

Art as Social Practice



A critical investigation of works
by Kenneth A. Balfelt

EDITED BY MATTHIAS HVASS BORELLO

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Introduction

BY KENNETH A. BALFELT AND
MATTHIAS HVASS BORELLO

***Art as Social Practice – a critical investigation of works by Kenneth A. Balfelt* introduces five works by the Danish artist with the aim of establishing a functional critique of art operating as social practice outside the conventional art institution.**

The fundamental premise of the book is that the artist involved in actual social contexts often initiates a ‘knowledge production’ that propagates and remains ‘out there’, independent of and beyond the art institution. The institutional circuit offers few platforms specifically devoted to a social art practice, which means that the thought, development and critical language of, and applied to, this art form has been distinctly absent. What happens when artists become socially engaged in specific societal situations? What is the experience of those who encounter and become involved in social art in the public arena? What kind of knowledge production transpires in this specific context, and how can it be articulated, propagated and evaluated?

Art as Social Practice looks at these issues from the perspective of a number of vigorously debated collaborative projects undertaken over the past twelve years in and outside Denmark by artist Kenneth A. Balfelt. All these projects are characterised by a desire to use art as a platform for investigation of, or solution to, specific social problems experienced by and around, for example, the homeless or substance-addicted adults. Balfelt’s approach seeks to resolve these social issues through engaged social practice based on the principle of working with directly impacted

populations, as opposed to working on or for these populations. This way of working as an artist raises a number of fundamental questions about the role and function of art in a modern society. The overall theme of the book is centered on activist art that transcends the parameters laid down by the art institution, provoking political debates in the public forum, aiming to participate actively and directly with specific proposals in complex social and political contexts.

The aim is to provide the necessary tools with which to construct a critical language around this art form. Art engaged in social practice frequently works with a highly-defined and often marginalised group: people who are directly involved in the artistic processes and who experience the consequences of the artistic choices. We will therefore meet artists, theorists, curators, participants, users, administrators and critics; voices and positions involved directly or indirectly in the projects – also those who are not normally heard in the field of art criticism or not normally encountered by the public – in order to build as well-informed and differentiated a foundation as possible for a revision of the qualitative language applied to socially engaged art practices.

The book is divided into three parts. The essays in the first part seek to clarify the thematic framework of the book and thereby the sphere of art practice to which Balfelt is a notable contributor; the intentions, concept of the work, role of the artist, the contexts, material, ideals and, indeed, the prejudices too. These articles are directly connected to the work of Kenneth A. Balfelt and to the international art scene, and they offer some very tangible reflections on the actual nature of art practice and how it presents in implementation within this sphere of art. Barbara Steiner, curator based in Germany, who is well-versed in the field of socially-oriented

art of the past twenty years, introduces the book with Art, Design, Social Work and Politics. Her introductory take on this complex practice and knowledge production is followed by Balfelt's own 'manifesto', openly setting out the explicit motives driving the artist's practice, with the intention that this will function as a constructive and fruitful springboard for the book's ambitions of initiating new depth, new critique and new awareness. The title of Balfelt's 'manifesto' is just as pragmatic as this book endeavours to be: *There is all the knowledge in the world to solve all the problems of the world – about a social art practice.*

The second part is a presentation of five specific projects undertaken by Kenneth Balfelt in recent years: *Empty Offices vs. Homeless; No One Can Wake Up; Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Users; Radical Horizontality – Shelter for Men; and Café Heimdal – Here You Can Find Shadow.* The projects are presented via various types of documentation, a brief introduction to each project and through interviews with those involved discussing the effect and dissemination of the art projects in the social contexts and structures within which they operated. In some cases these interviews – conducted by journalist Lise Blom, anthropologist Ivalo Frank Jørgensen and curator Christian Skovbjerg Jensen – took place a long time after implementation of the project. This part of the book thus presents a form of site-specific evaluation of the projects, in which the involved parties reflect on the effect of the projects as seen from their particular perspectives.

Based on a critical evaluation, the third part of the book tackles the critical perspectives and issues arising as a result of the societal role and ambition of art to influence tangible structures and debates within the community. Linking to the critical and activist drive that characterises

this area of art, and with references to the entire sphere of practice – and also current theory in the field – the three essays in this part will focus on increased critical thinking and articulation in dealings with this type of art. The American artist Brett Bloom, long time member of the Chicago based artist group Temporary Services and a collaborative player in many projects and publications, is the first contributor in this part. In *YOU'RE SO VAIN. YOU PROBABLY THINK THE ART IS ABOUT YOU. DON'T YOU?* Bloom confronts head-on the misunderstandings that influence perceptions of the socially engaged field of art and delivers a wealth of personal experience derived from long-term engagement with various forms of critical social practice.

In *POST AESTHETICS – when art becomes lived experience*, Danish art critic and curator Matthias Hvass Borello gives particular attention to American art historian Grant Kester and his reflections on the production of empathy via dialogue-based art. With a similar critical focus, cultural critic Daniel Tucker rounds off the book with *The Art of the Possible: Realistic Pragmatism and Social Service Image Myths*, in which we return to the concept of art and also the use of political, or straightforwardly activist, campaign as the starting point for some highly candid and urgent questions that tap into the sense of responsibility within art criticism, art history and art as seen from the social and political structures in which they are so conscientiously engaged.

From the starting point of the socially affected and politically engaged art that has emerged over the last twenty years, *Art as Social Practice* provides an overarching contribution to the presentation and discussion of the links between art, aesthetics and politics, and public and social engagement. Kenneth A. Balfelt's projects form a Danish basis from

which to investigate an as of yet unresolved international issue of art and criticism, but they are also a demonstration of the various ways in which this sphere of art can approach social and critical practice. The aim has therefore also been to involve as many voices and angles as possible – without being restricted by vanity and fear of discord – in order to provide a foundation for a constructive critical investigation of this art form.

Many people have been involved in *Art as Social Practice – a critical investigation of works by Kenneth A. Balfelt* over the years, and here at the finishing line we would like to offer our profound thanks to all those involved – also for their patience. The final touches have been added by graphic designer Peter Folkmar, who has assembled the elements of the book into a both pleasing and practicable whole – a book with which we hope you will be just as delighted as we are.

Part I:

How

Social

Practice?

Art, Design, Social Work, and Politics

BY BARBARA STEINER

For Vesterbro, a district near the Central Station in Copenhagen, Kenneth Balfelt worked with architects Steffen Nielsen to develop an injection room for drug addicts. In addition to sterile needles and a hygienic environment, *Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Users* was professionally

1 Balfelt: "The idea was to translate all the debates, reports, expert panels and media coverage about injection rooms from the last 6 years into a physical presence. A translation of the written and spoken language into a visual and physical one. To have an actual functioning injection room was a way of facilitating a debate."

staffed with two nurses.¹ In *Radical Horizontality – Shelter for Men*: Balfelt addressed the situation of homeless men in the center of Copenhagen. Cooperation among the artist FOS, an architect, and designers

produced *Radical Horizontality*: living spaces for the homeless with a café, TV room, cafeteria, and reception area. In *No One Can Wake Up*, Balfelt and the artist Lasse Lau concentrated on two projects: building a youth hostel in the Neukölln district of Berlin that would offer young people training opportunities and jobs and searching for a publisher for a book on the thirteen-year history of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that is the Lohmühle mobile home squat, also located in Berlin. *Café Heimdal – Here You Can Find Shadow* brought together two groups in the neighborhood around Mimersgade in Copenhagen: young immigrants and habitual bar patrons bearing the stigma of alcoholism.

These and other projects clearly reflect the artist's social interests. Balfelt intercedes on behalf of groups who, voluntarily or involuntarily, occupy a marginal position in society: drug addicts, the homeless, young immigrants, residents of mobile home squats. They all share a lack of social recognition. Another thing they have in common is that they do not fit into current models for production, efficiency, and performance, they are sources of costs and/or problems, and hence are perceived as "disturbances" by an increasingly economically oriented society. Balfelt works together with the affected groups in various constellations, bringing in, depending on the initial situation and the task, designers,

architects, social workers, or physicians. His role can be described as that of a “*moderating designer*”: that is, someone who assumes that all the project participants – even those who are usually commented on, judged, and told what to do by others – have an expertise. Basically, Balfelt initiates a process of dealing with urgent social problems, with

2 The focus of his projects is not necessarily solving a social problem, even though that is certainly regarded as desirable, but rather the process of engaging *with* social problems.

results that are very much open.² Art, design, social work, and politics are thus equally important instruments. Hence

Balfelt’s works should not simply be categorized as the one or the other discipline but are intentionally located from the outset within a network of relationships between art, design, social work, and politics.

Most of Balfelt’s projects were begun in the context of art exhibitions or art projects. For example, *Protection Room* and *Café Heimdal* were created in the context of projects for art in public spaces.³ *No One Can*

Wake Up was part of the exhibition *Berlin North* at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin.⁴

The field of art functions

as a place to think, communicate, and reflect, where it is also possible to generate, by using visual means and symbolic capital, essentially strategic attention for the concerns of the groups involved. Balfelt’s projects are based on a concept of art in which art wants to get involved in society including, of course, the (co-) design of social processes. By following such a practice, Balfelt takes his place in a long tradition of artistic positions that, rather than conceiving autonomous art works, produce art in relation to society, and attribute to it a functional role.

The projects initiated by Balfelt are structured accordingly. *Protection Room* and *Radical Horizontality*, for example, fulfill all of the demands made of such spaces, though with one fundamental difference from other, comparable setups: the demands for the space are formulated

5 In addition to having hygienic conditions, the space is structured in such a way that it offers various options to meet the different needs of the drug addicts: from a single cabin that is open underneath so that someone can step in in case of a collapse to spaces for injecting in groups. Details such as a long bank that enables a user to inject drugs into his or her foot or a mirror for injecting one’s neck are found along with an inviting entryway (the nurses’ area) and bright colors.

by the users themselves.⁵ Balfelt thus deliberately telescopes different ideas of functionality – those of the authorities, of the social workers, of the caregivers, and of the homeless themselves – and allows them to confront each other. This is most

evident in *Radical Horizontality*, set up once with the conviction that it was “functioning,” only to realize that it was dysfunctional when it came to conflicts among the homeless or between the homeless and the social workers. This “not functioning” was, however, attributed to the potential for aggression of the homeless rather than to the social and spatial organization on which *Radical Horizontality* was based. Balfelt and his team altered their perspective on the site and its function and first asked: “*What are the functional needs of homeless people and drug addicts? How do we fulfill these as well as give them a positive identity?*” Then the entrance was moved from the dark back of the building to be visible from the street side. Design interventions, the choice of materials and colors, and new functional spaces such as the café and TV lounge, among others, transformed *Mændenes Hjem* into a place where the homeless could feel welcome. The old claustrophobia-inducing entrance, in which homeless people seeking protection were separated from the social workers by a glass box causing distance and hierarchy, was converted into a bedroom for temporary visitors, a conference room, and a nursing room. Balfelt’s goal was achieved through relatively modest interventions that were “less hierarchical” and eased the tense situation in the

home. The role of the homeless changed from petitioners, outcasts, or dependent patients to people seeking help to be taken seriously, a temporary guest in need of social support.⁶

One of the changes in perspective was to develop – if not understanding – at least a certain receptiveness to all those whose way of living deviates from, or is even hostile to, one’s own status quo or that of the dominant society. Thus Balfelt and Lau took the concerns of young people in Berlin-Neukölln whom parts of the society have already written off to one of the most renowned art institutions in Berlin: the Hamburger Bahnhof. In this way, social milieus that do not normally meet, or actively avoid one another, were confronted with their respective ideas of life and values in and through this art project.⁷

⁷ In both cases, they worked closely with the Verein Fusion in Neukölln and with the community of the Lohmühle mobile home squat.

⁸ (From Balfelt’s project description, Op. cit.)

In this case, he mediated between young immigrants and bar patrons by inviting both to participate in a joint project. The occasion was an invitation he had received to take part in a project for art in a public space that would address the urban renewal for the neighborhood around Mimersgade and try to pursue the desires and ideas of the residents. The goal of *Sid Ned!* was “to open up the debate concerning the social qualities, which very rarely are included in the conventional idea of urban renewal.”⁹ Within that frame, Balfelt began to work with groups that had been antagonistic toward one another who had to come to terms over an extended period with the ideas and even prejudices of others. These groups included not only the

⁶ Balfelt has described the initial situation as follows: “The entrance reception area was a case in point with a glass ‘DDR border control’ where the staff was situated looking out and down on the people who asked to be admitted to the place. It was the area where most of the violent incidents took place.” The redesign did not receive unanimous approval neither from the homeless nor from the nurses and social workers, but “it gives cause for dialogue,” as one of the social workers said. Nor did the conflicts in the home disappear entirely. (From Balfelt’s project description)

In the process, the institution functioned as, as Balfelt put it, a “platform for dialogue.”⁸ Balfelt also played a role as moderator and mediator in *Café Heimdal*.

⁹ (From Balfelt’s project description, Op. cit.)

young immigrants and the habitual bar patrons but also the city planners, who often make the needs of residents secondary to economic considerations. Balfelt:

*Traditionally, urban planning is carried out by resourceful professionals who research the needs of less resourceful groups of people. I invited two parties from these less resourceful groups, easily stigmatised as alcoholics and immigrant teenage boys with no future, to meet and carry out a common micro urban renewal project.*¹⁰

Balfelt is interested not only in working with the socially weak and disadvantaged – that is, those who do not possess the necessary social „resources“ required today – but also in relating their concerns to a social system that does not know any

¹⁰ The young people were asked to make proposals for the remodeling of the bar, taking into account the needs of the guests. In the end, it was agreed to change the exterior look of the bar, an essential element of which is a sign with the name of the café in mahogany letters; it was executed by the young people themselves.



approach to dealing with phenomena of social deficiency and dysfunction other than combating the symptoms. In his projects, the artist is constantly relating micro– and macropolitics. This is an understanding of artistic practice that not only thinks about political agendas but also entails action in the political field, as the example of *Protection Room* makes evident. The task itself – namely, constructing and operating with state funding a legal injection room for drug addicts – is already politically polarizing; it was repeatedly used by political parties to take a stance, pro or con. So it is not very surprising that Balfelt’s project attracted the interest of members of the Danish parliament. It fit in with the goal of Denmark’s Social Democratic Party to legalize publicly accessible injection rooms in the country. The artist used these debates, met with a series of politicians in that context, including the minister of health, and worked with the association of drug addicts to fight for the construction of legal injection rooms. Going beyond the original occasion for the work – the *Contemplation Room* project for art in public spaces ended in 2003 – Balfelt, the association of drug addicts, and a number of other supporters made various attempts to push this project through politically. His *Protection Room* served him as a 1:1 model of such an injection room, designed to be discursive and practical. In 2005 Balfelt organized a conference and made a film in which various views on how to approach drugs and the associated problems were articulated. This initiative, called Dugnad,¹¹ ultimately led to the founding of the Dugnad Center Vesterbro. Balfelt was the chairman of the center for several years and in 2013 the first functioning injection room was established just 100 meters from the spot of the initial art project by Balfelt. *No One Can Wake Up* also had clear political intentions from the outset: the intention of presenting the two projects was to create public pressure to support the projects of the

11 Balfelt: “The initiative was named Dugnad, after the old Norwegian term for when local residents got together to solve a local problem.” (From Balfelt’s project description, Op. cit.)

young people and residents of the mobile home squat and to legalize the illegal land occupation of the latter.

Balfelt’s works challenge art, design, social work, and politics in equal measure: the concerns of marginal groups in society are brought into view and to attention by means of enormous symbolic potential of art and its institutions, while undermining a concept of art that is isolated from social questions and politicising art instead. Ambitious designs are developed for target groups with little buying power and existing solutions

12 In *Radical Horizontality* there are elements one would not expect of a homeless shelter: for example, some of the sleeping berths are deliberately reminiscent of “flake-out chairs,” originally designed for stressed businesspeople. For Balfelt, they are also extremely well suited as places for the homeless and drug addicts to sleep: “You lie gracefully and ergonomically correctly, you cannot fall out as your shoulders are inside the box, which also provides some soundproofing, and you have your belongings under the chair back.” (From Balfelt’s project description, Op. cit.)

are adapted to those groups.¹² Not only do they offer the homeless the possibility to appropriate products and aesthetics from other sectors of society, they also highlight discrepancies between various user groups, which are, in fact, consequences of economic borderlines. Through his statements Balfelt reflects on an increasing economization of today’s society pointing to “users” and “services offered” rather than “homeless,” “drug addicts,” and “immigrants.” The cynicism supposedly inherent in phrasing is not Balfelt’s but rather the expression of recent social developments. Anyone who is not a user or consumer has no recognized place in society. So when Balfelt speaks of “users” and “services offered,” he exposes, on the one hand, the exclusion of certain groups from the world of consumers and hence from society and, on the other hand, brings them back to society by proposing



to redefine the terms user/service in favour of disenfranchised groups of society. In the end, it is not about the question whether Balfelt's work is art, design, social work, or politics but about a multifaceted concept of art that seeks to initiate engagement with urgent social problems by bringing in various disciplines, sectors, and competencies and thereby challenging specific notions of art or art activities.

There is all the knowledge in the world to solve all the problems of the world – about a social art practice

BY KENNETH A. BALFELT

Art is a profession like any other. But art offers another type of approach to a given problem. The paradigm is different. Art produces other forms of reflections and solutions out of the ethical and aesthetic considerations and scientific understandings that make themselves felt within the world of art. This implies that the (physical) solution produced by the artist becomes a different solution than one produced within any other profession.

Knowledge is good and interesting. We are all affected by it. Theory is an approach to knowledge. But the problem in the world is not a lack of knowledge, but lack of actions towards solutions. As a member of the global community, the Danish society, and my local community, I think about how I can contribute to the development. Not development in terms of the capitalist product and service innovation, but development understood as a process aiming towards creating spaces for more community and compassion. We could call it, 'a better World'.

THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION

When I was studying at Goldsmiths College in London I had a troubled relationship with the concept, *representation*. The act of making art as something that does not produce, but merely refers to something else, seemed like a displacement activity to me. Nor does it appeal to me to use symbols and metaphors, as it is a way of using language (the visual, the spoken, as well as the written) that is not concrete, but rather relies on more or less prearranged references that we must know in order to understand the implied meaning. Working visually allows us to put into motion altogether different *layers* of emotions and thoughts. When I create an injection room as a work of art as a visual contribution in a sociopolitical debate, I know that the physically present space has a power. Power understood as a *force of influence* on social and political processes.

ART AS LANGUAGE OF DIALOGUE

Rather than using metaphors and symbolic language, I attempt what we may call a 'language of dialogue', where the purpose is to exchange and develop something together. By choosing a language of dialogue that makes use of another strategy, I also choose a language that produces something else in the meeting with my artwork. I am no longer in a discourse of 'having to know in order to understand', or what we may call an art codex, but I attempt to change my position into another way of working with art as communication. Sometimes, this 'other language' will be a special language of the profession with which I work in a given context – e.g. the language used by nurses or social workers and which they understand and can relate to. But this does not mean that this form of art language leaves the art discourse – perhaps on the contrary, because in my experience a need arises, say, to discuss the relationship of language to the boundaries of art.

By making use of another art language I also move into certain structures in society where the rules of the game are different. But as within the domain of art, it is interesting to me to deconstruct these rules and underlying structures. To understand how conditions and situations are structured and what they contain in order to understand what is interesting, ethical and beneficial. It is by way of this analysis made by someone from the outside, in this case an artist with a particular method and perspective, that it sometimes becomes possible to stimulate a change in how we do things in society. An example of an interesting result for me is when I hear Sophie Hæstorp Andersen (MP, the Social Democrats) stating that she is no longer just thinking that we should have an injection room, but also how it should be and function. That is, a qualification of a so-called damage-reducing initiative in the work for better conditions for drug users.

As with metaphors and symbols I also do not find it fruitful for my practice to see art 'as a mirror of society'. A mirror is nothing but a representation. It doesn't produce anything. It can stimulate awareness about the state of things and can thereby be an analysis. But that is not my objective. I use an analysis in order to understand how I should *produce* a contribution to society.

This leads me to my relationship with the art institution. I am completely dependent on the art institution and in particular the art discourse. It is only because there is an art which works with the visual language and which creates a discourse around this research, that the practice in which I work can be characterized as art. It's because I make use of, as mentioned above, its paradigm, method and frame of reference, because I'm educated in it and move within it, that I can professionally claim that it is art, as method and solution, when I make what we can call *functional models and solution proposals*.

THE PRODUCTION OF NON-KNOWLEDGE

In order to specify this I would briefly like to address another of the significant and leading, but for me inapplicable ideas about art: that it be a sin, even an act of crime, to copy art. A criterion for success for my art is that it *is* copied! When I comment and make concrete proposals to other forms of municipal institutional building in the projects *Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Users* and *Radical Horizontality – Shelter for Men* it is as a painting or an attempt to cause 'repercussions' in society. But unlike paintings, at least the ones I've seen, I try to create proposals to, or models for, solutions. It means that my art moves into the functional. These ideas are meant as more or less concrete proposals to society, and may be used by everyone. At the same time I am tempted to

copy from other artists – I find it absurd that good ideas can't be shared and implemented for the benefit of the community.

But at the same time my projects have the additional layer that puts thoughts into motion and calls for the reflection that for me is the domain of art. We can call this an artistic twist. That is, something that makes use of art's visual space and possibilities. The act of embedding elements of a language beyond the spoken/written language, one with other capabilities. One way of addressing this is art as 'the production of non-knowledge'. This concept, coined by Sarat Maharaj¹, articulates that art produces a non-knowledge, that is, it produces something that isn't knowledge in the sense as what we usually refer to, but which produces another *form* of knowledge. A knowledge that operates structurally different.

¹ Sarat Maharaj: 'Avidya: "Non-Knowledge" Production in the Scene of Visual-Arts Practice', Ute Meta Bauer (red.): Education, Information, Entertainment. Current Approaches on Higher Artistic Education. Wien: edition selene, 2001.

