springlike languor in his tone, but no-one knows whether the barbarians are really heading for our city. Now, six years after reading his book and getting goosebumps from the futuristic thrill, I look around me and wonder where they are, these barbarians. I must have missed them. Baricco did not describe the profile of the barbarian clearly, so perhaps I've been focusing on the wrong people? Or perhaps they took another turning, just as I was looking the other way? Or were they apprehended at the border? Or are they here already, but the revolution we were expecting turned out to be a gradual evolution? I see people around me who could fit the profile of Baricco's barbarian. In fact,

when I first read his book, I even thought that I fitted the profile myself. In all the sham barbarians, however, myself included, I see a deep-rooted impulse to behave in a decadent, aristocratic way. Nothing wrong with that, but the result is that, if there are already barbarians in Amsterdam, they are merely bland carbon copies of the barbarian hordes that Baricco predicted. Here and there I see people struggling with their digital connectivity, or rather: I see a few individuals unshackling themselves from continuous embeddedness. They log-off from Facebook, they start using an old-style telephone – one that you can only use to make calls – or put the television out with the rubbish, because you can watch whatever you like on Netflix. I do indeed see people who are channelling their passion for the real into sabbaticals, yoga lessons or the consumption of superfoods. And yes, I can see that reflected in the arts too: in the post-internet-artists,<sup>120</sup> for example, who are looking for a language of image behind the interface, or visual artists who are reappraising natural materials, or performing artists who are embracing Abramovic-fed ritualism in order to reenergise themselves in a physical performative sense. There is a need for physical authenticity, social contact and interpersonal proximity, whatever that may mean. See the flood of egodocumentaries and biopics, in theatre and film. See the trend in theatre schools to call a random presentation a ‘performance’. See the growth in game scenarios, set up in outdoor squares or festivals. Yes, attempts are being made to bridge the perceived gulf between the arts and society, to end the hegemony of bricks and concrete, the conventional audience seating arrangements and conventional narrative, but in general these attempts are affected by the aristocratic disease. In my view, Amsterdam is the mudflat. The ship of the Phaeacians has reached the IJ lake. No-one here is disembedded, not even those people who are hardly involved in cultural politics or social media, or those who do not make use of technological and digital resources at home. These days, who still pays for their shopping with money that doesn’t leave a digital trail? Who makes art without leaving a telltale trail of political influence?

A small group of rebel art professionals are eagerly anticipating new forms and new narratives, with new technological resources, new ethical frameworks and new ways of organising. Since returning home I have experienced moments of hope in Amsterdam. In the cloud of a theatrical installation *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015, William Kentridge) that takes spectators on a journey, transcending all boundaries of art disciplines, genres, meanings and emotions. Or watching the film *Son of Saul* (2015, László Nemes), in which the main character morphs to the bitter end and the spectator morphs with him, even after the film and into the next day. Or in *The Garden Which is the Nearest to God* (2015, Tatu Atzu), where you can be the man who measures the clouds. Or through the call for greater empathy, presented in a scarily cool, calm and collected manner by the Syrian-Dutch director Ola Mafaalani in the traditional ‘state of the theatre’ speech (*Staat van het Theater*, September 2015), which took me – yes, it is possible – on a mental journey from the Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam back to my in-between time in Gaza. Between these high points I surfed to the web page of Dries Verhoeven’s *Ceci n’est pas...*<sup>121</sup> to experience the necessary sensation of ardently searching for the inside-outside antithesis. I was moved by all these barbarian onslaughts. Cracks began to appear in my aristocratic shell. But the world is changing so fast that, as soon as one such moment becomes current and urgent, it is already past. Today, 22 October 2015, a theatre, film or debating programme about Syrian refugees is not current and urgent, that is at least four years too late. Where are the artists who think and work four years ahead, or more? Where are the Doraemons who visit us from the future, teach us about morals, and then fly back to the future? Where are the Jules Vernes and the Philip K. Dicks? If they are here with us now, would they have been declared insane? Have any artists been declared insane recently? No. Yes, there are more stirrings from below, more resistance, than ten years ago. I see driven dramaturgs and assertive students challenging the aristocratic establishment. I see them passionately agendising, protesting and occupying. The bitter irony, however, is that, behind their backs and in the ivory towers, the

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<sup>120</sup> The *Post-Internet Art* movement is an unofficial, worldwide collective of visual and digital artists. It is described in the global art magazine *Elephant*, edition 23 – Summer 2015.