Charles Esche talks about a form of art that works with creating 'modest proposals'², which is closely related to my artwork. This means something as models, though not to be understood metaphorically or symbolically, but rather as discreet proposals to or models for how a given problematic can be approached. Modest in the sense of size or scope, because the resources and opportunities for art are limited, but not modest in vigour and virtue.

EXTENDED MODEL OF THE ART WORK

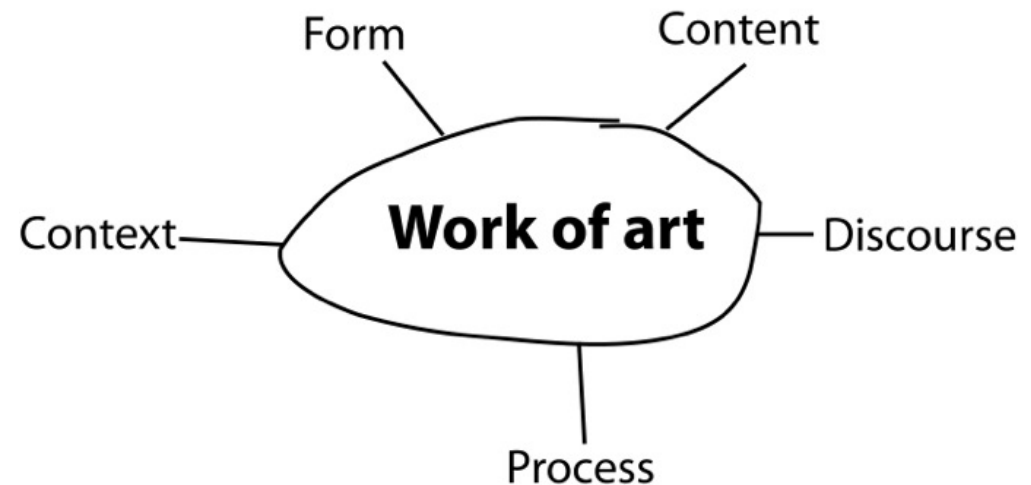
When I work with art, I have found the traditional model for art production too limited. Therefore I have developed a model that has three additional aspects added to form and content.

When I make art projects, it is largely the social and political context that is my main material. That's the one I dive into and find a situation,

not to predefine it as a problem, but to work to develop it. The development stands on an ethical, interpersonal, community building and aesthetic basis – and not an economic basis, aims that society otherwise largely stands on. To understand the work, we therefore need to understand the context and incorporate it into our production.

The discourse is all that is being communicated, written, spoken and displayed visually about the work. What we hear about a work of art will shape our perception of the work. It may, for example, be a press release, reviews and documentaries, what people increasingly refer to and analyze when they talk about works—often without having seen the work itself.

A central aspect of my process, is the way I involve people in my projects creating this development. The process and the feeling and perception of those involved in or affected by the project will load the work with meaning. "Are the locals consulted?" or "how did you select who attended?" are questions I get, which is linked to the impact of the process on the understanding of the work.



A BREAK WITH CAPITAL VALUATION

Somewhere between art as a structurally different form of language, and art as directly producing proposals, is where I find it interesting to navigate. With these poles and partners I try to produce an opposition or an alternative to liberal capitalism. Liberal capitalism is not a definitive problem, but as the only navigation within our present-day society, it is too limited. To have money, among other things, is about spending time deciding what to buy. A counter example can be found in the former GDR (German Democratic Republic), where you would place a call to say that you needed a new floor, and so you'd be supplied with the red linoleum one. Price and quality was known and completely transparent, and all prices were indeed the same in all of GDR (just imagine never having to compare prices anymore!). Thereby you could spend your time on other matters. As an isolated example I find this interesting. It means reducing the liberal capitalist focus to a focus on other subjects, like love and community. How I make use of this idea is to choose to see other aspects of a given context. That means to nurture and address aspects that put other conditions into play. Conditions that can provide other substance to life than the newest iPhone.

I also see a problem in reducing art to market objects. To observe artists and gallerist, with Euro-blue eyes on art fairs is to watch the selling out of art's potential. Just as selling to one rich, usually elderly white man, is uninteresting to what I think the art I make should do. When an artwork is assigned a market value and commodified, a price attached to it, it is to a large extent placed alongside all other consumer items, and placed within the liberal capitalist product-need-orientation instead of preserving it as producer of 'non-knowledge'. I do not sell my art. Since I made this decision – which serves to strengthen the structural objective I have for my art – I have however decided to sell to

museums, because they do not resell the artwork. Hereby I avoid the process whereby my art is transformed into an object for sale or investment, but at the same time that it reaches an audience that is the sole justification of art's existence, and I make a little money and ensure a discourse around my work. Not to mention that it feels great to leave large quantities of 'material' in safe hands.

Part 2:

Works

and

Users

Empty Offices vs. Homeless



NB! la' os mødes (NB! Let's get together) is the name of an art project in 2002, with the aim of bringing art to the people. The project took place in the outer Nørrebro quarter in Copenhagen. It is a densely built-up area without many green spaces or possibilities for leisure activities. Various artists are invited to a discussion with locals to create activities and projects in the area.

BY LISE BLOM

The artist Peter Callesen chooses to work together with Kenneth A. Balfelt, whom he knows from his time studying in London, where they shared an apartment.

– It is an experiment on my part. For me it is a totally different field to work in, just as it is different working together with someone. I normally work alone and with art in a more traditional way. It will be a more process-orientated way of working than that which I am used to, says Peter.

Together the two artists decide what their project should consist of.

– We agree that we want to do something together with the homeless. The term homelessness is interesting. It describes people without a residence, but the way I understand the term is in a broader sense – that as a homeless person, one can feel that one does not have any sense of belonging, says Peter.

35

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Part of *NB – Lad os mødes* curated by H. Øllegaard and B. Nørgaard, 2002-2003.

Video workshop, TV-production and TV broadcast with artist Peter Callesen and users of De Hjemløses Hjem (The House of the Homeless) Mia S. Mortensen, Steen Flemming Hansen and Michael J. Christensen.

Together with three users of the house we made a TV program that was broadcast on Kanal København/NTV. The theme was chosen collaboratively and was concerned with the many empty offices in Copenhagen that exist side by side with homelessness. We (fictively) squatted in an attractive, empty office building on Copenhagen harbour. We stayed there for 24 hours to record a report about the issue. Afterwards we interviewed responsible politicians and a real estate analyst.

The end result was a docu-fiction that used the narrative of the squatting inserted with interviews, thereby setting the situation in perspective.

The idea was to refrain from filming the homeless as victims and instead let Mia S. Mortensen, Steen Flemming Hansen and Michael J. Christensen, all homeless at some stage in their life, point the camera at the topics they wanted to film. Through generating ideas and making a TV-production they acted as empowered subjects and pointed out problems they themselves found relevant.

Before going ahead, the artists Peter Callesen and Kenneth A. Balfelt set up the following conditions for the project:

- It is the conditions of the homeless that dictate when we meet
- We insist on them being active subjects
- We are not here to discuss problems but to make a project
- We all have the same say in the project
- It is a common project

Through the terms we laid out we managed to get a very good process going, although it took 9 months instead of the expected 1-2 months.

Watch the film here: <http://vimeo.com/29517484>



Still from the video (Mia, left, Steen and Peter). After breaking in to the office building the crew set up a camp to eat, sleep and film.

However, Kenneth has experience with such projects, as he has previously been involved in *Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Users*. In that connection he experienced that it is possible to have an effect on the public and political debate via an art project. He would also like to do that with this project.

– *I don't immediately think of a larger political context. It is more concrete: Can we make something for these homeless people? Can we somehow create an everyday which is a little more exciting for them? Create some experiences, which can give them another perspective, says Peter.*

De Hjemløses Hus (The House of the Homeless) became the starting point for the project. Kenneth and Peter's first brainwave is to collect

sleeping bags, but the house's storeroom, stuffed with sleeping bags, convinces them that this idea has been used many times before. They speak with those who use the house about what they are interested in. Some of the users suggest that the artists organise an activity in the house.

– *We agreed to make a video workshop. But it wasn't to be us who filmed them, says Kenneth.*

– *They themselves should be behind the camera. It gives a much greater power to be behind the camera than in front of it, says Peter.*

– *In this way they participate in defining reality, instead of just being asked about what they think of a given subject. Together with them we discuss the power one has when one is the person who asks the questions, says Kenneth.*

The two artists have decided beforehand that the project should proceed in the participants' tempo, and that all should be equal. They make it clear to those interested that the group will function democratically.

House of The Homeless (De hjemløses hus) in Copenhagen where the artists meet the homeless and started developing the project.

IDEA DEVELOPMENT

'Homeless' is written in large letters on the board. The word is ringed by a circle and separate from the branching lines and other words. We are in De Hjemløses Hus in outer Nørrebro in Copenhagen. The two artists, Kenneth and Peter, together with



a group of homeless people in the hallway, are developing ideas for a film.

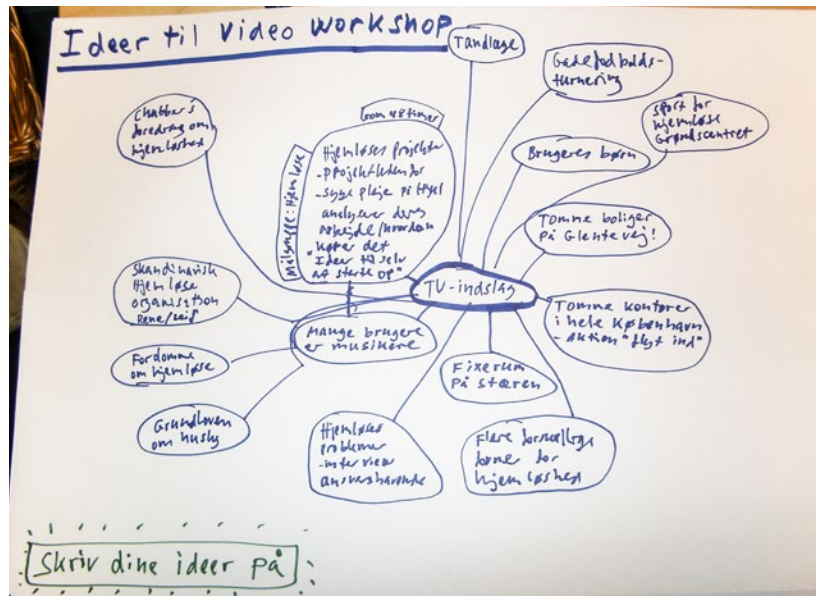
In the film the homeless people will use their experiences and point out problems related to homelessness, whilst the artists contribute with equipment, as well as technical and narrative know-how.

There are a number who are interested, but after a couple of meetings it is Michael Christensen, Steen F. Hansen and Mia Mortensen who remain involved.

In Copenhagen buildings stand empty, whilst simultaneously there are people who do not have a place to live. Banners with the text “5,000 square meters of office space to rent” hang on the empty buildings and this is an insult to the homeless, believes Steen. Therefore he suggests that this be the subject of the film. Michael and Mia, who also use De Hjemløses Hus, think this is a good idea. Kenneth and Peter are agreeing.

Neither Steen, Michael nor Mia are homeless at the moment, but they have been, and they know many who still are. Approximately half of the people who use the homeless house have no place to stay and they are, therefore, dependent on hostels. The film will centre on the homeless problem on a broader level and not on the problems of individual participants.

– *We never talk with them about their problems. It is never on the agenda. Instead we discuss which kind of film we will make. Quite*



Brainstorm about what to make a video about.

practically, the work consists of making a synopsis, storyboard, finding out how we can go out and film, and what we need to have with us, says Kenneth and adds:

– *It is mostly us who decide what will be asked in the interviews. But I remember that we discussed together about which questions should be put to which people.*

Jørgen Torkelund is an activity worker and volunteer coordinator in the house whilst the film project takes place. He recalls Kenneth A. Balfelt and Peter Callesen spending time on placing themselves in the milieu.

– *It is difficult to get a project started in De Hjemløse Hus, and it is quite demanding getting people engaged. One can risk people not turning up for the meetings they themselves have arranged, says Jørgen.*

He explains that the users of the house read the appearance and signals from people before they get involved. In this milieu the police are the number one enemy, and it is therefore an advantage that neither Kenneth nor Peter look like police officers. Kenneth and Peter dress as if they have an alternative focus on life. This also comes through in the manner in which they meet other people.

– *If the users can sense that they are people who have respect for them, then they will be given space to be here. The artists have treated them respectfully; otherwise they would not have cooperated. The users are good at sensing which intentions one actually has, says Jørgen.*

THE OCCUPATION

Steen enjoys the view over the entrance to the harbour from one of Copenhagen’s most exclusive office addresses at Kalvebod Brygge. Here the film crew have broken in during the cold, dank night. Or, more precisely, they have simulated a break-in. Previously they have, of course, phoned and asked for permission to use the building so they

can be certain of being able to work in peace without police interference. They stay in the building for 24 hours and take with them lots of bread and toppings to make sandwiches with. They use the time for filming and conversation. Mia, Steen and Michael have agreed that they will not take any drugs on this day, because it is important that they can think clearly during filming.

But before they can get started with the film they must solve a problem. Another person shows up, who is so stoned that Steen, with a glint in his eye, judges him to be beyond the range of reason. And when he sees the many computers, telephones

and other office inventory in the office building, he focuses completely on what he can take with him. Mia, Steen and Michael do not want trouble, and they quickly agree that the fourth person should get out of the building as quickly as possible.

– We do not want to be blamed for anything going missing. Therefore we say to him "No-one touches a single thing. Or you'll be in trouble". So he gets miffed. We gave him money for a bus ticket, tells Michael.

Kenneth and Peter are surprised when it happens. But they are also happy about the decision the others make.



Michael and Mia discussing what empty offices could be used for with regards to homelessness.

– I have total confidence in Michael, Steen and Mia, and I feel that they take responsibility on themselves. When the extra person comes into the picture he is quite clearly not a part of the group and the shared responsibility, says Kenneth.

But Steen is sorry that it is necessary to throw out the fourth person.

– It is an uncomfortable side of myself, and a situation I otherwise try to avoid, he says and explains:

I am involved in throwing him out – I participate in rejecting him from our group.

He reasons that the action is necessary in relation to the common good and adds that he would do the same again if it were necessary.

Kenneth experiences a change when the filming begins.

– There have been many involved in, and with, ideas under the development phase, and others who should have been present during filming. But it is Steen, Michael and Mia who have stuck with it. Firstly, we have to attract people in to get them actively involved, but whilst they are filming they begin to lean on each other and an internal discipline



Mia filming.



Stills from the video.
 a) Empty office for rent.
 b) The break-in.
 c) Investigating the office space.
 d) Sleeping time.
 e) The Mayor of Construction of Copenhagen.
 f) Steen.

is formed. They have an investment and interest in the film. Now they express that it is their film, which we will make together, says Kenneth.

In De Hjemløses Hus, Jørgen can see and hear that the three users are excited when they have been out filming. They engage themselves in the film project. In his experience the users often drop out of projects that they join, so it is rare that projects are completed.

– They tell of the things they experience when they have been out filming. They focus on something other than the trivial day-to-day. They appear energetic and happy. I ask myself what it is that makes them behave like this. Maybe it is because they feel that they are being heard, says Jørgen and adds:

– I see the collaboration as respectful; they benefit from one another.

The cooperation works best during filming, Steen thinks. It is equal, because Kenneth and Peter lack the experience of living as a homeless person. This is knowledge that Steen, Michael and Mia have. On the other hand, they lack the knowledge of cameras and computers, so in this way he feels that they supplement each other.

When they break-in to the empty office building Steen, Michael and Mia know exactly how it should be faked for it to look realistic.

The fact that the break-in looks realistic is a part of the film's narrative style. The film is a drama-documentary and for Michael, Steen and Mia it provides an extra challenge. They will have to both be themselves and play roles as homeless people in the film. It doesn't feel totally free.

– The film cannot be complete socio-realism, because half of the time we have to concentrate on focusing on the practical tasks, and the other half of the time we need to be acting. At the same time we need to keep to the storyboard, says Steen.

After the occupation of the office, they interview two politicians from Copenhagen's Borgerrepræsentation (The Copenhagen City



Steen and Michael during re-take of sleeping scenes.

Council), and a property analyst, in order to put the formulation of the problem with the two empty buildings into perspective. They are Mikkel Warming, the left-wing politician from Enhedslisten (Danish Red-Green Alliance), the liberal Søren Pind, the then Bygge- og Teknikborgmester (Mayor of Building and Technology), and the property analyst Carsten Lehrskov. Of them, Steen points to the interview with Mikkel Warming with particular interest.

– *Mikkel Warming gives me the impression of being a white-collar worker. He appears to be a totally ordinary person and that, I believe, is his strength as a politician. It is not difficult to interview him. One can sense that he has been on media courses, but I believe that he answers honestly, says Steen.*



Steen, Michael and Kenneth editing the film.

EDITING

– *Can you enlarge it?* asks Michael. He sits close to the computer monitor but he has difficulty seeing what is happening on the screen, because he cannot see so well after an overdose, which nearly cost him his life. It irritates him that he can't see so well because he wants to be involved in the editing process. Michael edits the film together with Peter and Kenneth. Once in a while, Steen is involved, whilst Mia at that point has dropped out of the project totally. At first, Steen thinks that Kenneth and Peter can finish the film alone, as the rest of the work is technical and something that they don't have any knowledge of anyway. But Kenneth and Peter insist that it is a joint project in which everyone should have input.

Initially they need to find out which parts will be used in the film, and which shall be edited out. After they have worked so closely together for a while, and spent 24 hours in the office building, they have gotten to know each other well. They are open when they speak to each other. They can laugh at some of the clips on the raw tape; they are funny

because none of them are used to being filmed and they make fools of themselves in front of the camera. Michael is also on guard when he hears an interview with Mia, where she tells how much she earns. The social security services could bust her for it, so the statement is immediately edited out of the film.

Steen is a musician. Previously he has played in the band Virtual Smile, and the band's music is being used in the film.

After months of editing work, the first version of the film is finished. They get a third party to evaluate the film. He suggests a more personal portrait of the people in the film.

– Therefore we filmed some extra footage in De Hjemløse Hus. In the scenes Michael and Steen tell of situations and things they are good at. They appear as active people instead of coming across in the role of victims, says Kenneth and tells that they consciously edited pictures out where one can see needle marks on their bodies.

EXPERIENCES

– Our relationship has been as equal as it could be, when one takes our social status into consideration, Steen believes.

He explains that it is Kenneth and Peter who have had the plans, and whom had access to money and a camera.

– But I also feel that it is my film because I have recorded the background music. In this way I have also contributed to the film, he says, and adds:

– The best thing about the film is that it has appeared 200 times on Kanal København (local Copenhagen TV station), says Steen with a wry smile. *I get recognised on the street and people ask whether I am the one that has been involved in making a film about the homeless.*

– I chose to be in the project because I wanted to help other homeless people, says Michael. Therefore he is glad that the film has been finished and that it has been shown in, amongst other places, De Hjemløse Hus and at Mændenes Hjem (Shelter for Men). He believes that the film can be a contributing factor in giving homeless people ideas and hope so they can try to look forward in their life by signing up on a housing programme – either in Copenhagen local authority's 7th office or in cooperative housing.

Working on the film has made Michael think more about the homeless situation and the help they are offered. He thinks that he has managed to say some sensible things in the film.

– I think the film has turned out fairly well, and I actually learned many things, says Michael, and gives an example:

– The social workers need to go into more detail in people's cases instead of just giving people money. As it is now there isn't so much one can use the public systems for. The only thing one can ask his social worker about is getting more money.

Jørgen can see that the film project has made the participants grow as people and has given them an identity. He recalls that during the same period Michael also became active in the user group in De Hjemløses Hus.

– I think that it was meaningful to the project that some guys from outside came in, and who represent a positive reference group. Artists are a group who the users want to belong to; I can sense that from them. The artists have put something personal in the work and that has had an importance – the participants feel recognised. There are some who can use them, and who believe in them, says Jørgen.

Jørgen believes that the best thing about the project is that people with different interests can gather together and create something meaningful – namely a film which is thought through with a purpose and a message.



Kenneth, Peter, Mia and Michael just before leaving the occupied office building.

– *The project is a decided contribution to society. The film is part of the highlighting of a problem that exists in our society, and which is important for many individuals, says Jørgen, and continues: The project of making a film has, in itself, a social aspect, where people are met and understood on their own terms.*

The participants are not used to engaging themselves in anything prolonged. Their lives are unpredictable and so much of what can go wrong in their lives, does go wrong. Therefore, he believes that it is important to emphasise each time something goes well.

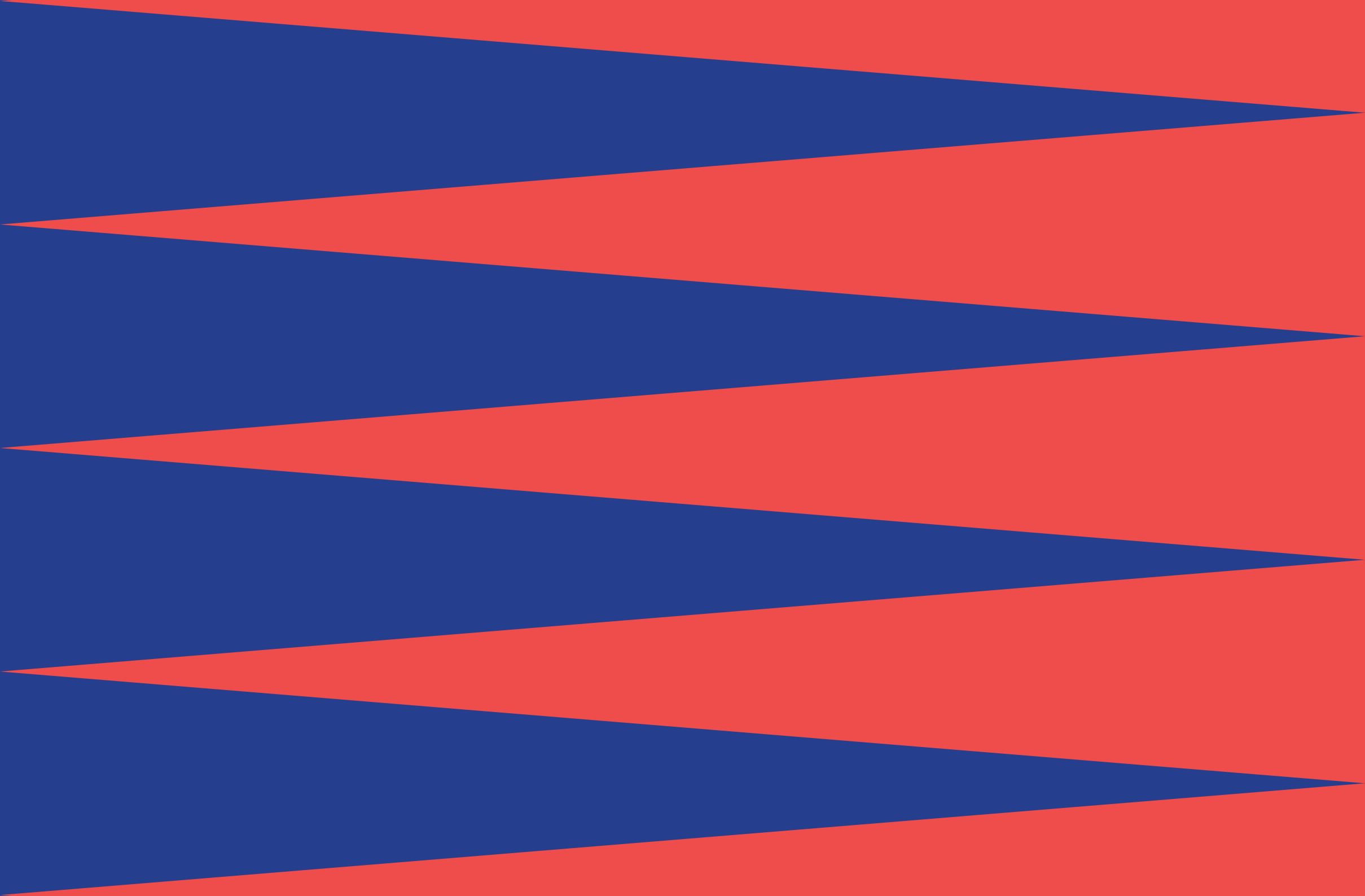
– *The project has given the participants a mouthpiece and that is important, because the really big problem for the users is communication. And it is difficult to participate actively in a democratic society when one can't express one's own opinions and experiences, says Jørgen.*

Apart from a local TV station the film has been shown in artistic contexts, and therefore the film has not had the same political breakthrough, which the fixerumsproject has had for Kenneth.

– *For me personally the important part of the process is when we show the film to other users in De Hjemløses Hus. I can see that Steen is proud, and he states, "This means that if you are just patient, then it will work out in the end". Then we give each other a hug, says Kenneth.*

For Peter it is still the process that has been the most important, even though he is also decidedly satisfied with the finished product.

– *The project hasn't only been about making a film – it turned into a meeting between people. And it isn't just them who have given us an insight into their lives; they have also gained a glimpse into our lives and have seen how we live, says Peter.*





No One Can
Wake Up

I am talking with Ms. Gabriela Knapstein, curator of “Berlin North”, the exhibition which took place at the prominent art space Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, in 2004¹.

¹: The exhibition took place from the 31th of January to the 12th of April 2004 in Berlin

One of the artists participating was Kenneth A. Balfelt. I have contacted Ms. Knapstein because I’m about to start writing the present article about socially involved art and I want to hear her viewpoint on art qua politics. When I ask for her opinion on the dualism of political art, she says that it operates simultaneously within the politics and the arts.

BY IVALO FRANK JØRGENSEN

– I’m a curator and I form a judgment about whether a work qualifies as a piece of art... whether an art-piece can be helpful for a particular situation is not up to me to decide, that’s up to the politicians, Ms. Knapstein elaborates.

The actual effects of political art occupies my mind. I wonder if the many art videos produced by well-meaning artists portraying diverse social issues in the world are any good for the matter in dispute? – And decide to set forth and make this question the *raison d’être* of my research.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Part of the exhibition Berlin North at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 31st January – 12th April 2004, curated by Gabriele Knapstein.
With artist Lasse Lou.

For our contribution to the exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof, we decided to highlight two local projects in order to create a campaign for these self-organized alternative projects in Berlin. The museum of modern art, Hamburger Bahnhof, represents a particular vision of Berlin. In an attempt to highlight a different Berlin, we contributed to the exhibition by looking at the local context of Berlin with two initiatives that use art as a facilitator for interaction.

Fusion is an association that tries to give the youth of the impoverished Neukölln area possibilities for expressing themselves. It is an intercultural youth activity club where the young people of the area can experiment, play music and make visual art. They use the idea of carnival to activate the youth and in this process to mentor the kids about life and problems. In order to create jobs for the youngsters, the association is trying to create its own business. One idea is to run a youth hostel that can offer education and jobs for youngsters.

For Hamburger Bahnhof we made a presentation of this visionary idea in order to put pressure on local and national politicians to support the project. All Fusion needed was to be allowed to rent a building down the street from the local council. The presentation consisted of a poster and a video.

Gesamtkunstwerk Waggendorf Lohmühle is a small, self-organized community trailer park where a small group of people live together, squatting on public land. The community has created its own neighborhood-based public space in the city. In this way they use different forms of art to create interaction and news of social life. As part of the project the community would like to publish a book about their 13 years of existence as another effort to initiate dialogue.

For Hamburger Bahnhof we created a campaign in order to find a publisher for the book. We presented the book and a prototype of it. A video with information about Lohmühle and its motivation for making the book accompanied the poster.

Both of these projects use art as a medium for making social processes. Art is a tool that facilitates communication and makes it possible to solve problems in society.

In order to highlight these alternative ways of using art as a facilitator for social change, we decided to make ‘campaigns’ for the two projects as our contribution to the exhibition. The role of the art institution is then transformed into functioning as a window onto what I would call “implemented artistic and alternative ideas”. The art institution becomes a platform for dialogue.

Watch the two films here:

No One Can Wake Up – We Need a Publisher
(Lohmühle Gesamtkunstwerk)

<http://vimeo.com/295191110>

No One Can Wake Up – House Wanted (Fusion)
<http://vimeo.com/29520223>

Read more:

www.kennethbalfelt.org

www.hamburgerbahnhof.de

www.fusionstreet.com

www.lohmuehle-berlin.de

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In order to shed some light on the subject, I'll interview people who have been subject to and participated in projects by Balfelt and Lasse Lau. The point of departure is the 'Kinder and Jugendklub Manege/ Fusion', a meeting-point for young people between 6 and 18 who come from the lower working class and predominantly immigrants in Berlin – and the 'Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle', a self-organised community which was founded after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 on the no-mans-land between former east and west Berlin. Balfelt and Lau's work at the two locations resulted in a poster and a video per site which were exhibited at the Berlin North exhibition.



Kids from Fusion in workshop making carnival props.

THE KINDER AND JUGENDKLUB MANEGE/ FUSION

I arrive on my bike at Fusion which is situated in Neukölln, one of the low-priced, but colourful and mixed neighbourhoods in Berlin. I have made appointments for an interview with the founders Marta Janzer and Wolfgang Janzer. Since Ms. Janzer is busy having a meeting with the local policeman on the status of the place, I start by interviewing Mr. Janzer on Balfelt and Lau's project here called House Wanted. The title refers to an empty building a bit further down the road, which Ms. and Mr.

Janzer would like to rent – in order to convert it into a hostel and create work possibilities for the many youngsters who visit Fusion regularly.

Mr. Janzer and I withdraw to a small office and I turn on my camera. He is obviously pleased with the House Wanted project, although it didn't lead to a house.

– Kenneth and Lasse had an unusual approach to social reality, they were very interested in our work and we had many intense conversations. It was exciting to work with them.

Inquiring of Mr. Janzer if any concrete developments came out of the co-operation, his first answer is:

– There was little response, a couple of artists stopped by afterwards, but no politicians... I guess they didn't go to the show... and

what came out of our efforts at Hamburger Bahnhof was unfortunately a reduced version of the huge performances we had planned²... just a poster and a video.

In spite of this I notice his continued enthusiasm. *– This kind of project makes the youth here stronger... that there are people that care for them, it makes them feel that they matter, which is a rare sensation to most of these kids.*

² The artists' initial plan was to bring the actual working-process, the art and the people from both the *Kinder and Jugendklub Manege/ Fusion* and *Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle* into the area of Hamburger Bahnhof. This idea was turned down by different persons in charge of the exhibition space.



House wanted for youth hostel as employment project.



Youth hostel as envisioned.

Ms. Janzer, who has now joined us in the office, shares his point of view:

– *The product or the after-effects of an art project is secondary to me, to me art is a way to reach people and that process is the actual task for me, that's why I consider Fusion an art-piece 365 days a year.*

When I interrogate Ms. Janzer on what she finds beneficial about the House Wanted project she replies without hesitating:

– *It gave us something and it gave them something... to me consciousness and the dialogue is vital... to give the small ones here some self-confidence... that's the art... and first step is communication... and curiosity... that someone takes the guys here seriously is exceptional, normally they are only taken serious as depressing case-stories... one boy told Kenneth that he wanted to study geology, he had never told anyone this before.*

We are disrupted various times by children who either need a key, a piece of paper or something else from Ms. and Mr. Janzer, but to me it sounds more like an excuse to have a short chat – and to make sure that they are around. The persistence of the interruptions give me an insight into the meaning of Fusion for the people here.

As I sit in the humble office, see the teenagers outside the door and listen to the discussions on their everyday problems with drugs, money, arranged marriages and alcohol – just to mention a few, I think

to myself that the social context of Hamburger Bahnhof is miles away from here. Almost too far. Mr. Janzer seems to have read my thoughts because he adduces:

– *I feel ambivalent about exhibiting at such a fancy place... on the one hand, it creates an enormous and fascinating tension to exhibit there, being a representation of the lowest social class in German society... on the other hand... maybe people with real influence on Fusion's situation would have seen the exhibition if it had been shown at a space*

closer to them, both physically and mentally, but I don't know if they were invited to the vernissage, it could have been cool if the mayor from Neukölln had been there.

He contemplates for a moment then adds:

– *But I think that political art is important... not because of its efficiency... the*



Fusion – a youth club to tackle youth problems by building carnival props and participating in the yearly Berlin Carnival.

political artist can't change the world, but he can use his tools to show other people his visions. Kenneth and Lasse operate like transmediators between two different spheres; the social domain and the high art institutions. The fact, that there are artists who challenge to the established art concepts, is part of that same art-field tradition. It's their job to say: hey, have a look at reality, another reality.

Speaking about realities, Ms. Janzer doesn't believe in any radical modifications overnight either. She appreciates even the smallest alteration and is grateful for any aid:

– I expect very little from politicians, I'm a realist... we wanted to get some of the street art that we make at Fusion into the Hamburger Bahnhof. It didn't happen, but it was very courageous of Kenneth and Lasse to spend an offer from Hamburger Bahnhof on us, they did everything they could. I wouldn't have been able to scale down what we originally attempted to display – to this poster and video, it was a clever reduction, so to speak.

Time is running out and they both have to continue their busy occupations trying to help the so-called, lost cases, in Germany to find their way in a Berlin society which is overloaded with depth, growing 20% unemployment and half a city to renovate – and which does not prioritize in investing in those who, at a first superficial glance, can appear a waste of money.

Before we part ways, Ms. Janzer asserts that she has a suggestion:

– Maybe next time it could be advantageous to exhibit here and send invitations out on the internet, also to the people in power in our district, maybe this could bring about the concrete changes you talk about.

An idea worth consideration.

I take a little walk around the place to say goodbye to the crowd before I go home. Loud hip hop music comes out of one of the rooms. A group of ten teenagers are learning new steps taught by one of the older and more professional dancers from the area. This is one of several activities, which takes place here on a weekly basis.

Poster for Fusion to have the Berlin municipality to rent them an empty house to be used as a youth hostel as employment project.

The poster is a detailed visual document with a large green silhouette of a house in the background. Text and images are arranged around and inside this shape.

- Top Right:** 'HOUSE WANTED' in large purple letters, with 'model for a social solution in youth work in Neukölln' below it.
- Top Left:** 'The History of Fusion' section, with 'Fusion' logo at the bottom.
- Top Middle:** 'Our Approach' section.
- Middle Left:** 'The Youth Hostel' section.
- Middle Right:** 'Youth Hostel as Business' section.
- Bottom Left:** 'Youth Hostel as Berlin' section.
- Bottom Middle:** 'Fusion' section.

Various photographs show groups of people, street art, and buildings. The overall theme is social housing and youth work.

„Wir brauchen einen Verleger“

Ausgangspunkt einer des Gesamtkunstwerks: Wegarbeit, Lohmühle, und ein Aspekt der Kommunikation von Kunst, Kultur und Leben.

„We need a publisher“

Die Kunstwerke sind in der Lohmühle, einem alten Mühlebauwerk, entstanden. Die Kunstwerke sind in der Lohmühle, einem alten Mühlebauwerk, entstanden. Die Kunstwerke sind in der Lohmühle, einem alten Mühlebauwerk, entstanden.

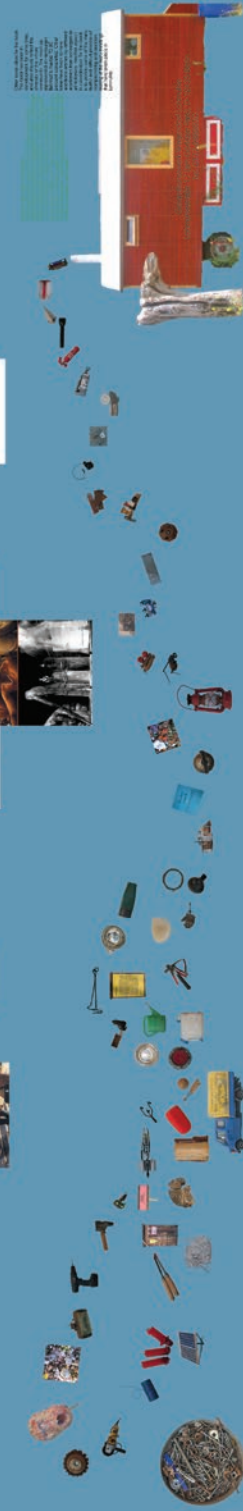
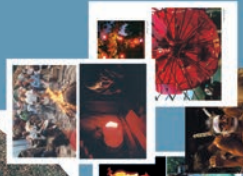
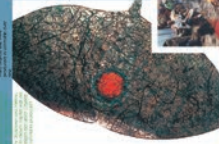
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AM ANFANG WAR
HIER NUR WÜSTE

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Poster for Lohmühle to help them find a publisher to publish their book about their activities to contribute to society with culture.

THE WAGENDORF GESAMTKUNSTWERK LOHMÜHLE

– I welcome artists like Kenneth and Lasse, I hate to waste my time but these two guys came, looked around, asked their questions, worked hard and had an art-piece exhibited. That’s great. I can only praise that kind of project, explains Martin Kurpiers at Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle.

He is the founder of the zone and has been living here since 1989. We sit down in a warm self-made building made of elements I can’t identify – with a wooden floor. Mr. Kurpiers immediately lets me know that he’s in a hurry because of the upcoming storm. He and the rest of the inhabitants from the community have to strengthen the houses so that damages can be prevented.

Here Balfelt and Lau made a video and a poster named “Publisher wanted” as a campaign for a book on divergent aspects of the spot – which is just waiting for a publisher’s attention to get out on the sales-market.

To my inquiry whether the two artists had brought about innovations in the book situation, Mr. Kurpiers utters vigorously:

– We got some work done on the book, its been edited over. We still haven’t got a publisher though, but that would also have been utopian. I have communicated with the



Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle at the old border between East and West Berlin.



Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle at the old border between East and West Berlin.

authorities for 15 years and its a long ongoing procedure to get things through. It doesn't happen due to one spectacle at a stunning art-space, it needs to be done over and over. Then you get a political remark. One thing the exhibition definitely gave was another kind of publicity – and we need that, we want more attention than what we get from the people on the street who just stop by.

Similar to Ms. Janzer and Mr. Janzer, Mr. Kurpiers would have liked a more vivid exhibition in 2004 though.

– I would have liked to show stuff differently, more lively and so, but that wasn't possible, the space was confined and it was a group exhibition, but next time maybe. Then I would like to be present in the discussions with the curators as well, to talk about the format. Perhaps I could

bring about what we do here... since I'm from here.

Now the storm is getting really strong – we can both hear and feel it on the movable walls – so we finish our meeting. Before I leave Mr. Kurpier asks me to send him a copy of this book. He is obviously used to interacting with journalists.



The site for Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle before the Berlin Wall came down.

EPILOGUE

A couple of months later, Kenneth asks me if I can find out what the current situation is at the Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle. To facilitate that Balfelt puts me in touch with Stefanie Sändig, who was one of the lead figures in the community at the time of the Berlin North exhibition.

In the meantime I have based myself in London, so I write to Ms Sändig and asks her if she would like to be interviewed. She writes back that basically, her life has changed massively in the last couple of months, but that she would like to tell me about the changes. Some weeks later I get a lengthy e-mail from Berlin:

First of all, I want to depict the present situation at Lohmühle to make my response understandable.... Of the founders of Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle, there is only Jürgen "Zosch" Hans left. Martin Kurpiers is about to leave the place, and so am I. Eve and Winni are already gone, and Maria has also left to go to Frankfurt with a theatre group... After they left, Martin and I continued fighting a bit longer for the place, but we have lost... You ask me what

happened to the book. We began to work on it when WGL was at its peak. Now you can look at the project as over – due to the development here... All activities here have gone completely backwards. The inhabitants weren't ready to spend money on it.



Installation view at Hamburger Bahnhof.

The reason is lack of professionalism and insufficient acknowledgment of the efforts such a project requires to succeed... They thought it would happen out of the blue... that a publisher would fall down from the sky and ask if he could help... Kenneth and Lasse handled their part professionally and it was fantastic to work with them, but Martin and I couldn't get through with our vision in the long run... in the democratic process here... Kenneth and Lasse's presentation didn't have a great effect on the situation afterwards, but that has got to do with the development on the whole... I think the biggest contribution they made – if I have understood the projects right – was to portray other people in their project and to show them to the broad public. To create dialogue via art.

– Stefanie Sändig.

The e-mail leaves me quite disillusioned, and I wonder what conclusions to draw. I can detract two things from Sändig's words. The publishing of the book about Wagendorf Gesamtkunstwerk Lohmühle was given up, the founders are moving away to look for other things to do with their lives. This also means that Kenneth and Lasses exhibition at the "Berlin North" didn't achieve what the artists wanted, to find a publisher and thereby help the place to survive. Simultaneously, Sändig praises them for their work, and from what I can see, it is because they really tried.



Installation view at Hamburger Bahnhof.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of my research into socially engaged art, I was very pessimistic. I doubted whether these art projects had an effect on the artworks subject matter and brought about any discernable changes whatsoever.

So I decided to look for quantifiable results in all my interviews

– with limited success. The tangible benefits were scarce, no house or publisher in existence. However, the subtle and less measurable outcomes were repetitively emphasized and highlighted by the people I encountered. They felt seen, heard and taken seriously. They were overall satisfied with the project and would, without a doubt and with no exception, do the whole thing over again.

This observation shows that the projects are purposeful, not because they always have material end results but because the artists efforts are of the utmost value to the people in question.

A political work of art should obviously, like other kinds of art, be judged in accordance with the existing but undefinable ways of denominating a project as a work of art. Since I wasn't in Germany at the time of the Berlin North exhibition, I can only rely on Ms. Knapstein judgement, that Balfelt and Lau's art project qualifies as a work of art.

However, because political artists operate in an arena spanning both art and politics, their pieces should also be judged according to political standards. Just like a political initiative aiming to improve a social problem, this type of art should be followed up by similar, subsequent and appropriate assesment criteria to ensure that the political and social 'targets' have been achieved.

Following my examination of the individual's responses to socially engaged art, I would therefore suggest a further premise in order to claim success for such a project. Namely, it absolutely should have a positive effect on the art-works target group. This effect doesn't have to be identical with the stated ideal, as long as other positive outcomes, for example, their psychological enhancement is increased. This premise is of prime importance since improving a situation, which the artist perceives as being unjust, is the crux of the piece and this should be taken into account in the evaluation of this artistic genre.



**Protection Room
– Injection Room
for Drug Users**

An injection room is a room where drug addicts can take their drugs. Basically, this is as much as Kenneth A. Balfelt knew on the subject when he decided to create an injection room himself. He has followed the debate and taken into account the opinions of experts and specialists. He believes that injection rooms are reasonable solutions to the health and societal challenges which drug abusers present. But despite the persuasive arguments from experts and positive experiences with injection rooms in other countries, the injection room was, and were until 2012 illegal and is still a controversial political issue.

BY LISE BLOM

– In making an injection room, my aim is to enable a multi-faceted debate on injection rooms. The debate on injection rooms had gone on for a long time. There had been statements from experts, Narkotikarådet (Narcotics Council) and various ministries, but the debate had been exclusively in the spoken and written language. I wanted to bring a visual contribution to the debate, says Kenneth A. Balfelt.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Part of the public art project *Contemplation Room* curated by Cecilie Gravesen, Lasse Johansen and Kristine Aggergaard. With architect student Steffen Nielsen.

2002-2003

One of the major social and urban problems for citizens and businesses in Vesterbro – the western borough of Copenhagen, near Central Station – is the injection of illegal drugs in public. The problem is, however, greater for the drug addicts themselves as they have to inject under stressful and generally miserable conditions. This causes mistakes while injecting, overdoses and infections such as HIV and hepatitis. On the basis of this unfortunate situation I initiated design of a 1:1 scale model of a physical injection room.