<sup>121</sup> See: <http://driesverhoeven.com/project/ceci-nest-pas/>.

incumbent aristocrats determined the outcome among themselves long ago. The policy conditions for the Amsterdam Arts Plan 2017-2020 were penned some time ago. Changes in Amsterdam are in accordance with a well-coordinated political plan. The form has been determined, the time path has been determined, and the people who are allowed to protest have been 'designated' because: they are tolerated. The barbarians in Amsterdam - whoever they are - are tolerated, and even included in the aristocratic master plan. As Baricco already modestly and indirectly states in the motto of his book: there is nothing new under the Sun. In the meantime, the city has become shrouded in mist. Why am I still here?

Humility would be appropriate for the artist of the twenty-first century. Humility would be appropriate for me. I should follow the example of Fabre's *The man who measures the clouds*. However presumptuous he may seem, it must be the case that, with every cloud that passes, he realises that his open arms cannot embrace the whole blanket of clouds. This realisation gives rise to a sense of humility. The fact that he nevertheless continues measuring does him credit. He knows that someone must start making an attempt to... well, to do what, exactly? To defy? In an age when clouds can be produced by machines – indoors *and* outdoors, as the artworks of Kris Verdonck and Berndnaut Smilde show – and in which Daan Roosegaarde creates cycle paths that light up like a starry night, the absurdist attempt by Fabre's man is already in itself an act of defiance. It does not bother him that people think he is mad. It does not bother him that he is alone in his attempt. It does not bother him that the multitude below forgot about him long ago or are laughing at his strange quest. He knows that he is the link between the known and the unknowable. He is the bridgehead to *the bourne from which no traveller returns*.<sup>122</sup> He is here and now, and everywhere. He is, rightly and happily, a Cultourist+ and challenges us, fellow Cultourists, to accompany him on his zealous quest. He provides space for the replacing emptiness by opening his arms as far as possible and choosing a ruler with a maximum length that is incomparably small in relation to the clouds to be measured. That is humility. That is the model of man's insignificance and hence the symbol of the insignificance of art. It shows how naive the ultimate Enlightenment thinking actually is. It shows how courageous it is to display this naiveté. It shows that there is no absolute measurability, no universal formula, no ultimate essay that performs miracles and prompts people to change their art. The *Man who measures the clouds* brings only a transient zone of clarity in a slowly breathing fogbank. Thanks to him we can glimpse our Ithaca, and we know where we are again and how it works between us. I should watch him more closely. I should take on his form. Why am I still here?

One more thought arises in the mist. What is wrong with sampling the unknowable? Are we not allowed, as people, to make an attempt to formulate, to quantify? That is my aim with this essay too. I am sampling the unknowable, replacing space with metaphors and possible portraits of the future. What is wrong with that? Nothing. Or rather, there is. It depends on the answer to the following question. What if I succeed one day? What if I manage to find a formula or metaphor that expresses what I am experiencing? As far as I am concerned, that would be anthropocentric hell. I would rather be the man who measures clouds. The man who knows that there is no point in what he is doing, because after the comma there is something moving that no language can put into words. Kellendonk was right in every respect, *homo crearis* must step out of his artwork before he becomes visible. Otherwise there is no room for imagining and experiencing. Otherwise there is no room for the assertiveness of the emancipated spectator. Otherwise artist and spectator are not free to become clouds and to morph from a floating island into water into air into water into a floating island...if I want to capture and not-capture the replacing space, if I want to become or not-be, then

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Shakespeare – *Hamlet*.