By cooperating with drug addicts and organisations involved in the area, architect student Steffen Nielsen and I designed a physical model for an injection room complete with the proper equipment, facilities and professional nurses. The room was usable both functionally, and from a health and cleanliness perspective. But more importantly the interior design worked towards giving dignity to potential users.

A bomb shelter at Halmtrøvet next to the central station was the site of the project. It is one of the three preferred places for injecting in central Copenhagen. In Danish, a bomb shelter is called a "protection room", which is why I adopted it as a title for the project. To point to the fact that there are hundreds of unused protection rooms in

Copenhagen, and at the same time there are people who need injection rooms.

The idea was to translate all the debates, reports, expert panels and media coverage about injection rooms from the last 6 years into a physical presence. A translation of the written and spoken language into a visual and physical one. To have an actual functioning injection room was a way of facilitating a debate.

The project aroused the interest of both local and parliamentary politicians. As a continuation of the debate following the project, the leading party of the opposition, the Social Democratic Party, made a proposal to legalise injection rooms in Denmark. During January and February 2003 a union of drug addicts' next of kin and I held meetings with all four right wing parties – two of which made up the Government – trying to convince them of the usefulness of injection rooms. On the 28th February 2003 the Law Proposal set up by all four opposition parties had its 1st hearing in Parliament.

On the 12th of May I met with the Minister for Health, Lars Løkke Rasmussen. Although he admitted not having any alternatives on how to solve the problems, he did not want to allow injection rooms.

When the proposal for allowing injection rooms in Denmark came up for its second hearing, 60 members of the parliament voted against and 44 in favour.

However, the opposition relaunched the proposal both in

Spring 2005 (it was rejected with 62 against and 51 for) and in Winter 2005-6.

In 2005 a group of local people, including myself, organized a conference with 80 invited guests and speakers trying to find solutions to drug related problems in Vesterbro. Together with Johan Hye-Knudsen I made a film presenting the views of different local parties on the problems. The initiative was named Dugrud, after the old Norwegian term for when local residents got together to solve a local problem. We produced 101 suggestions that were sent off to Parliament and the Copenhagen Council.

Through a series of meetings and the publication of a book about the conference, we managed to obtain 12.2 million Danish Kroner (approx. 1.6 million £) from the Ministry of Health and formed a partnership with Copenhagen Council to establish and run Dugrud Center Vesterbro. Kenneth Balfelt was part of the board of Dugrud Center Vesterbro and responsible for the interior design of the center.

Today, Dugrud Center Vesterbro is converted into the first public "health room" in Denmark (established 100 meters from Balfelts initial art work in 2002), where drug users can inject their substances in clean, safe and supervised surroundings.

VIDEO Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug

Users <http://vimeo.com/29436474>



Left overs from injections in a public toilet in Vesterbro.

Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Users was Kenneth A. Balfelt's contribution to the Contemplation Room exhibition, which dealt with how one can use the public space. As a resident in the Vesterbro quarter of Copenhagen, which for decades has been a meeting place for drug addicts, Kenneth A. Balfelt has been witness to the everyday life of drug abusers. He has seen that life as a drug addict is both difficult and damaging to one's health – to a larger extent than it ought to be. Therefore he decided to make an injection room.

As his knowledge of injection rooms was limited, he jumped head first into a three month long research process. Aside from written material he

contacted a number of people active within the field, who had knowledge and opinions on the problem. Those whom he contacted urged him to use the project so they could get their own viewpoints across.

– *As an artist I have the fundamental principle that I come up with an initiative and explain which direction I would like it to go in. Those I work together with can contribute their thoughts and in this way we get a common platform to work from. In my experience the project improves when I am open to ideas from other people,* says Kenneth A. Balfelt.

KENNETH A. BALFELT – ARTIST: THE PROJECT ENDED UP FOCUSING ON SOCIAL EXPULSION

Halmtorvet on Vesterbro has throughout many years been a place that respectable citizens avoided. But the area has been renovated. And the authorities have done what they can to keep the original inhabitants and their stoned existences away from the central square, in order to make it attractive for the area's new inhabitants and the guests in the fashionable cafés.

Nålepuden (The Pincushion) was a little hillock on Halmtorvet, situated beside a roundabout and formerly an air-raid shelter. On top of the mound one could have previously met some of the traditional stoned inhabitants from the area – namely drug addicts who sat there to get their fix.

For Kenneth A. Balfelt it was a paradox that there was a shelter, but the people, who really were in need of it, had to sit on the street to get their fix.

It was in this way he found out where to place the injection room. Thereafter the task was to find out how an injection room should be furnished. During his research Kenneth A. Balfelt experienced that the physical surrounding in the existing injection rooms abroad did not show respect for the people who used them. And it made him decide to come up with his own attempt at designing an injection room.

– *The general attitude seemed to be that if one offers social counselling then it doesn't matter if the rooms are unattractive. It made it clear to me that I also wanted to work with the stigmatisation and exclusion that goes on at the design level, says Kenneth A. Balfelt.*

But quite quickly it also came to focus on human prejudices. Even though Kenneth A. Balfelt felt that he was open and non-judgemental, he realised that he also had prejudices. Deep inside he assumed that drug addicts were a little dumb and that in reality they had put themselves in the situation they had ended up in. He realised these prejudices during a visit to an outpatient department, where the head of the department treated its visitors in exactly the same way as he treated any other people.

– *Afterwards, when I interviewed an addict, I could hear a voice inside me that said – “what he says sounds stupid. What use can I possibly make of that?” I realised that I was prejudiced. I was able to put it aside, since I had become aware of it. For the first time I began to listen, and since then I have become more aware of the various nuances of these people I have met. I can see that they are just as different as any other person I meet and can contribute with just as much or just as little. It has been important for me in a humane sense to acknowledge this, says Kenneth A. Balfelt.*

Even the physical furnishing of the room should be functional and reflect the value of the users. Kenneth A. Balfelt quickly realised that an injection room was not just a room with a particular furnishing. In order for an injection room to function in this manner, there needs to be nurses.

– *From the start I had not considered whether or not there should be nurses in the injection room. It was only after I realised what an injection room really was that I considered this. An injection room is a nurse – that is the core of an injection room, Kenneth A. Balfelt underlines.*

The project got engaged people involved, financial backing, moral support and practical help from around 30 persons and organisations. Amongst others, an architect student, a journalist, residents of the area, a film documentarist and several local companies made contributions. In this text you can meet some of the people who got involved in the project. The nurses Charlotte Fich and Nina Brünés work with drug addicts in an outpatient department and as a street nurse, respectively. Jørgen Kjær is spokesman for Brugerforeningen, which is the union for active drug users.

Preben Brandt is a qualified psychiatrist, former spokesman for Narkotikarådet (The Narcotics Council) and current spokesman for Rådet for Socialt Udsatte (The Council for Socially



Drug user with overdose being brought back to life by paramedics.

Marginalised People). Politician Sophie Hæstrop Andersen, the then parliamentary member for Socialdemokratiet (The Social Democrats).

CHARLOTTE FICH – NURSE IN THE OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT STÆREN FOR ADDICTS: THE PROJECT SHOWED THAT THERE IS ROOM FOR BOTH A SUBCULTURE AND TRENDY CAFÉS

When drug addicts appear in art it is normally because the artists want to exhibit a hideous and cruel reality. Therefore, the nurse Charlotte Fich

was surprised when Kenneth A. Balfelt approached her. His aim was to create a piece of art which took the addicts' own subculture as its starting point, as well as their expression. He wanted to create an injection room where drug addicts could get their fix. Charlotte Fich has worked for the same goal for many years.

– Kenneth wanted to show that the injection room is more than just being practical and hygienic. It is an artistic assignment and a challenge to create a beautiful piece of city furniture, says Charlotte Fich and adds:

– He made an underground cave, in order for the addicts to feel good.

A model of an injection room in actual size was like a gift. It gave specialists an example from which to begin their discussions, and it could wipe out the myth that injection rooms should be sad and ugly.

– To have an injection room made, as I had myself wished for over many years, and on top of that to have it made by an artist, transforms it from a piece of bread, necessary from a health perspective, into a cream cake, she says.

When Kenneth A. Balfelt contacted her, Charlotte Fich had some misgivings, but she knew that she had to participate. She used to work as a street nurse, and here in this country she is the one of the leading figures



The injection room with nurses Nina Brúnés and Charlotte Fich and hygienic and life saving hospital equipment.

with insight into 'fixing up'. She is known as an outspoken advocate of injection rooms, and as she is employed by Copenhagen local authority this has, over the years, given her a few political bruises. Therefore she asked her manager in the Familie- og Arbejdsmarkedsforvaltningen (Family and Labour Market Administration) for permission to participate and she got his approval.

Firstly, Kenneth A. Balfelt told her what she already knew about getting a fix. And because it was related with artwork, Charlotte Fich felt free to come up with all sorts of thoughts and ideas.

– One could give one's imagination a free rein, because an artist has a much broader framework and freedom to move in than an architect, for example. If an architect had asked for my advice, we would probably arrive at a very hygienic and precise injection room, says Charlotte Fich.

But even though the injection room was an art project it was, after all, more than a picture one went in and looked at. It also needed to function in practice.

– I could see that he had considered the height and weight necessary for the interior. If you need a fix in the neck, if you need to inject in the groin, then you need to have this much space. The room must have a certain openness, so you can be found if you are about to die of an overdose. And in order for it to not be a total exhibition of humiliating situations for the individuals, it needs this kind of privacy. I saw those considerations in the finished product, so therefore he must have listened to our words, says Charlotte Fich.

When the injection room opened she was one of the nurses who was on duty. She remembers especially the white smocks the nurses wore.

– At the bottom of the sleeve was written stay with me (BLIV HOS MIG), and when one folded the edge of the sleeve up it read life with me

(LIV HOS MIG). It was discreet and spoke volumes for what went on in an injection room with nurses, tells Charlotte Fich.

People attempt to close their eyes to the fact that there are drug addicts who inject themselves. In this way they believe that they can be free from relating to reality and taking a position on it. If it were up to Charlotte Fich, the bunker would have had a sign with injection room written in pink neon over the entrance. A sign that could show that an activity takes place here, just as other signs tell us that here is a library, a hairdresser and a chemist. She is against the tendency to cover up subcultures and hide them away, so they don't bother others. This position became extremely clear for her after she participated in the injection room project. She used to imagine an injection room on a bus or discreetly placed on a side street. Now she is of the opinion that it was appropriate that the injection room was placed on the newly renovated Halmtorvet.

– We can easily have several dimensions together. One of the trendiest places in the city with cafés in steel and glass and in between them there was a bunker containing an injection room. It was perfect. Each culture has its own physical expression. Those from the subculture have a right to be, just like all the others. I learned from this project that it's possible for these things to be placed side by side, says Charlotte Fich.

The placing in a bunker was meant to underline that this is a subculture. But when the subculture has its own style and its own place, it signals that it is there on an equal footing with other forms of culture.

– There is something symbolic in the fact that it is a bunker. It means that we go underground, we hide ourselves a little, but we also come up again. We are a subculture, and we play on it without being ashamed, says Charlotte Fich.

She believes that it is important that the culture becomes more visible in this way. Just the fact that we begin to talk about drug abuse can ease

the burden for those who are injecting themselves, for example. At this present moment in time they see themselves as bad citizens, and they feel that everything they do is wrong. Charlotte Fich underlines that drug addicts are also sweet and helpful people and she wishes that both the population and the drug users themselves recognise that just because they take drugs does not mean they are hopeless at everything else. Our acceptance of their lifestyle is a condition for them to be able to hold their heads high as proud people.

Before, during and after the injection room project, Charlotte Fich contemplated how a subculture could be integrated in society. The project itself gave her the possibility of experiencing an injection room that gave her new arguments and a belief in a broader cooperation.

– How can we use each other to uplift society? If we put our energies together there may well be some problems that stand out clearer, rather than being blurred, she points out.

NINA BRÜNÉS – STREET NURSE IN PROJEKT UDEFOR (OUTSIDER PROJECT): WE CREATED A ROOM WHERE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING CAME ABOUT

It is far from the first time that street nurse, Nina Brünés, has experienced that artists want to make projects for the homeless and junkies. Homeless people make fantastic models, she points out. Nina Brünés likes to help artistic projects because she believes that people from other backgrounds than health and social workers can bring new approaches to the debate. But before she gets involved in a project, she investigates the motives. This was also the case when Kenneth Balfelt contacted her.

– I was extremely sceptical, as I had just been involved in a project where I got the impression that the starting point was in people's

wretchedness, in order to create a profile for oneself. Therefore I pushed Kenneth hard, but he was serious and personally engaged. His legwork was so thorough that one had to respect it. After the first couple of meetings I was in no doubt whatsoever, and it was for this reason I involved myself so deeply in the project, says Nina Brünés.

With support from the leader of Projekt Udenfor, Preben Brandt, she set two weeks aside from her calendar in order to work in the injection room.

– I was drawn by the fact that people could inject themselves down there, but unfortunately the law doesn't allow it, says Nina Brünés.

Before the opening it became clear that the police wouldn't look the other way when people were getting a fix in the room. Therefore a decision had to be made. Nina Brünés, Charlotte Fich and Kenneth A. Balfelt decided to not break the law. Today Nina Brünés asks herself whether the injection room would have had more impact if there were fixes taking place in the injection room, and the police therefore had closed it after 48 hours.

– Today I would probably be a bit more daring. It is the job of an artist to be provocative. But Kenneth had also created a beautiful installation, so it would have been a shame to shut it down after 48 hours, and risking him being thrown into prison, she says.

If it had happened, the debate might well have turned into one about an artist who is trapped in prison because of his art, instead of the need for an injection room.

The decision that no one would be allowed to get their fix, was taken five days before the opening.

– Strategically we did not tell the politicians and the journalists that there would not be any injections taking place. But we also kept that knowledge from the users and that had consequences. It was wrong because they were led to believe that they could inject themselves there, says Nina Brünés and continues:



From the opening of the injection room.

had pulled their pants down on Maria Kirkeplads square in order to get their fix. For them it was like a gift from heaven



The press at the opening of the injection room.

when they heard that they could come inside into an injection room and even get assistance from a nurse. For some people it is extremely serious. But the most paradoxical thing is that they have experienced so many disappointments throughout life that they do not expect any more. They take it with a smile, take a syringe set and instead go up on the hillock to get their fix, says Nina Brünés.



The entrance to the injection room in a bomb shelter.

The users stated that the injection room was fantastic and even though they weren't allowed to inject themselves there, they continued to visit whilst it was open.

– *You stood there with all your talents as a nurse. You can hand out needles and water to them. You can talk about where they can inject themselves, and how they should do it. And then they have to go outside and do it on the grimy ground. For the residents in the area it is a daily nuisance to stand by their windows and look down at someone lying there and injecting themselves in the neck, she says.*

The local residents have been an audience for years, and sometimes they need to stride over junkies who are lying flaked out in the street. Now they had a chance to meet the addicts, and many of them made use of the opportunity.

– *We had built a room where people could meet. It became a room where mutual understanding was created. There was a dialogue, because the residents came down and chatted. They tried to get wiser. Many found out that the addicts have a great awareness of the residents*

in the area, that the addicts are also disgusted over fellow users who throw away needles and syringes. When you ask addicts what is the worst thing about injecting themselves in public, it is never about them; it is more about whether children see them, says Nina Brünés.

The injection room looked great, but she doesn't believe that it would work in practice, first and foremost because of the physical framework in a bunker, where there is no emergency exit. But also because, for example, wood was used and that cannot stand being disinfected again and again. On the other hand, the super-sterile injection rooms in Canada and Holland don't appeal to her either.

– *It was an injection room where you wanted to sit and read a book. That combination is fantastic. He combines design with harsh reality, where people are able to sit with a needle in their arm or in their groin. That lifts the injection room to a totally different level. The design is a signal that we worry for you. You will be given something dignified, something of value, something beautiful. One can typically say, show me the place where you hang out and I will show you who you are. It is as if one is putting a mirror up to a homeless person, when in a typical 'hanging out place' there is usually a table and two chairs – and the one chair wobbles. On the other hand, when you show Kenneth's injection room then you show how you see these people – you make them beautiful, says Nina Brünés.*

She is convinced that one day we will get an injection room in Denmark, and that the project has pushed the debate in the right direction. At the same time she points to the fact that the debate in connection with the injection room has helped to raise awareness for those marginalised by society.

– Anyone who brings understanding for others and who is involved in reducing prejudice, contributes to society – to the highest degree. You can raise 50,000 kroner for the homeless but have you made a difference? One cannot solve the problems of these people by giving them more and more money. If we do not increase the quality of what we offer and create a better framework for those who have been marginalised, then we will not get anywhere, says Nina Brünés.

JØRGEN KJÆR – SPOKESMAN FOR BRUGERFORENINGEN AF AKTIVE STOFBRUGERE (DANISH DRUG USERS' UNION): IT IS UNPROBLEMATIC TO GET A FIX UNDER PROPER CONDITIONS

Brugerforeningen is a special interest organisation that fights for better conditions for drug addicts. In its work the union allies itself with all who work to put the living conditions of addicts onto the agenda. One of the

The second injection stand; open and possible to use for two people with a bench long enough inject in the leg or foot.



goals is to get an injection room in Denmark, and therefore the union participated in the injection room project. Today the union's spokesman, Jørgen Kjær, evaluates the result thus:

– Nothing of great note has come out of the project. It made injection rooms debatable for a period. And there are some within the world of art

who have spoken about it, who would otherwise have not spoken about it.

Jørgen Kjær is sorry that only a few politicians chose to visit the injection room and see what it is actually all about. But he wasn't surprised. Brugerforeningen has noticed that politicians keep a distance when they are invited by the union to meet addicts in, for example, Marie Kirkeplads. Jørgen Kjær believes that this is all down to the general opinion that it is the addicts' own fault that they have problems. But despite this attitude, Jørgen Kjær experienced that local residents from Vesterbro met to discuss the injection room.

– During the project there was a tendency towards dialogue with the Vesterbro residents. But it was only those members of the community who already had an interest in the topic, who met up, he says.

He describes the injection room itself as spartan, but useable. It proves that an injection room can be made without it costing a fortune.

– There was no doubt that it was an artistic project. If we had made an injection room we would have chosen to prioritise the practical more



Collaboration with the Danish Drug Users Union. Dennis Jensen and chairman Jørgen Kjær, right.



The third injection stand offered mobile furniture and a mirror to inject in the neck.

highly over the aesthetic. It should have been bigger and more practical. I regard the project as a sketch of how an injection room could look. And Kenneth did a good job with that, says Jørgen Kjær.

Brugerforeningen were involved in the project, amongst other reasons, because it was the intention that the room would be used for intravenous drug injection. The members wanted to show how unproblematic it could be, done under the proper conditions. They had made guard lists so there was someone present in the injection room at all times, where they helped and answered questions, just as they administered the cleaning. But when the members of Brugerforeningen turned up to the opening they were told that they couldn't inject themselves in the newly established injection room anyway.

– It was a disappointment that people couldn't get their fix. It was pathetic for the people who sat up on the bunker and injected themselves in public, says Jørgen Kjær and points out:

– We were sad about the fact that we couldn't fix up, but we were even more disappointed that we hadn't been told about it until the opening. Kenneth knew a week before the opening that no one would be allowed to get their fix, and he kept it to himself until the opening day.

According to Jørgen Kjær it is wrong to involve people in a project that is concerned with their lives and simultaneously engages them in work, without giving them a full explanation of how the project will turn out.

– In this way one loses respect and the project starts to appear superficial. Kenneth should trust other people, that is fundamental for mutual respect. Because we could, of course, have kept it quiet that in reality no one was allowed to fix up, Jørgen Kjær underlines.

PREBEN BRANDT – SPOKESMAN FOR RÅDET FOR SOCIALT UDSATTE (THE COUNCIL FOR SOCIALLY MARGINALISED PEOPLE): THE PROJECT MADE IT CLEAR THAT AN INJECTION ROOM IS A POLITICAL QUESTION

– Kenneth A. Balfelt has left his fingerprint on the agenda and on the debate. He has successfully managed to reach those working in the field. There is no doubt that anyone who has a social insight can relate to it – that includes journalists, politicians and practitioners in the Copenhagen area. We can use it as a framework for common reference, says the leader of Projekt Udenfor (Outsider Project) and former spokesman for Narkotikarådet (Narcotics Council), Preben Brandt.

He is of the principal view that one cannot be engaged in people and people's conditions without involving artistic dimensions in them. There is a need for a common language so that people working in, and with, these issues can enter into a dialogue with society. The common language can be artistic or political because purely specialist language is not suited to a discussion. Therefore Preben Brandt grasps the chance



Collaboration with Outsider Project (ProjektUdenfor), chairman Preben Brandt and nurse Line Ervolder Christensen.

when, for example, artists want to involve him in projects.

– For me, it is a very natural part of my work, and I am happy when artists involve themselves with specialised subjects in a concrete way. Kenneth surprised me by being so professionally well read and so knowledgeable on the concrete matters. Even though he came

to discuss them, he was well prepared, and I think that made the discussion fruitful and exciting, he says.

Preben Brandt related to the injection room as a happening, which irritated some, but surprised the majority. Suddenly it was there, without any drama. It switched off the warning lights and made it easier to discuss injection rooms. So even though the injection room is still not legal, the situation became more relaxed.

– I believe that the lack of drama around the injection room has led to several institutional offers saying: okay, we will allow it – albeit discreetly – here in our institution. Therefore I believe that many have benefitted from the project, says Preben Brandt.

The injection room would have been a social project if there were users there getting their fix. Instead the project came to clarify the fact that it is all about politics. And as an artistic project it is more effective, he concludes today:

– Now the project has shown that creating an injection room is possible, but still there are some who will decide whether such an innocent

happening can be carried through or not. So, for me, it turned out to be the right project. Making an entire injection room and equipping it so it could be used, well aware that there were addicts walking around whose lives could possibly be saved in those weeks it was open, was a strong statement. For me it is even more provocative that it wasn't allowed to happen. Things were pushed to the extremes because we all knew that it would be shut down if people were allowed to inject themselves in there.



The hygienic hospital equipment.

The way he sees it, the injection room was an artwork, even though it was equipped so people could get their fix down there. It had the facilities, it was realistic, but the placement under ground made it claustrophobic. He can still see the injection room in his memory, so he concludes that it has made an impression on him.

– It was made with

a sense for the aesthetic, it was harmonic, the colours were delicate and matched each other. It was not made in a slovenly manner. He had been more than meticulous, extremely thorough; in fact, astoundingly thorough, says Preben Brandt.

He preferred the humane expression in the room, as opposed to the traditionally clinical expression, which he points out is regrettably still in fashion.

– *They have begun to paint with different colours in hospitals. I think the times are changing. I can certainly imagine that someone like Kenneth has his finger on the pulse and senses the new attitudes and viewpoints on what is right and wrong, and in this way he starts up the process. In the same way I also believe that the project has had an impact,* he says.

Preben Brandt estimates that, in addition, the project has also been meaningful for the development which has taken place over the last three or four years.

– *There are fewer and fewer drug addicts who use homeless institutions, fewer drug addicts who constantly live outside of established society the whole time. More and more drug addicts are in nuanced and clearly compiled treatment programmes. There are more and more drug addicts who live ordinary lives*



Nurse uniform designed by Jason Dodge for the project. Stay with me (bliv hos mig), but if you roll up the sleeve and cover the B, then it says "life in me".

with a wife and children and are maybe even employed, even though they are active and take drugs, Preben Brandt concludes.

But even though the everyday lives seem brighter for many drug addicts, there is still a group for whom Preben Brandt cannot see any positive changes. These are the addicts living under the toughest conditions.

– *It is precisely this group that the injection room project is really for. But they have not had any positive outcome from the project or from many of the other things that have been set in motion. We, who are engaged in this field, are a bunch of twits. That applies to Kenneth, and it applies to me. Kenneth couldn't get the addicts who live under the worst conditions into the injection room, because it was too pleasant. The fact that it was pleasant sent out some signals about the slightly nicer drug addicts,* says Preben Brandt.

The discussion always comes to rest on the problems of those who are slightly better off. Preben Brandt tries to solve this challenge from a qualified point of view, and he calls for artists who, like Kenneth A. Balfelt, can come up with an idea on how one can solve the problems of those in the most desperate situations. One of the barriers is that those excluded most of all are also those who are the most petit bourgeois. These people are also simultaneously trying to distance themselves from the lower middle-class.

– *Basically, the absolute weakest and the most excluded will find the injection room far out. But one cannot make an injection room on petit bourgeois premises. It would have been kitsch. One could make it on clinical premises or around disordered premises. It would still not have satisfied the petit bourgeois thinking. I don't know how one should do it – it isn't easy. I have been together with many of these people. As soon as it begins to get a little better, they begin to think of small bric-a-brac figures – a little elephant from the hardware shop and small, cute doilies.*

It is almost painful that they have lived outside society for so long and then their big dreams are a little crocheted doily.

It is all about a common language. It is not just a spoken language – it is also a pictorial language. One ought to have a place – even if we don't know where it is, and we can't totally understand it. It is so different from our language, and this is why we misunderstand one another, explains Preben Brandt.

Preben Brandt believes that the project has been a considerable contribution to society by raising an important debate, by showing a humane design, and as a part of the process that has made many of the drug addicts more acceptable and less marginalised. Therefore, he wouldn't hesitate to go out of his way in order to support similar projects, because he believes that they make a difference and have a purpose.

– I think there is a future in blending artistic expression with debates and with social work. It is a good thing, if one can mix it more. That we meet, develop and cooperate – that is important, says Preben Brandt.

SOPHIE HÆSTORP ANDERSEN – SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC POLITICIAN: A HAPPENING BECAME A PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

One hears the truth from children, drunken people – and artists, says Sophie Hæstorp Andersen. They can tell us some truths, provoke and push things to the extremes. In 2001 she was elected into Parliament as a representative for the Social Democrats with the injection room as one of her key issues. She decided to support the injection room project, even though she predicted that Kenneth A. Balfelt could run into problems.

– I thought that there would be people injecting themselves down there. I had heard that he was in contact with the police about a tolerance policy, as it was called, which would mean that they would turn a blind

eye to what happened. But the project got so much media attention that the police could not let it go. They began to distance themselves from the project. After this happened, I no longer had any expectations that there would be anyone injecting themselves, says Sophie Hæstorp Andersen.



Politician Sophie Hæstorp Andersen at the opening of the injection room. At the end of the project she and Balfelt arranged a press conference about the issue.

She wanted to show that there are also politicians who are in favour of injection rooms in Denmark. Therefore she was present at the opening of the injection room, she requested that *Folketingets Sundhedsudvalg* (The Parliamentary Health Committee) should participate and she took part in a press conference together with Kenneth A. Balfelt.

– He raised this matter with political intentions, and I took the baton from him. Together with others, I attempted to raise the profile of the case higher. This was clearly the goal when placing myself alongside him, she says.

Before Sophie Hæstorp Andersen was elected to Parliament the injection rooms were not on the Social Democrats' agenda, and the then Prime Minister, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and justice minister, Frank Jensen, were directly opposed to them. The argument was, amongst other things, that Denmark had signed international conventions on drugs. Sophie Hæstorp Andersen became the spokesperson on narcotics policy and she managed to get the party to change course. At first the party supported a decision-making proposal from SF (Socialist People's Party) on free heroin to the hardest burdened drug addicts.

And later, as spokeswoman on narcotics policy, she was able to bring about a decision-making proposal in 2003 on injection rooms, or health-care rooms, as they came to be known in parliament.

– I think that Kenneth was a strong, influential collaborator in the process that was set in motion by the party, and which meant that the Social Democrats moved themselves so powerfully as they did in that period, she says, and explains that the sceptical party members slowly but surely changed their opinions – firstly, when they discussed free heroin, and later when the media set the focus on injection rooms in connection with Kenneth A. Balfelt's fixerumsprojekt.

However, Sophie Hæstorp Andersen needed to explain to her party colleagues that there was a difference in the art project and the health-care rooms, which she put on the agenda with the decision-making proposal. It was not about placing a healthcare room in all empty bunkers in Copenhagen, or in workmen's carts.

Proposal for a parliamentary resolution as a direct result of *Protection Room*. The resolution was rejected but came up twice in the following year before it was finally accepted in 2012.

Beslutningsforslag nr. B 68 Folketinget 2002-03

Fremsat den 14. januar 2003 af Sophie Hæstorp Andersen (S), Lone Møller (S), Lene Garsdal (SF), Kamal Qureshi (SF), Villy Søvnald (SF), Naser Khader (RV) og Line Barfod (EL)

Forslag til folketingsbeslutning

om etablering af sundhedsrum for stofmisbrugere som et led i den integrerende og skadereducerende politik på narkotikaområdet

Folketinget pålægger regeringen inden udgangen af denne samling at fremsætte lovforslag, der etablerer de retlige rammer for en videnskabelig forsøgsordning med sundhedsrum, hvor stofmisbrugere uden sanktioner kan indtage medbragte stoffer under overvågning af og su-

Forsøget rettes mod de stofmisbrugere, der enten er uden for behandlingssystemet eller ikke profiterer i tilstrækkelig grad af den behandling de aktuelt er i, og hvis eneste aktuelle reelle alternativ er at indtage deres stoffer under ekstremt uhygiejniske omstændigheder med stor risiko



Governmental injection room FixStern in Hamburg which Balfelt visited as part of his research.

– When I look back, the process was extremely educational for me. It showed me that I should have a pedagogical responsibility towards other people. It was important for me to clarify what it was I wanted. They were to be ordered and hygienic places where

there was a good environment, with heating, the possibility to get a bath, and the possibility of chatting about treatment or getting infected areas cleaned up, says Sophie Hæstorp Andersen.

According to her, it is important to debate the drug addicts' situation. Neither the police nor people living outside of Istedgade and Halmtorvet have any idea about the situation of impoverishment and degradation that the Danish drug addicts live under. The population's understanding is a necessity in order to support healthcare rooms. Kenneth A. Balfelt has contributed by making the debate more tangible, because the injection room physically existed, and was not just an abstract idea.

– There are 70 healthcare rooms around Europe but I cannot get a single Danish journalist to visit them in Hamburg or Flensburg. Kenneth showed an example here at home, says Sophie Hæstorp Andersen.

For her it wasn't so important that the injection room was an art project. She sees the greatest advantage in that it was a visual representation of a problem.

– I think Kenneth was a pioneer was a pioneer activist on the matter. There are residents in Vesterbro who have started an association that, amongst other things, stages theatre. They reach out in the same way and engage other people visually, instead of the usual sitting and writing letters to the council and the politicians in Christiansborg, says Sophie Hæstorp Andersen.

Another strength of the project was that it was possible to get to speak with the people the project is concerned with. If Sophie Hæstorp Andersen visits Maria Kirkeplads square people disappear before she can manage to say a word.

– This project became to a large degree sought out by those who were in need. And that was great. This wasn't an elitist project, which only works on paper. It was something that the users themselves could also use, she says.

She praises the aesthetic furnishing of the injection room, which goes against the tendency to place the homeless and drug addicts in used furniture and in derelict neighbourhoods. And she stresses that Kenneth A. Balfelt has been given the job of renovating Mændenes Hjem (Shelter for homeless men).

– It is fantastic that he got this issue onto the agenda, that those who live on the absolute bottom rung of the societal ladder also have the right to joy, aesthetics, and pleasant colours in their daily life. That their days shouldn't only consist of the grey pavements that street life has to offer. This, I think, is really worthy. It is another discussion: should culture be for all, and should it also extend to those who do not have the means themselves? As a social democrat I can say that it is one of our key issues, says Sophie Hæstorp Andersen.

KENNETH A. BALFELT – ARTIST: THE DEBATE WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PROVOCATION

The point of creating an injection room was to give a new perspective to the debate about injection rooms. Therefore the project shouldn't only be presented as part of an art exhibition. With this in mind, Kenneth A. Balfelt contacted the media in order to present his project. The media were told that an injection room was opening on Halmtorvet. The aim was to get the media to write about the project and, in this way, to get the debate going.

But as the injection room was, and is, illegal in Denmark, the big question was how the police would react to having something of this kind placed a few meters from the biggest police station in the country. So Kenneth A. Balfelt contacted the police. He began with the local police, who informed him that as long as they couldn't see anything going on in the street, then they wouldn't do anything. But as a precaution, the local police referred him to the narcotics unit. Here the project was met with interest and he was referred to the Commissioner of Police. At this point the project had already been broadcast in the media, and the first politicians had joined up to react against the project. So the message from the Police Commissioner was that the injection room was illegal and that establishing it would be punished with 20 to 30 days imprisonment. Kenneth A. Balfelt received this message a few days before the injection room was due to open. He discussed the decision with the nurses and the architect students who, at this point, were his closest collaborators.

– I had no ambition to go to jail. It would not contribute to the project, if the project had become a scandal and the injection room closed down on the first day. My goal was to get a multi-faceted debate. Therefore we agreed that the drug addicts could come to the injection room, get counselling and equipment, and then would have to go up on the hillock, where they usually go, to get their fix. In this way we were able to exhibit the

paradox that there were some people who wanted to help and were able to, but were not allowed to, says Kenneth A. Balfelt.

But he and his closest collaborators kept the decision to themselves. Towards the media the information continued to be that people would be allowed to inject themselves in the injection room. They said this in order to be sure that the media would remain interested in the project. And it worked. It was reported in around 30 newspaper articles, eight radio and six shows during the 3 weeks the project ran for, and for some time afterwards.

Kenneth A. Balfelt is, himself, satisfied with the project. He believes that it was received well and that the debate was multi-faceted.

– I knew how an injection room could be, which people could run it, where it could be and how it should be run, says Kenneth A. Balfelt and adds:

– Furthermore it became a platform for a debate and the fantastic thing was that drug addicts stood together with non-users and talked together. And they could be together in an air-raid shelter that was 12 meters long and 2 meters in width and height. Until then there had not been any initiatives taken where the two groups were brought together in the same room for a discussion.

The project has meant that he himself has become convinced that injection rooms are necessary. He became convinced during the project after he had been told a couple of times of the risks there are for HIV, hepatitis, infections and overdoses, when drug abusers are reduced to getting their fix on the street.

– The project is one of the most important things I have done in my life. It has given me a lot of self-confidence to complete my visions. And the project has proved that art can contribute to society as a valuable partner when we need to discuss important societal relations, says Kenneth A. Balfelt.



Through a process with meetings and the publishing of book about the conference and suggestions we finally managed to get 12,2 million Danish Kroner (app. EUR 1,6 million) from the Ministry of Health and form a partnership with Copenhagen Municipality to establish and run Dugnad Center Vesterbro. Kenneth was part of the board of Dugnad Center Vesterbro and co-created the interior and courtyard design.



After the injection room project Kenneth A. Balfelt is now interviewed in many different contexts, which have nothing to do with the world of art. He has, amongst other things, been interviewed as part of a research project in the area of narcotics. And in a journalistic interview he has been questioned on the social aspects of the new café milieu on Halmtorvet.

– It is interesting that I, as an artist, have become involved in debate and research. I am taken seriously and am seen as an actor, of expert background, who can contribute with knowledge just like people from other specialist areas – like, for example, a doctor or a social worker.

Marginalisation occurs in language and in our approach and attitude towards it. When you see the words drug addict and drug abuser, you see a shabby, self-destructive person who has made the most stupid choice one could make. As if they have taken the most ridiculously stupid, foolish decision one can take in life.

But there are so many other facets to these people. And there is a reason that these people place themselves in this situation. They have been exposed to a terribly traumatic experience. Drug abusers choose the best alternative for themselves that society has to offer.

They would rather prostitute themselves, criminalise themselves, take drugs, be homeless and burn bridges to family and friends in order to get the peace which taking drugs gives them. They would rather take drugs than confront the shame, the guilt and the terribly depressive feelings in their lives. The fact that they take drugs is a small detail.

The whole shit situation occurs because the drugs are criminalised. But those who take drugs are still people and just as different, with just as many facets and experiences, and they have just as much to draw on as we others have. That's the way I regard it now, says Kenneth A. Balfelt.



Radical Horizontality – Shelter for Men

The new entrance of the building has opened up the building to the main street. The materials are very stable and well known for Copenhagen and suits the red brick building – e.g. a copper porch roof. In order to break the strict symmetry of the building the artist made a shopping like window. Through the contrast of the old solid materials (copper and oak) and old citizen institutions style (church, town hall, etc.) and new forms (frame, font, flower wood carving) an unresolved tension between something stable and something that is modern, and points forward, is created. This is the new invitation.

– Go back home, they always used to say when I rang their doorbell. Back then I could almost never get into Mændenes Hjem (shelter for homeless men), says Charly. He was born 31 years ago in a place far away from Denmark. His voice is slurred and it takes a little while before the words are formed into a sentence. Charly has been coming to the male refuge since he was 18 years old. – It is much better now, because now they always let me in. I can get warm when it is cold and get help, says Charly.

BY LISE BLOM

The neighbourhood behind the central railway station in Copenhagen is, amongst other things, home to hotels, porn shops, prostitutes and drug addicts. Mændenes Hjem is situated here. Three years ago the entrance was through a gate in a side street leading onto the area's main street, Istedgade. When Charly needed help or a break from the hard life on the street, he would ring the buzzer on the gate. From there he got into the reception. In the reception he had to explain who he was and what his reasons were for being in the shelter. The shelter's staff sat behind a glass window and decided whether he could come in or had to remain outside. Inside there were four small rooms – one with computers, one was a



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Interior design of café, living rooms, TV-room, canteen and reception of a shelter for the homeless in central Copenhagen.

With artist FOS assisted by design student Charlott Karlsson, architect Helle Gade Jensen and interior designers Loop.
2002-2006.

Mændenes Hjem is a shelter for the homeless near the central railway station in Copenhagen. It is a place for men who are homeless and also those who have mental and/or addiction problems. Most of the users are drug addicts. The ground floor contains services like cafés, a dining room, nurses, social workers, free syringes, etc. for both men and women

In 2002 we were asked by Mændenes Hjem to redesign the ground floor interior of the place.

Over a 9 month period we carried out research at the place in order to gain a better understanding of the way the institution worked and how the staff and visitors used the place. We gathered information about homelessness and drug addiction. We also looked at the relationship between institutions, architecture and behaviour – how architecture makes certain types of behaviour possible, whilst preventing others. From the research we developed a set of values that led the design process.

Our methodological approach embodies our values, thus allowing them to take physical form. To transform from mere ideals into lived reality.

The following have been implemented:

- New entrance and refurbished old entrance (now back door)
- Floor cover – a combination of wood and grey-black linoleum
- Bathroom with coloured tiles and a chandelier
- New sleeping, counselling and observation room
- New windows with opal film with artists' drawings cut out
- Caravan meeting room
- Oak tables and (low) bar desk
- Tiled wall in dining room with large communal table
- Sculptural room divider for TV room
- Wooden carved box with beer tap providing water on draught
- Furniture, acoustic ceiling, lighting, face mirror, etc.

Half roof over the new entrance and easy seating for the TV room is still awaiting financing.

It was our intention to remake the interior design so that a more fruitful, less insecure and less hierarchical dialogue could take place. Before, the place was characterised by a very traditional institutional architecture that created distance between the staff and the users. The entrance reception area was a case in point like a border control post where the staff were situated looking out and down at the people asking to be admitted into the place. It was in this area that most of the violent incidents in the institution took place.

The aim of our design was to downplay the 'patient-doctor' relationship in favour of a less hierarchical atmosphere where both staff and users could bring out their personalities. In this way, we hope the dialogue in the place is based on equality, common goals and interests, rather than the institution that wants to change me. The refurbishment, as well as other initiatives, has resulted in more people than ever using the institution than in its 97 year history.

VIDEO *Ingen figur er hel*

<http://vimeo.com/86771427>

canteen, one had a chocolate and coffee machine and one was a TV and sitting room. Now and then people could sleep overnight in the canteen.

Some of those who used the shelter felt that the staff in the reception were petty officials, and their manner sometimes provoked them into violent conflict.

The shelter's staff worked primarily in the area they were assigned to, and those who were on duty in the reception regularly checked through the rooms, where they didn't feel especially appreciated or safe. A former staff member tells how they could hear a choir of whispering voices run from one room to the next, as warning that the staff were carrying out an inspection.

The staff and their walkie-talkie system was often commented on: Here comes the guard with that fucking walkie – don't you want a set of handcuffs as well?

– Many of the staff felt that they were merely supervisors when they worked in the rooms. They didn't feel as if their role as social workers was being used effectively if they were telling people off, setting limits and keeping check on things. As social workers we have so much more to offer; we can talk to people, provide services and help people to move on. But it wasn't presented well enough to those who use the shelter, because our role as supervisors took too much space, says the superintendent of Mændenes Hjem, Robert Olsen.

He and the staff agreed that the shelter was in need of more than just paint and new linoleum in order to renovate the worn out rooms. The physical refurbishment of the rooms should express their value in relation to this kind of social work. Therefore the two artists, Kenneth A. Balfelt and FOS, were given the job. Kenneth A. Balfelt describes the task:

– We needed to shift the visual impressions by tearing down walls, opening the rooms and making the space more welcoming. We believe



The "East German Border Control" like former reception/control post. There is glass so you can see but not articulate your concern with coming. The staff comes to the door and addresses you. Most conflicts at Mændenes Hjem took place in this area.

that it creates a better interaction between the staff and those who use the shelter. An interaction where people are not being scared away but feel welcome, visually and mentally. It's all about programming the place so people get a better feeling of solidarity and community whilst they are here. In this way they can be relieved from their loneliness, enter a community and receive help, says Kenneth A. Balfelt.

FOS goes on to explain that their work in renovating the rooms is all about meeting people at the point where they are in their lives. And as

Only hard or uncomfortable furniture was available for relaxing after hard life in the streets or drug intake. Here's someone taking a nap.



there are, for example, many drug users who use Mændenes Hjem, one of the tasks is to design a chair where they can sit comfortably whilst they flake out.

– *There will be lots of naive people claiming that by that by providing a drug addict a comfortable chair, then we also approve of what he does,* says FOS, and adds that an uncomfortable chair does not reduce the drug addict's need to flake out.

– *You have to accept some things that you normally wouldn't accept. It is easy to have something in common with people who are like yourself. But in order to create a modern community, it is necessary to set aside your own values,* explains FOS.

In renovating Mændenes Hjem, Kenneth A. Balfelt describes their role as social translators. In order to prepare they spoke to those who use the shelter, read reports and visited other social institutions with the same target groups. They spoke with staff in order to get a feel of things from the social workers' perspective. The same approach was used to gain an idea of the architect's work methods. Therefore their artistic considerations also incorporate pedagogical ideas as well as ideas of interior design, which these professions utilise.

In order to investigate the needs of those who use the shelter, the artists made a couple of designs – and architect students held a workshop. At nine 'o' clock in the morning they set up a table with coffee, tea and cigarettes in the middle of the corridor so that those using the shelter either had to walk around it or sit down.

– *By employing methods of user-involvement in their work, I think they have done some things which are interesting in relation to the pedagogical*



Workshop for users of Mændenes Hjem about the disposition and uses of spaces.

work. We have people coming here who are not very skilled verbally. They got the chance to express themselves in the workshop, where they could write and draw on wall sheets, and in this way express themselves and put forward their ideas, says Robert Olsen.

The artists have boiled down the many inputs from the research phase into a number of ideas and values which are built on the values Mændenes Hjem strives for, together with their own sense of what is ethically right and humane.

2006 RELATIONSHIPS – (GOODBYE TO THE PETTY OFFICIALS)

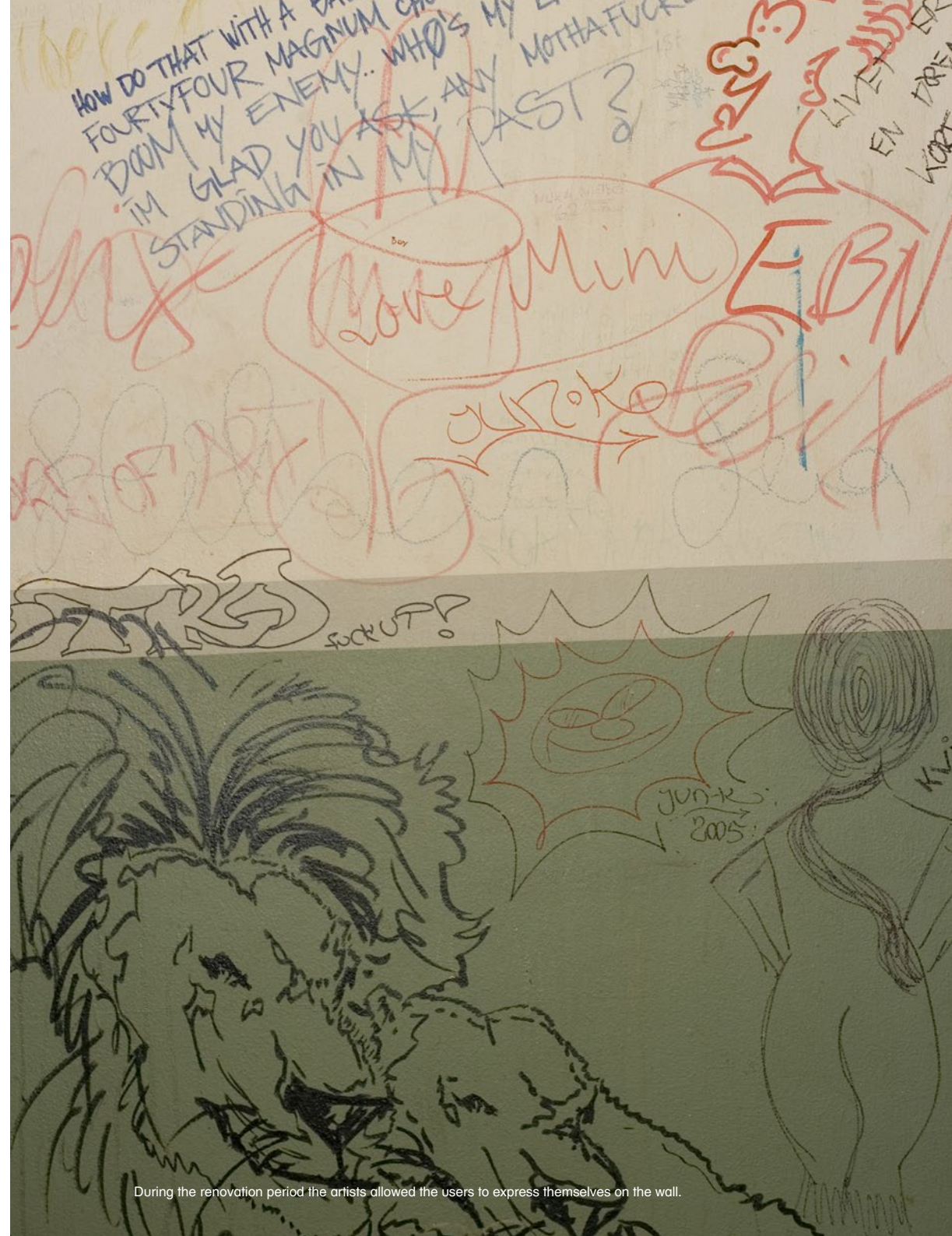
We meet Allan at the tap by the entrance to the rooms at Mændenes Hjem. Allan has been coming here for almost twenty years. He thinks that the tap is beautiful – even though he would prefer if beer came out of it – and he is enthusiastic about the changes at Mændenes Hjem.

– *The rooms at Mændenes Hjem have become more human. We interact with each other more now. The rooms have been formed into one and the staff come out instead of locking themselves in the office. Everyone who comes here needs something. Some need warmth, others buy something to eat, and if you have problems you can talk to the staff about them. They look after the cafe and come over and chat, says Allan.*

– *Now the rooms can better meet the needs of those using the shelter, adds Michael Pedersen. He has been a nurse at Mændenes Hjem for 3 years.*

– *There is no doubt that there is a greater equality in the rooms we have now. I have a better relationship to many of the men who come here. The rooms set the stage for dialogue and spending time together, says Michael Pedersen.*

In the Spring of 2006 the conversion of the ground floor of Mændenes Hjem is almost complete. The biggest changes have taken place over



During the renovation period the artists allowed the users to express themselves on the wall.

three years – namely the relocation of the entrance and the merging of the rooms; but it is not until now that the paint on the the walls and the correct lighting create coherence in the space. And it's also now that the caravan can be used as a room within the space – as an alternative room for conversation.



The first room you entered in the old interior design after the reception was the billiard room. It was rarely used.

– *Nowadays we get to know people much better, so the contact with them has become different*, says Vibeke Toft-Bruun. She is a social education worker at the contact center (kontaktstedet), and as a result of the refurnishment and restructuring, her work has changed from outreach work

on the street to being primarily concentrated in the rooms.

– *Now I can form contact with people better. For some, being here is all they need. We give those people time, until they feel like talking to us. The conversation might begin in the bar. In the beginning it often centres around small things.*

And then the conversation can



The old canteen. With gray linoleum, fluorescent lights and much to much space.

get deeper and more concrete afterwards, as we get to know each other – just like when ordinary people meet each other, she says.

She reckons that the new work structure shows more respect for those using the shelter, and that the human relations between the staff and the visitors has improved. Max, who has been coming to Mændenes Hjem for 16 years, is also of the same opinion.

– *Now the staff are more down to earth. To a larger extent they are on our level much more than when they used to take us in, sitting behind the glass partition. Back then, they were arrogant. They say it themselves, when they sit in the reception. I would be the same if I worked under similar conditions. In a place like that you start to feel superior to other people*, says Max.

He believes that Mændenes Hjem is the only place where people can be themselves.

– *The freedom here is good. You get to see how people really are. Perhaps it might be annoying listening to some, but then at least you know what they are like*, says Max.

CONFLICTS

Robert Olsen is the superintendent of Mændenes Hjem, and prior to the interview he is looking for a vacant room.

– *In institutional environments there are two fixed bases: the reception is one and the superintendent's office is the other. One can call them symbols of patriarchy – now they are gone. It is interesting for both the staff and those using the shelter, that they no longer exist*, he says.

As superintendent over the last 13 years, it is his responsibility that the values of Mændenes Hjem are carried out in real life. It has always revolved around the idea that the staff should be open, welcoming and helpful, when the men come in through the door. And, at the same time,

they should be able to decide who comes in the door – whether they are mentally or physically ill or are in need of acute help in some other way. Even though the values then and now are principally the same, it is necessary for the staff themselves to develop in order to be able to relate to the current problems that the men have.

– *When you take a sledgehammer and knock down the reception – the one found in pretty much all reception centres and hostels – then you force the staff to act in a new way. The staff need to find new ways of relating to those who use the shelter. And these ways should develop and improve in an ongoing process,* says Robert Olsen.

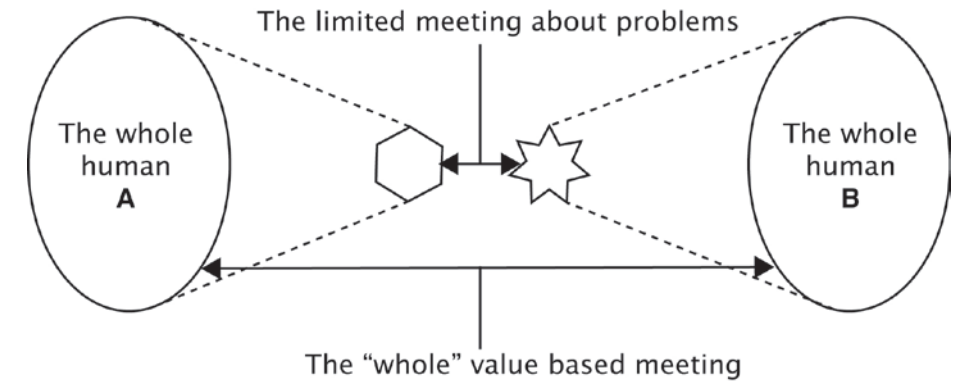
Rasmus Koberg Christiansen, a social education worker at the contact center, is one of the staff who have experienced what the opening of Mændenes Hjem has meant for those using it as well as the staff.

– *In the beginning we were overrun. It was problematic that suddenly so much pressure came on Mændenes Hjem, so we didn't get much social work done. We were bodyguards from when we arrived until when we left, and it was extremely dissatisfying. That's not the work we're here for,* says Rasmus Koberg Christiansen.

Once the reception disappeared the number of visitors rose, new groups came and many wanted to test the shelter's limits. That created a rise in the number of conflicts, which reached a head towards the end of 2004.

– *We were scolding people all the time and had to constantly shout "stop that!" and "what the heck are you doing?" So we created a strategy where there were always plenty of staff members in the rooms, to function both as guards and to talk with the men. We made people aware of what was unacceptable in the rooms. The people using the rooms have understood this. So now Mændenes Hjem has become a free space from the streets, where the men can come in, relax and make use of our offer,* says Rasmus Koberg Christiansen and adds, with a smile, that now in

autumn 2006, when this interview takes place, he can go eight hours at work without having to raise his voice once.



The main task for the artists was to accommodate a more whole and value based meeting.

RESOLVING CONFLICTS

On the outside, the wall to the Bjælkehytten (log cabin) is clad with wood, so you feel as if you are in a cabin in the mountains. Previously this room housed the reception. Now you walk in to a large room, which reminds you of a couchette coach on a train. Along the walls are bunks, which can be folded down so that during the day they can be used as sofas. The association with a train comes from the fact that lots of homeless people have tried to sleep on trains. Here we meet Michael Pedersen from the Healthcare Department (sygeplejen). He explains that many who come here are drug addicts and those who are on cocaine, in particular, can be awake for days, until they come down. Here they can get some sleep whilst, at the same time, the nursing staff can keep them under observation.

Michael Pedersen formerly worked exclusively as a nurse; now he also works in the rooms. The role creates new possibilities and challenges.

WORK PROCESS FOR MÆDENES HJEM 2002-06

PROJECT MANAGERS:

Kenneth Balleit
FOS

Psychological translation between management, user and manufacturers.
Physical translation between management, user and manufacturers.

ASSISTANTS

Helle Gade Jensen Architect
Charllotte Karlsson Designer

Each component in this diagram has a practical as well as a theoretical function. The purpose of this is to create a frame for the interior, where physical aspects also have a psychological quality.

First of all, the vision, which acts as an umbrella for the overall set of values. Next, the psychological perspective, which is the basis for the physical elements.

Next, the material, which has two aspects: the physical materials to be used as well as their theoretical function, where the point is that the material contains the Story (the spatial-temporal story, or like the Bible) (wood, earth, rock).

This means that the story relates the overall features, like the room dividers in the interior.

Next, diversity, which should be seen as the tale (the individual tales that make up the Bible). The distribution of space locally in the room (chairs, lighting, cushions, noise and silence). Next, the abstract. This section consists of material without a function, the playful, apolitical, social, non-functional beings (decorations, statements, ornaments, water tank with beer tap).

RULES AND APPROACH

This describes the order of the individual steps.

The point in this structure is to seek as far as possible to only do one level at a time, so that each layer is completed in accordance with its own logic; to use an artistic approach in a practical task.

VISION optics (lens)

Anxiety is part of the community. Mændenes Hjem is a community we have chosen. Home design versus lifestyle design; the whole society must be accepted; the community is safety; power must be visible; love; the belief in a different view of life; you are not insane; neerumspyk polamuk; I am not "this" person here; the structure should not offer convincing treatment; randomness provides the building blocks; social concerns are a physical entity; no figure is complete; power should not contradict suggestions

The vision is the overall strategy throughout the process. It contains a constant reminder of the objectives, overall visions and specific working methods.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE mental direction

Mændenes Hjem is a community we have chosen
The community is safety
The structure should not offer convincing treatment
Randomness provides the building blocks

Social concerns are a physical entity
No figure is complete
Home design versus lifestyle design
Anti-geometric meeting place
The belief in a different view of life

The psychological perspective is a sort of ideological protocol. Values and direction for the process. The values act as a sort of answer sheet for judging suggested materials, aesthetics and design. The psychological frame must be applied by all involved parties to put various suggested materials, aesthetics and design ideas on the same mental track. The rule is that every sentence in this box must be applicable to the other boxes, i.e. not just the materials box.

MATERIALS environment

The community is safety
The structure should not offer convincing treatment
No figure is complete
The belief in a different view of life
Power should be visible

distribution of space
wooden columns
walls
floor
cantine
ceiling
levels
windows

The MATERIAL (the Story) is a translation of the psychological perspective where we use the above values as much as possible. The theoretical function is to create the actual distribution of space.

If possible, this part should be completed before the next step.

DIVERSITY atmosphere

Mændenes Hjem is a community we have chosen
Randomness provides the building blocks.
Social concerns are a physical entity.
Home design versus lifestyle design.
Anti-geometric meeting place.
The belief in a different view of life.

distribution of seating
details
local function
fanter
colours
lighting
wall-paper

DIVERSITY (the tale) is the decision about the mutual relations of the individual materials and objects. This is where diversity, a sense of space and randomness must be accomplished. This section deals with design objects, colours, lighting, placement etc.

If possible, this part should be completed before the next step.

ABSTRACTION context

Randomness provides the building blocks.
Social concerns are a physical entity.
No figure is complete.
The belief in a different view of life.

patterns
cups
ornaments
the personal

erstanding that perfection is not possible. Everything is relational, the abstract is a cross-section of social, political and functional types of language. The abstract offers a non-verbal language that makes it possible to draw lines to the sections above. This makes it possible to create a new context.

If possible, this part should be completed before the next step, which is to drink a beer.



Defining 'social'
iso-social is a group put together by the surrounding environment, social is all the ones who have chosen each other
anti-social is against any cooperation, a-social is unable to cooperate
resocial is an attempt at connectedness

For the design process the artists made a "dogme-like" plan for the procedure. This was based on the set of values they defined for the project. They started off by defining outer parts, e.g. walls, ceiling, floor, for then to work our way down to furniture, details and ornaments. Each of the values was then designated as important factors to one or more of the phases.

By the fact that he speaks more with those using the shelter, he gets to know them better and gets a greater insight into their healthcare problems. The challenges are that he has to deal with conflicts arising between the men to a much greater extent.

– In the past a conflict could take place through a window, where people could stand and act just as crazily as they wanted. Now they come inside our sphere; therefore it becomes necessary to deal with the person as an individual. It has brought changes to the way we handle conflicts. We need to take a closer look at each individual in order to see how we resolve a specific situation. It has created a greater capaciousness and a greater breadth to how we deal with the conflicts, says Michael Pedersen.

If the men consciously overstep the rules of the house then they are thrown out and temporarily banned. But in line with the staff approaching conflicts in a different way, the men have also gained a greater understanding of being banned. When the ban is over they can talk together again, which is important because those who use Mændenes Hjem typically do not have anywhere else to go.

– Having a conflict with a resident is not always bad. An understanding and respect is created when a conflict is resolved. It brings an enormous calm. The man might realise that the staff at Mændenes Hjem can deal with the fact that he flips out, and yet there is still place for him, says Michael Pedersen.

Allan's experience is that people are given lots of chances, so long as they behave decently.

– If we mess up, we get a bollocking. We have to listen to the staff, but they also listen to us. In this way, I believe, the staff are fair. If we are in the right in a case, then we are also given the right, says Allan.

TOILET CULTURE

The toilet at Mændenes Hjem has been the cause of many conflicts. Immediately after the elegant toilet opened, the drug addicts realised that it was an ideal place for drug consumption. And consumption rooms are illegal in Denmark. It created hours of queues for the toilet as well as conflicts amongst the men and with the staff. Finally, Mændenes Hjem had



The new toilet got closed due to too much succes. It was used as an injection room.

to face the consequences and, just like other institutions on Vesterbro, close the toilet to public use and instead redirect people to the toilets at the train station, for example.

– If we open the toilet for public use then it becomes a consumption room. It creates unrest and conflicts with pushers, people collecting money and drug abusers who don't have time to wait for each other. We can't work in that environment, so we need to curb the conflict situations that arise. And that is why we keep our toilet closed. Seen from a political perspective the toilet is closed because we are in need of a consumption room, where people can take their drugs in a dignified manner, says Robert Olsen, and adds that

things are now changing in relation to the people sleeping in the rooms being able to use the toilets and wash themselves.

– Many of the men who come to the shelter live only for their habit. When someone creates a space where they can do what is most

important to them, which is to get a fix, then conflicts arise. We are forced to act, and in this way we are given a controlling and directing role. We take on the policeman's role, but that's not why we're here. One minute we have to remonstrate with them and ask them to go somewhere else to get their fix – the addicts experience this as if we are treating them like dirt – and five minutes later we need to have an empathic nursing chat with the same man about a health problem, which is important for his health. The two things do not go together. We can't avoid discussions but we can limit the conflicts if the rooms, to some extent, give them the possibility of fixing up, says Michael Pedersen.

REFURBISHMENT

Allan visits Mændenes Hjem more often now than he did before. And he gets annoyed when he sees some men writing graffiti and vandalising the shelter, because he knows that it will be a long time before the shelter will be refurbished again. The whole thing makes him wonder what the total cost of the refurbishment might have been.

– I think that it is a little too nice. The decor reminds me of a lawyer's office. To me, it gives the impression that the organisation has a lot of money. But I know that the shelter hasn't got that much money, so I guess it is funds that have paid for the refurbishment. But I shouldn't think about the money. I think that it is fine to be gilded. Those who aren't satisfied should be ashamed of themselves, says Allan.

Even though he is impressed with what they have been given, he is still in doubt whether they deserve it. As a user of Mændenes Hjem he feels as if he is a part of the lowest echelon of society.

– I never thought that Mændenes Hjem would ever look so fine, says Allan.

Max believes that the renovation has made the shelter more pleasant, but it has become too institution-esque for his taste.



The café with a low bar desk and a central and warm light 'jam jar' chandelier lit-up big oak table. Wooden floor for café area and institutional linoleum road way towards social workers office and nurse. The arch shows where the old walls where.

– Designers – If you are doing something to Mændenes Hjem, then you should know that people here need warmth, security and happiness. I think you could have done better, Max underlines.

– I don't like the design. It is too cold, and is lacking in cosiness. If it were up to me, there would be wallpaper with palm trees and a sandy beach. It might be artificial, but you could dream yourself away while you were sitting there slumped, coming down. Right now there is nothing to look at, says Max.

There are certain things in the refurbishments he thinks suit the place well. He sits by one of the solid oak tables in the canteen, which are to

his liking because they express a tradition and remind him of the vikings.

– *The large dining table is okay. It is better if you can eat together, rather than if you need to eat apart, says Max.*

A sculptural room divider made from light wood creates a room within the room, where you can watch TV. “Kindling”, Max calls the room divider.

– *It is awful to look at and reminds you of chaos. It’s nothing we need to be looking at. Most of us feel that in reality it would be better suited to a prison, where there is order, and where you know the limits.*

No matter whether you like the refurbishment or not, the decor is generating conversation.

– *The fantastic thing with the project is that it gives cause for dialogue.*

The experiences of the men who visit the shelter are just like those of others. Some come in and say what the heck has happened here, whilst

others think that it is fantastic. The caravan

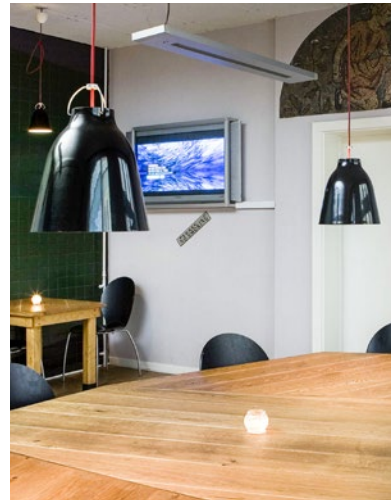
is the thing I have had most dialogue with the men about. It is striking

when you come into the room and a point of valuable discussion

– no matter whether people think it is ugly or fantastic. When the

caravan is covered with those small metal plates, I started to think about the pancake house in the Hansel and Gretel fairytale, says Kurt Jensen with a smile. But even though the caravan stimulated his imagination, he doesn’t think that it makes a difference whether a conversation takes place in an office or in an untraditional place. He believes that the only thing people are interested in is whether they can get help or not.

When the caravan is covered with those small metal plates, I started to think about the pancake house in the Hansel and Gretel fairytale, says Kurt Jensen with a smile. But even though the caravan stimulated his imagination, he doesn’t think that it makes a difference whether a conversation takes place in an office or in an untraditional place. He believes that the only thing people are interested in is whether they can get help or not.



The new dining table.



TV lounge.

artists have been in the shelter there has been a curiosity towards them and their work. Many of the men feel that this is different and exciting. They realise that some thought has been put into this project; thoughts which they haven’t been approached with before. It gives rise to a valuable and different experience. It is not bad for a drop-in centre, being able to gain such an experience, says Michael Pedersen.

– *When I first saw the workers cover the caravan with those small metal plates, I started to think about the pancake house in the Hansel and Gretel fairytale, says Kurt Jensen with a smile. But even though the caravan stimulated his imagination, he doesn’t think that it makes a difference whether a conversation takes place in an office or in an untraditional place. He believes that the only thing people are interested in is whether they can get help or not.*

Jam jar chandelier as focus light around the central café table.





FELLOWSHIP

Kurt Jensen sits at the bar in the cafe. Here the large table symbolises community, and the bar top is low so it doesn't feel like a counter. The surroundings signal that here you can meet without obligation and speak about this and that.

The old original relief.

Due to homelessness, Kurt Jensen has lived at Mændenes Hjem for eight months. Nine years ago he also spent some time in the shelter.

– *The rooms are cosier than they were before, he states.*

At the back of the rooms the sculptural room divider creates a room within the room. On the room divider itself hangs a flat screen television, so only the guests who are inside can see it. The room is decorated like a living room with armchairs and a coffee table.

– *When I first saw the room divider I thought that it looked as if a joiner had just been paid and had bought a crate of beers, before he put it up. But then I realised that it reminded me of a bird, says Aksel Kjeldsen.*

This time around he has been living at Mændenes Hjem for 16 days, whilst he is waiting for a new home. In periods of his life he has been harboured at either Mændenes Hjem or other drop-in shelters, where he has received

The old dining room was characterised by people eating alone. In the new interior a big solid wooden dining table is placed centrally. Big enough so you do not sit too close to others but still you sit with others and can interact.



help to get back on course. He describes the stays as a mixed pleasure – but mostly with positive experiences.

– *Mændenes Hjem is one of the best. And it has become nicer and nicer. The staff function fantastically. The guests are pretty much the same as they usually are. Things just get tumultuous when people deal with drugs. The staff have warm enough hearts, but they have cool heads when they throw people out. They do it in a decent way, without using either arm-locks or leg locks, says Aksel Kjeldsen.*

He'd like to scotch people's prejudice about the place. It is not only the mentally ill or drug addicts who use Mændenes Hjem. He and others using the shelter are educated and have had jobs, until a divorce sent them on a drunken social collapse. And in the periods where he stays at Mændenes Hjem, he is happy that he can also talk about art and philosophy with others staying at the shelter. Here he can explore the peculiar room divider made of kindling to discover a bird. He can bring Storm P (writer/cartoonist) into a discussion, when there is talk of a lamp made from used jam jars, and he can lark about with the thirsty men who expect the taste of beer when they drink from the new tap.

The lamp, which is made from jam jars, and the figure which hides in the room divider, symbolize, in the artist's view, the different energies and the alternative outlook on life, which is found in Mændenes Hjem.



A large tile-wall fills the whole side of the dining room and with a Klondike like roof and desk at the food serving point.

– Here there is space for difference. People are good at respecting one another. Here there is more tolerance than there is in the streets. It's easy to say that you are tolerant when you live in Hellerup (upper-class suburb) and don't have to relate to others, in the way we have to do here, says Aksel Kjeldsen.

He points out that community is a practical necessity, because there are many nationalities in the shelter. And there is a lot of generosity. People share what they have – often it is cigarettes.

– Somehow Mændenes Hjem is also a home. It is homely here. And there are staff who help with all sorts of things, says Aksel Kjeldsen.

Kurt Jensen doesn't experience a great sense of community. In his opinion it feels as if people become introverted and only stay for short periods in the shelter in order to get warm or get a hold of someone they



Drinking water tap. Islamic wood cutting, Superman logo formed sink, and Danish draft beer tap.

know. It's at the large dining table that he experiences most sense of community, even though the pleasure is dependant on how the others at the table eat. Therefore he is happy that he has the option of sitting at one of the smaller tables.

THE FLAKE OUT SECTION

– My jacket was still there when I woke up, says Allan.

The six flake out boxes have been a big success amongst the men using the shelter, and they are used frequently. The box can be folded out to a deck chair, where one's head is partially shielded by the sides of the box from sound and light. The back can be opened so personal items can be stored without danger of being stolen while you are asleep.

– The flake out section is a really good offer for those using the shelter. They have the chance to get some rest, and when they have rested they can speak to us, says Rasmus Koberg Christiansen.

THE CARAVAN

The caravan is a different kind of space within the room, which can be used for conversation. As in a traditional caravan, along its length it has two cushioned benches with a table in between. The difference between this caravan and a traditional caravan is the view to the kitchen and cafe in Mændenes Hjem, instead of the countryside. The idea of placing a caravan in Mændenes Hjem came from one of the men, when the artists held a workshop. The artists grasped the association, because a caravan is precisely something that many homeless people would like to live in. The illusion within is totally realised and is completed by a jigsaw on the table. Rasmus Koberg Christiansen, who is a social education worker, sits relaxed and leans against the backrest. You sit close to one another and the cosy space invites you to relax. The idea is that the



Injection equipment hand out furniture. Teak on the outside, as a symbol of acceptance of their choice of self-medication, and clinical flecked laminate to suggest hygienic care taking.

Flake out deck chairs as they are called. Originally designed as powernappers for business people but ideal for drug addicts and tired homeless: You lie gracefully and ergonomically correct, you cannot fall out as your shoulders are inside the box, which also provides some sound proofing, and you can have your belongings under the chair back.

visitors to the shelter and the staff can be more informal here than they are in a traditional office.

– *The caravan’s greatest strength is that you can talk to the men about matters which have no direct connection to their social situation. The contact center office is more traditional with a writing desk, computer and office chairs. There the staff have their caps on, and residents answer questions. In the caravan you don’t have the same way of relating as client and social worker. You can relax with each other, and it can produce a different conversation,* says Rasmus Koberg Christiansen.

Sometimes the homeless need concrete help to find a reception centre or to get a place in Mændenes Hjem. In other situations the staff member

can function as a mediator between a caseworker and the homeless man he/she hasn’t spoken to in half a year, because because they had a falling out. If the man has left a treatment institution, he can get help to get back in treatment. Other times a man may need a comforting shoulder, because he is upset that for years he hasn’t been able to pull himself together in order to go and visit his children at the children’s home. The conversation could also be a casual chat.

– *A man asked if maybe it was time to have a chat about the Eurovision Song Contest. He is extremely interested in the Eurovision Song Contest, and I had also told him that I was, too. I said “yes – let’s go in the caravan.” We sat down and turned on the radio, and I sat there for 45 minutes with this extremely hardcore alcoholic and hash addict and talked about the Eurovision Song Contest. It was really cosy and a fine way to spend time together,* says Rasmus Koberg Christiansen.

To outsiders, a conversation about the Eurovision Song Contest may sound like banal chit-chat, but it’s basically about building relations between those who use the shelter and the staff.

– *One of our most important tasks is building up relations so those using the shelter get to know us. So when things get serious, the man in question knows that the person he has built up a relationship with at Mændenes Hjem can help him to resolve his situation. The process can take years, and it can be a long time before the man accepts the help we can offer. The caravan is good for those relationship-building conversations, which don’t deal with concrete problems like, for example, cash benefit or treatment offers,* says Rasmus Koberg Christiansen.

Even though the staff have begun to use the caravan more and more, it is not yet fully integrated into the work of the employees. Rasmus Koberg Christiansen explains this by saying that they need to get used to using this new form of conversation room. They need to find out which

types of conversation work best in which room. And, he underlines, that it's not the room exclusively that has an influence on the meeting.

– We are very aware not to make the men into clients. But you shouldn't believe that you can cancel out the difference that is between us. We meet the men at eye-level, but we work here and they don't. The difference is that they arrive without having slept for three days, without receiving welfare help for half a year, without having seen their children for two years, and with their loved ones dead from an overdose, says Rasmus Koberg Christiansen.

NEW ROLES FOR THE STAFF

Katrine Damgaard is a social education worker at the contact center. She is finding her way in the new surroundings.

– The rooms offer new forms of interaction. The challenge is that we need to accept the rooms and try to play along in a different way. And we have to think much more about our non-verbal expressions than we did before, says Katrine Damgaard.

It is not only the staff who get to know the men better now, with their work being concentrated in the living rooms – the men also have the chance to see whom amongst the staff, in their opinion, has something to offer them.



Before, meetings between staff were held away from the users 'hidden' in the basement and counseling took place in a formal office where the social worker know best how to navigate. We have placed this function in the big common room in a self built caravan. The caravan makes meetings more transparent as well as plays down the formal and client making aspect and frame it more as a dialogue between equals or even friends! It is placed in the common rooms and have windows. In this way a meeting is part of the context of being in common.

of those who use the shelter sitting there selecting us. That we, and our conduct, are being tested. Some might think, I don't want to talk to Katrine because I don't understand her. Or they could think that I am super cool, because I say things in a direct and unsweetened way and set some limits they can understand. They have the chance to get to know us without having to talk to us. In this way they can choose whether they think that I have something to offer them or not, says Katrine Damgaard.

– We find it difficult to make contact with some of them, because they are withdrawn or don't want to talk with social workers. Instead they can see what we are like as people. They can see how we act in the room, and how we speak. Sometimes we joke around, other times we tell people off, or set limits. Sometimes we can be caring and at other times we can be unreasonable. In the room we need to act appropriately, so people can trust us. I like the idea that there are some

She finds it exciting that the artists met and collaborated with those who use the shelter, because they have been open and not skeptical.

– I think it is fantastic that the artists challenge my assumptions of what can be done. It is extremely comforting to see the men sitting around a table with architects and draughtsmen and listen to what they have to say. I think it's funny when the artists respond to these people in a different way than we do in here, because they have another agenda and a totally different existence, says Katrine Damgaard.

With their work they have opened up the possibility for the men to now engage themselves in how the room should look. She explains that no-one had ever previously come with a suggestion of moving a table, or where the coffee machine should stand.

– Now you hear comments about the refurbishment, either because they don't understand it, or because they think it is cool or terrible. It is not so much what they think about the design, it's more the fact that they

now think something or other. It is great that they take a position on it. I am happy to be a part of a process where the milieu is prioritized. To see whether the different rooms can create different forms of togetherness, which hopefully are differently positive. If nothing else, the project is an example of taking these people seriously on a



The low bar desk in the café with engraved texts from users.

level that has not been considered before – the artistic and cultural level. And it is a recognition that they have an opinion on the environment they move around in, says Katrine Damgaard.

As with those using the shelter, there are details she likes and others she doesn't care for. For her it is particularly important to emphasise what is practical in relation to the working situation for the staff. In some places there is a lack of practicality in relation to cleaning, whilst in other places the artists have found a good solution.

– I like that the mattresses in the bunks in Bjælkestuen can't soak up all sorts, but at the same time they have a visual expression which is not "now I have to put the bed wetting sheet on". I like the fact that so much consideration has been shown, though it is not obvious, because these people have a different way of being than other people, says Katrine Damgaard.

SECURITY

Whilst Katrine Damgaard is positive about the men's experience of the new rooms, she is more reticent when it comes to the cooperation between the artists and the staff. Amongst other things, she is not absolutely convinced about removing the reception.

– Previously you made a decision when you went into Mændenes Hjem. Many of the people using the shelter left their street behaviour 10-12 meters behind, when they walked down the side street and in through the gate. The decision meant that you went from a world of drug abuse into another world with other rules, says Katrine Damgaard.

She explains that street behaviour means more aggression, dealing with drugs and people who's looking to beat those who owe them money. Aggression brings with it more angst for those men using the shelter who are in need of protection. For the staff it means that they need to use more time and more energy regulating behaviour.



Sleeping Room (short term), Conversation Room and Observation Room. Before short time night sleepers (1-3 days) that did not live in the shelter (3-12 month) slept on the floor in the dining room. We have used the old reception (the symbol of power and control) for 6 sleeping places in train sofa-into-bunk beds. The theme of the train was an idea from the staff – inspired by the camping meeting room idea we developed.

– *Setting limits is a means of gaining access to something else, but if too many limits are set, then I might as well be a bouncer. I don't want that, and it's not what I'm best at. And we have been through a period where we have needed to set lots and lots of limits,* Katrine Damgaard stresses.

She criticises the artists for not having thought through the security of the staff in, for example, the caravan, where there isn't an emergency exit.

– *The lack of security won't limit me, and I'm going to use the caravan, but I will think seriously about whom I take in and under which circumstances,* says Katrine Damgaard.

Not because she is afraid of the men who use the shelter, but she wants to avoid putting herself in a situation that could cause anxiety.

– *I could never dream of continuing this work if the men made me nervous. The thing I am anxious about is being struck by their powerlessness. Anxiety is losing faith in the belief that there is something better,* says Katrine Damgaard.

Rasmus Koberg Christiansen also thinks about whom he invites into the car-

van, but he is absolutely safe with the large majority of the men.

– *Our greatest security is that we know the people who come here, and the better we know people, the more safe it is,* reckons Rasmus Koberg Christiansen.

Nurse Michael Pedersen was part of the group of staff members who collaborated with the artists. In his experience, some of the newly designed things are about to lose their functionality because the practical application doesn't always follow the design brief. In some instances there is a gap between the staff's practical work and the artists' ideas. For example, the shelf for hypodermic needles and syringes, which increases the work pressure on the staff. And when the staff experience that their workplace has deteriorated because of unnecessary work, then it causes resistance.

THE PROCESS DOESN'T END WHEN THE REFURBISHMENT IS FINISHED

None of the staff interviewed want to revert to the old Mændenes Hjem, with its reception. Many of the staff have found other employment, but as the work at Mændenes Hjem is such a strain, it has always been like that. And, according to the superintendent, Mændenes Hjem doesn't have a problem finding staff.

– *We are proud that our talk about values is not merely an empty cliché. The values have been implemented in practice both in relation to work and the physical space. We have changed the way we approach the men and at the same time the services we offer the people who use the shelter have become more accessible,* says Robert Olsen.

– *From a human perspective it is important how the first meeting between those using the shelter and the staff is formed. Previously, this meeting always took place through the reception. Now the men and the staff can sit and drink coffee together, and it gives the staff better possibilities for getting to know the individuals and to learn about their backgrounds. That is an advantage because the staff aren't merely confronted with a man with a problem. Across the table is a human being with a life story and a background. You can talk about general stuff, and when a topic comes up which is better dealt with in private, then the conversation can be relocated to the caravan. In social work it is essential knowing the subject and to keep a dialogue going with them. If you merely carry out your social work over people's heads then that doesn't get you anywhere. And it is nice for the men that they can experience meeting staff who are friendly and welcoming and might also be a friend. That is the basis of social work,* says Robert Olsen.

It takes courage and dialogue to realise these values in the real world. Creating open access to Mændenes Hjem gave the immediate



impression of positive value but in the beginning the consequences were that the staff had to manage a number of different types of conflict.

– It is easy for us to talk values but as soon as we change values in practice it provokes anxiety. It can easily result in people withdrawing and saying no, we're not ready for this after all. We daren't open the doors to Istedgade, that seems too provocative and all too much. But if we have a value that states: We have to be more open and welcoming, then we might have to stick to the physical changes. The artists have been good at capturing our values, formulating them into something tangible, and standing fast by them. The artists have insisted that this value means that we have to do things in this way. And if this is the path we choose, then we keep on it, says Robert Olsen.

Robert Olsen believes that there is a difference in the way that artists and designers work. The artists' work is process oriented, whilst the designer and architect work more concretely. The processual approach to the refurbishment has caused many and lengthy discussions, which has resulted in the protracted refurbishment work.

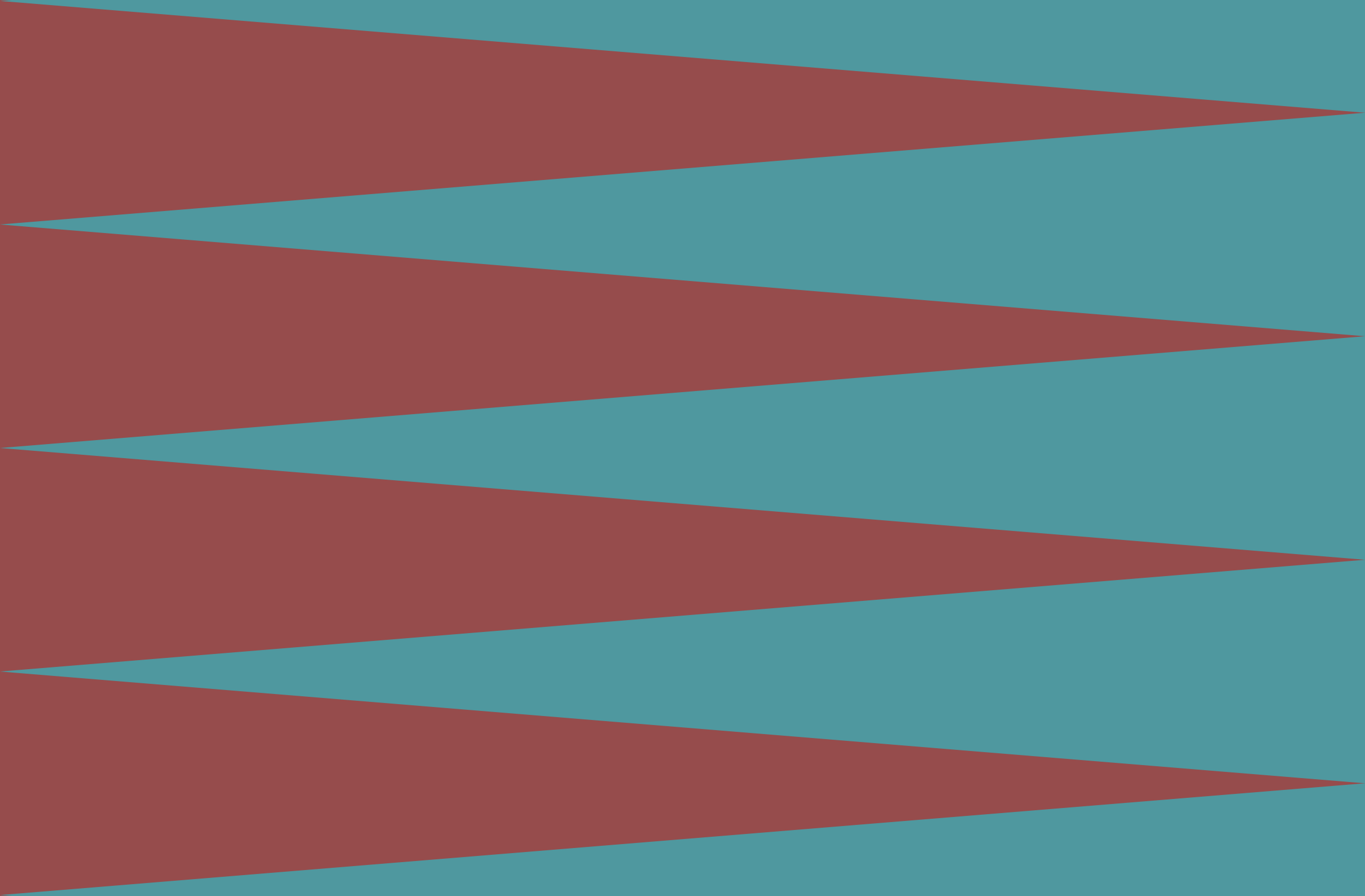
Robert Olsen is pleased that he engaged two artists in the refurbishment work at Mændenes Hjem.

– A far way down the road we have achieved what we aimed for. But it isn't a process that ends once the refurbishment is over, we still have aspects we need to develop. We have broken with some of the old conceptions of what an institution is. It has been important not just for Mændenes Hjem, but also for other homeless institutions. It has been exciting but also exhausting, because you change and develop continuously and the staff need to be adaptable, says Robert Olsen.

This is also how it will be in the future because Vesterbro and Mændenes Hjem's target group keeps changing, and Robert Olsen doesn't have any

difficulties imagining that some of the existing services will disappear, whilst the need for a different kind of service may arise in the future.

– The art of carrying out social work is to adjust in relation to the contemporary social problems that exist. The Mændenes Hjem of five years ago is different from the Mændenes Hjem of ten years ago, and the place we have today will not be the same in five years time, says Robert Olsen.



Café Heimdal – Here You Can Find Shadow



The pub Café Heimdal has been at the corner of Heimdalsgade and Mimersgade for close to a hundred years. Some of the guests have been regulars for more than 40 years. Across from the street, the lawn, and the bike track dividing Heimdalsgade in two, is Rådmandsgade School, formerly Heimdalsgade Graduate School (Heimdalsgade Overbygningsskole, HGO), also known as ‘the black school’.

BY CHRISTIAN SKOVBJERG JENSEN

Partly, because the buildings are black, and partly because more than 80 percent of the students have a different ethnic background than Danish – a good deal of them live in Mjølnerparken, a socially disadvantaged neighbourhood characterized by ghettoization, located a few hundred metres away.

These incongruous neighbours became the main participants in the collaboration that was Kenneth A. Balfelts contribution to the exhibition *Sid ned!* – Samtidkunst på Mimersgade (Sit down! – Contemporary Art on Mimersgade).

Sid ned! was comprised of six public art projects with the shared objective of creating alternative perspectives and commentaries on the urban renewal going on in the area at the time. And Kenneth A. Balfelt quite literally took as his starting point the idea about art as alternative

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Part of the public art project ‘Sid Ned!’ (Sit Down!), 2006, curated by Christian Skovbjerg at Mimersgade, Copenhagen N.

- Micro-urban renewal including 8th-10th grade pupils renewing an old local pub.
- With Sami, Ziad, Mohammed, Markus, Ibrahim and Ozgur

As part of a larger urban renewal project for the quarter around Mimersgade at Nørrebro in Copenhagen, Christian Skovbjerg initiated and curated a public art project that examines the wishes and ideas of the local residents by inviting a group of artists working in the social field. The goal was to open up the debate concerning the social issues and perspectives, which very rarely are included in the conventional idea of urban renewal.

For this I invited pupils from a local school to make a interior micro-renewal of a local pub with regular, mostly Danish, customers. Traditionally, urban planning is carried out by resourceful professionals who research the needs of less resourceful groups of people. I invited two parties from these less resourceful groups, who are easily stigmatised as alcoholics and stigmatized immigrant teenage boys, to meet and carry out a common micro urban renewal project. This project is about renewing or making an addition to the pub Café Heimdal.

The boys interviewed the regular customers about what they would like to see changed. This only led to ideas about minor adjustments as they were immensely satisfied with the way things were. But the facade could need a face-lift.

First, we suggested to paint the facade but the pub owner, Johnny, hinted that it might be too big a job and was a bit reluctant to give us the go. So we decided to make a new sign. We made a model of a sign using Douglas fir with carved mahogany letters.

After doing the interviews I asked each one of the boys what they wanted to get out of participating in the project. In these conversations one boy said that he did not expect them to be as friendly as they were and another said he expected them to be racist, which he had seen no sign of.

I told this to one of the regulars which prompted a larger conversation on the matter, where several of the regulars rejected that they were racist towards the kids. One of the regulars, a painter, rejected to be interviewed by the boys in the research phase and told me stories about misbehaviours of immigrant boys in the neighbourhood. But after we had asked him for advice on how to paint the facade he began to lobby the owner on our behalf.

As part of the motivation for joining, the project was to exchange school lessons for project work. It proved hard to motivate the boys beyond these hours. This made some of the pub regulars feel let down when I worked alone for a week during a school holiday to take down the old sign. At the opening only two of the boys came and quickly disappeared again – leaving guests, the press and myself in confusion. But the pub and the guests were very satisfied with the new sign.

You can find more info and the project newspaper here: www.publik.dk

urban renewal. The point of departure was to get together two local groups with apparently nothing in common, with the purpose of creating a real and physical change at Café Heimdal. The constellation sprang from an apparent mismatch – a classic Danish ‘bodega’ (pub) and a group of youngsters with an immigrant background. The combination was about doing and accomplishing the seemingly unthinkable and problematic. Can young immigrant kids do urban renewal? Can they hang out at a pub with elderly beer drinking men and women? Do the two groups have anything in common and can they work and talk with each other? Can good things come from this?

Ziad cutting out letters for the sign in mahogany.



In the end the pub Café Heimdal and the neighbourhood got a new front sign, but the real core of the project wasn't the physical urban renewal – on the contrary it was the meeting and the collaboration that the sign sits as a reminder of today. A reminder of an unthinkable and in many ways positive meeting between young and old, traditionally Danish beer culture and a youth culture with very different global, ethnic and religious affiliations. But it was also a wholly new way of thinking and realising urban renewal.

– Normally, when urban renewal or city planning is undertaken, architects, urban planners, or other socially advantaged people are the ones conducting investigations into needs and ideas of various groups, like the socially disadvantaged, the marginalized, or subcultures. My idea was to put two of these groups together and then let them create a kind of ‘mini-urban renewal’. Hopefully it would show that they can do it themselves, and that the resources are there, even though we may be biased to think the contrary, Kenneth A. Balfelt explains.

Now, some two years after eight students from HGO and Café Heimdal made their very own mini-urban renewal with Balfelt as the go-between, I meet with some of the key persons of the project for a talk about what they think came out of it, and what it was like to participate.

IN THE BEGINNING

Eight students from HGO – seven with an immigrant background – volunteered for the project after Balfelt's introduction at their school. It sounded new and different, but other things also came into play:

– In the beginning it was mostly to escape classes and hang out with the guys, but of course also because it sounded new and different. They're not people you're used to talking to, says Valbon, one of the eight participating students. He goes on:

– Of course we'd often walked past the bar over there and thought all sorts of things about the people in there. So it was also to see what might happen. Perhaps something positive.

Johnny, the owner of Café Heimdal, was also positive from the beginning. He was happy to take part in the collaboration, even though they had had

plenty of previous unfortunate clashes with young boys from the area – or perhaps because of this: He saw the point of the two groups getting together.

– I agreed to it because I thought it sounded good. One should be positive towards others who live here and who would like to make something, instead of all those who just cause trouble.

There had been quite a few violent encounters between young people from the neighbourhood and the pub. Some boys at some point had tossed firecrackers and a small molotov cocktail into the pub, among other things resulting in one of the guests losing hearing in one ear, and some damaged furniture. And this was just the reason why the owner Johnny chose to be a part of the project. He saw the idea of making something together, trying to change the situation and take part in changing the bad development for the better.



Café Heimdal with the old sign.

But not all were positive to begin with. Many of the clients in the bar often spoke harshly and in prejudiced terms about the young people of the neighbourhood. One of the regulars, Fido remembers his own doubts in the beginning:



Meeting about the project. Marcus, Mohammed, journalist Birger Thøgersen and curator Christian Skovbjerg Jensen.

– When they said that we were going to be having visits from the boys from 'the black school' I was very skeptical. I live right across from the school and have seen – I don't know how many young kids – making trouble and for instance smashing people's windows. Mostly it just seemed like a blown up youth club over there.

Once the project began to take shape and ideas came up about painting the facade and making a new sign, Fido suddenly became more engaged in the project. The facade was to be painted several shades of brown to match the new sign, which they were doing in wood, and they were also looking at images of the Nordic god Heimdall and the Horn of Chaos that he guards. Those ideas were never realized, as the owner Johnny considered them too wild and wanted to focus just on the sign. It wouldn't need maintenance and was more manageable.

ROLE MODELS AND PRECONCEPTIONS

Like many others Fido had quite a few previous disagreeable experiences with young ‘immigrant boys’ from the neighborhood. But when they started coming to the pub along with Kenneth, drinking soda pop and questioning the clients about what sorts of change they were interested in, something happened. People from the pub suddenly became more positive and pretty curious. Like Tine, who works at the pub, Fido went over to the school to see them work on the sign. And Tine has no doubt that



Marcus, Ziad, Kenneth and Sami in the workshop to produce the sign.

something happened in relation to the prevalent preconceptions: *– I think it really offered many things. You could see that the clients and the boys began accepting and respecting each other. That was very positive. And we do still talk about it once in a while, especially if someone had a bad*

experience, and start to talk badly about immigrants. Then I often say, do you remember back then with the sign, and they admit that yes, they were actually nice guys. So the experience and the meeting has taken root, and in a way it lives on:

– I’ve also heard many others pointing to the sign and saying they know the guys who made it – their cousin or buddy, so it is something that people remember, and something that made a difference, adds Tine.



Cutting out the letter shapes in paper.

– It was really fun to be part of it, but it was also a lot of work. In the beginning I didn’t think we could pull it off – that it was going to happen. There was a lot of trouble, but after we had been over there and talked with them, it became more concrete and serious, and we wanted to make it happen, to finish it, says Ziad, one of the students most devoted to the project. He was glad to get a little push, and thinks lots of kids need a push. That you can do what you set your mind to:

– One of the things this kind of project is good for is to show that not all immigrants are troublemakers, and to set a good example.

Tine, Fido, Mohammed and Marcus in discussion



FROM IDEA TO REALISATION

The first few weeks the boys came regularly to the pub as part of the project. To see the place, discuss with Johnny the owner, and see what kind of people went there.

Then they spent three days interviewing the clients about what they thought was lacking or might be added to the place. The initial conclusion

was that most were tremendously fond of the pub and didn't really want much to change. Only the facade came up more than a few times as a place worthy of attention. As mentioned there were many ideas for improvement of the facade – among other things, illustrations of Heimdal and the Horn of Chaos, and painting the entire facade – but in the end the final job became the sign, one that everyone could agree on. After the first visits and interviews it was very clear that both parties were surprised about each other, in a positive way. There was a good energy, now to be put into the work of making the sign.

Ziad and Sami both remember the time in the workshop as the hardest:

– Some of the guys had left, so we weren't so many any more. Those who had been fooling around more had left, so there wasn't so much fun and joking around anymore, and quite a lot of work.

Both Johnny the owner, his daughter Tine, and Fido stopped by to see how the work was going. Sporting white overalls the boys were busy with sketches, jigsaws, brushes and lacquers etc. in the school wood workshop and out in the yard. The production phase was hard work, but after a month's work it was finished, and the result was ready to see the light of day.



Mohammed and Ziad in Café Heimdal.

Sand grinding, oil, five layers of ships laquer.



Sami, Ziad and Mohammed in the workshop.



The finished letters ready for mounting.

THE INCOMPLETE CONCLUSION

Now the sign was finished and just needed mounting. Posters were distributed, workmen were hired to give a hand, a small scaffold was set up for the mounting, and the opening and conclusion to the project was drawing near. The press had gathered to see the result of the collaboration between Balfelt, the young boys, and the pub. And the sign came up. Sadly only few of the boys had come and were present for the conclusion to their work and the project as such.

Ziad recalls:

– It was a relief to finish it, because it had been pretty hard work. We were proud of it, but also a bit embarrassed. Everyone knew what we were doing. And that was a little strange.

Ziad and Sami don't remember exactly why they never showed up for the mounting of the sign, and why they never got to say goodbye to Kenneth and the pub:

– It wasn't because it was at the pub, but all that attention and the fact that everyone knew that we had done it. I guess that was a little too much. Perhaps it would have been better some other place. I mean, all our friends walked by in the street here.

Tine, one of those most involved from the pub, thought that it was a frustrating way to conclude the project:

– I don't think the boys were prepared for all that attention. To tell the truth, neither was I. Perhaps they were asking themselves why the journalists would want to speak with them. Was it because they were immigrants? I remember that some of the boys got really mad over an article with the headline 'Immigrant boys help a pub'. As they said, 'but we are Danish!' I had never thought about it as something negative, the immi-

grant boys thing, but turned out that they did, and I have given this a lot of thought since then.

At a point two of the boys dropped by. Immediately they were almost ambushed by journalists with questions and cameras. They didn't really want their photos taken, and they disappeared as quickly as they had arrived. It is difficult to answer exactly what went wrong in the end. Everyone was happy about the project and proud of the sign. But only two of the boys stayed on and were there to celebrate the conclusion to the project.



Poster announcing the opening.



Mounting the new sign. Floating mahogany letters on douglas fir.

AND WHAT CAME OUT OF IT?

Today, the sign is still hanging there as a reminder of this story, and this unimaginable meeting between very different people, living side by side in the same neighborhood. If you ask the people involved what they learned from the project the answers are very mixed.

For Ziad and Sami it had been an enlightening experience. Ziad emphasized that you should never judge people by their looks. But they also mentioned the teamwork, the cutting of wood, the polishing, painting and lacquering. And then, meeting new people and helping them, seeing something through, that felt good. Fido doesn't believe it changed a thing.

– Well there's still trouble. In the beginning it was looking good. The young fellows came and talked and hung out here. Then they left and made a sign, but didn't show up for the mounting of it. I guess they just didn't care. And now we have the sign, and well that's about all. Still, Fido believes the method of working together is good:

– Maybe the topic should've been different. It could be something they're more interested in, like cars or motorcycles, then they probably would have been more around and committed.

Fido also suggested that they should have written how the sign came into being and who made it. A lot of people knew, of course, but it could very well have been written on a smaller sign – as with public sculptures – or like the neighborhood street signs that explain who the Nordic god streets were named after, such as Odinsgade. Johnny thinks it was good:

– I think it worked out well. I got to know some young people with a positive attitude. They came in here and saw what it looked like, and they had so many different ideas.

Johnny doesn't think it really changed anything, but does say that it has been positive for those who were a part of it:

– *Certainly many of the clients became very positive when they saw what the boys went around doing. And they're also very happy about the sign today.*

Tine also points out the positive coverage of the project:

– *Many in the neighborhood were talking about it and were curious about it, like other bars and neighbors, but also that it made the newspapers, radio and the television, was very positive. It is a good way to build integration. They come and see what kind of people we are, and the other way around. You know, we also run into many prejudices about 'bodegas'. But what they saw was that we're just ordinary people. Tine thinks it was fun to come visit them at the school and see them work.*

– *It could have happened a lot more. We should have been more over at the school, and the school might have played a bigger part. I mean, it was only those few students who came. I've thought a lot about whether or not it had any effect. But it's really hard to say. Of course I hope that we'll be able to live together, all of us, but really it's not getting much better here in this neighborhood, I'm sorry to say, and that's a pity because they're just as Danish as we are. Whether the project helped, I don't think I can give you the answer. But I think about it a lot, says Tine, and goes on:*

– *It would have been kind of funny if we had gotten together a little after, and see how they were doing – just to keep in touch and talk about the project.*

A NEW URBAN RENEWAL

The exhibition *Sid ned!* and consequently the project *Café Heimdal* had financial support from Områdefornyelsen i Mimersgade-kvarteret (the Mimersgade Area Renewal initiative). In conclusion I met with the director

of Områdefornyelsen, Peter Christensen, to hear how they experienced the project, and what they feel they got out of it.

– *Well it's not urban renewal in the physical sense, but more an urban renewal that goes into dialogue with the social environment in an area. There are many positive relations in a neighborhood like the Mimersgade area, but also quite a few negative ones. The question is whether you're able to harness and set in motion the social potential of a place. This is harder to do than one might think – to mobilize the diversity as a positive aspect. It is easy to say, but difficult to do. But it was exactly what the project did by virtue of the meeting between the two groups and their collaboration. (...)*

You could say that the sign was the pretext, or rather the occasion for starting the dialogue. To have something to meet around. In my experience we often need a reason to meet or to work on our differences or a negative development. And in this case the renewal was the sign, and that was the point and the goal in the end. It was the frame.

Some time in the 1970's the journalist Poul Martinsen got a group of bikers and hippies together to build a bridge, and it actually generated a lot of positive things. In the same way the boys didn't have much in common with the customers from the pub – but along the way, in the process, they came to understand each other better, and learned to respect one another.

In response to the question about what Områdefornyelsen got out of the project and what they could take with them, Peter Christensen says:

– *The project above all generated awareness around the neighborhood. And in addition it showed that through art it's possible to stir up and create dialogue between very different groups in a local area. We couldn't have done it in the same way with other partners. Here art has a very special ability. Kenneth's project produced quite a bit of knowledge*

about the place and about the people involved – and both are part of the local community. And the idea I guess is that it will spread like rings in the water. The traces now left in the neighborhood are concrete evidence that you can make results on the social level.

Again Peter Christensen emphasizes the social aspect as the primary strength of the project:

– It helped heighten curiosity and openness in a diversified neighborhood where many never meet or speak to each other. Here, they did. They spoke with each other, and they met as people under very different circumstances – because they had a project in common. Many of the prejudices the two groups had about each other were broken down – and that caused a more nuanced image of ‘the others’. Urban renewal traditionally consists of physical renovations, but there are also many social dimensions of urban renewal, too often neglected. In its own way the sign was the physical dimension and framework to the project – but it was the social dimension that mattered. It was the process, the dialogue, participation, the act of creation and building something together, and building community that mattered. And in the most densely populated area in the country it is important to get along well with each other. In the end the positive experiences showed that things can change. That you can work deliberately towards results in the social domain.

The people who participated in the project are very different and have also experienced it in distinct ways. But essentially they have understood it in the same way, and been aware of the emphasis of the social, collective, and local aspects. They have been mindful of their own prejudices as well as those of others – if those were about making trouble or drinking too many beers and being racist. And what was most uplifting wasn't necessarily so much the positive experiences of taking part, or the results it brought about. It was as much the consistent and collective



The boys and Kenneth A. Balfelt holding up the finished model for the sign.

recognition of being prepared to meet each other and create more community, better relations, to lessen the tensions and the preconceived ideas about each other. Because preconceptions, stigmatizations and divisions in communities are not constructed by themselves. They are formed through images and stories circulating and growing in strength, until one or more responses are made. And this is the sort of resistance and movement created by Balfelt's urban renewal project.



Part 3:

Critical

Investigation

YOU'RE SO VAIN. YOU PROBABLY THINK THE ART IS ABOUT YOU. DON'T YOU?

BY BRETT ALTON BLOOM

This essay is written not for those who collaborate with, help with, live with, pass through, pass out in, or otherwise engage the work of Kenneth Balfelt. They don't need it. However, you really do need it. You need it the most. I say this as a provocation, or an invitation to collaborate on the production of meaning around Balfelt's work rather than to enable either of us to take up an expected power relation of critic or historian or theorist. I am none of these, nor do I desire to add to the misery that they produce and the culture that they propagate. We should not trust these functions of knowledge production and negation around art practice if they do not simultaneously seek to be expansive in the construction of meaning and devise more egalitarian forms of communication. These forms must empower, not serve power.

Balfelt's work demands a new culture in both an ideal sense – of fomenting larger cultural shifts – as well as a practical change in how art is understood and goes into the world, and the kinds of thinking and communication it can provoke. His work is often with people and situations that are neglected and marginalized. Balfelt, and people working in socially engaged manners, are working with a different set of ethical norms for experiencing and thinking about their work than that of the dominant art culture. Practitioners have not clearly articulated this in writing. They have not received much help from historians, critics and theorists. This text will expand on what this entails.

Here I will try to collaboratively think about Balfelt's work against the larger back drop of the maturation of socially/engaged/critical/art practices and their convergence with truly trans-disciplinary approaches to working and living. It will try to come to terms with how Balfelt's work contradictorily emanates from and dwells within a neoliberalizing, deeply racist, social welfare state. It abandons centralizing interpretations in favor of visualizing and understanding complexity, diversity, empathy and

emotion, and non-representational-able-being. This essay is part of the story. The diversity of experience that sprawls out from encounters with any work of art has not been adequately articulated by any one person or book about art. What follows is an attempt to sketch out what is at stake in understanding aesthetic experience in these terms.

SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE MATURES AND LEAVES THE HOUSE OF MODERNISM AND ITS TERMINALLY ILL BASTARD, POSTMODERNISM

Change is contested within art practices. If art is truly political, with the capacity to provoke and make us uneasy, it is either absorbed, if someone can make money from it, marginalized, or turned into an aesthetic formula instrumentalized to ends not of its own making. The new Social Practice programs popping up in American university art departments are a prime example of this commodifying trend. Socially engaged art that seeks out uncomfortable terrain has received, and continues to receive, a great deal of resistance. It is clear over the past decade that many people are working in this way and a more robust, mature discourse around it is finally becoming possible. We cannot leave the development of this only to people trained in universities or traditional ways of understanding art history who are not also deeply embedded in this practice.

This year, 2011, socially engaged art practice gets a substantial amount of focus in a city where art market bias and dominance – like in no other place – continues to impede the narratives that this kind of work conjures. The New York based public arts organization, Creative Time, and its head curator, Nato Thompson, launched an ambitious exhibition, Living as Form, that was part archive, exhibition, activist campaign, and celebration in Manhattan’s Lower East Side neighborhood. I participated in this as a consultant as well as with the art group

Temporary Services. I bring this up to reveal my biases as well as my own history with these ways of working. It is as a practitioner and thinker about this work, that I approach Balfelt’s work. It is from the perspective of a critical practitioner, like myself, who has worked in complex, collaborative, and long-term configurations, that understanding of this work must come. This kind of work has “grown up” since the 1990s, but there is still a lack of an adequate theoretical and critical language around it. We cannot expect this to come exclusively from theorists or historians, outside of the process, who tend to reduce this practice to that aspect of it, which they are able to focus on. Complexity is reduced to: “dialogical”, “relational”, “participatory” and other catch phrases. We need many more practitioner-writers to open up the understanding rather than condense it into marketable terminology.

More artists need to write about their own and others’ work. Collaboration and the process of bringing the art to fruition are just as important to include in an analysis as the parts that become public. This is skipped by critics when they make claims about the need to have evaluative criteria by which to measure the work. Typically, this can be understood as code for imposing a market-derived set of “good” and “bad” indicators applied to a “final product.” If you truly want to understand socially engaged practice, this way of thinking is useless.

In Temporary Services, we generated a few criteria of our own that shift the focus away from aesthetic discourse that favors commodities to ask questions about what the work is actually doing in the world, in particular, how we can tell if a work is socially engaged or just an exercise in making art social?

1. Does the work empower more people than just the authors of the work?

2. Does the work foster egalitarian relationships, access to resources, a shift in thinking, or surpluses for a larger group of people?
3. Does the work abate competition, abusive power and class structures, or other barriers typically found in gallery and museum settings?
4. Does the work seek broader audiences than just those educated about and familiar with contemporary art?
5. Does the work trigger a collective imagination that can dream other possible worlds while with eyes wide open understands the current one?

[Temporary Services, interviewed by Nato Thompson for Creative Time, January 2010 – <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2010/publicspace/interrogating/2010/10/temporary-services-date-year/>]

PEDAGOGICAL INDOCTRINATION & POWER

“You are a good painter. Don’t turn into one of those fucking conceptual artists!” – Advice from a former teacher of mine, a realist painter, who wanted to make sure I made work like she does.

How we think and talk about art is taught to us. What is taught is how to remake what other people have made, to reproduce the codes of art-like things. The best pedagogical practices are ones that pass along critical thinking skills but not ideology. Almost all contemporary arts education is ideological. Balfelt and I had a conversation about this type of arts-related indoctrination: how ideology is passed from one generation to the next. In particular, we discussed the oft repeated phrases one would commonly hear a decade ago used to dismiss socially engaged art: “Why don’t you just be a social worker?” or “Why is this art instead of social work?”

There are two things that need to be discussed about these phrases. The first is how they are a part of arts education and the indoctrination they normalize. The second is the attempt at claiming power and control

over what can and cannot be art. Indoctrination – the notion that one must make art-like things instead of other possible courses – takes place first at art schools and with impressionable students. Students are exposed to their professors’ biases and ways of thinking. These biases get presented as knowledge and understanding, without any caveats, rather than as what they really are: a position someone takes in relation to the production of meaning, form, social experience, and art. Students often repeat their professors’ biases without realizing it. I did this on many occasions and saw many others do this as well. The real power of this transmission comes when peers exert pressure on each other by leveraging these kinds of insults, which are little more than attempts to control each other’s behavior. Many of the students where I currently teach enter the school with already fixed, highly conservative ideas concerning the boundaries of art. These are things they learned in various preparatory courses for the academy. It is only when you actively undermine this function with your teaching that you do not produce students that are just repeating ideology, but learn to think the world themselves. Great care must be taken not to pass unreflective bias along.

Telling another person what is and what is not art has two functions. Within the pedagogical process, it teaches people to make art that looks like what everyone expects to be art. One is trained to make distinctions that can exclude and control access to what is considered to be art. When claims are made that someone is not making art, especially when that art work or artist articulates her practice as a challenge to dominant modes of production and practice, then it is an attempt to exert control over that person and limit access to the kinds of rewards dominant forms of art production currently enjoy be they monetary, attention, intellectual, or other.

The art market has perfected these mechanisms of exclusion, control, and the making of elite goods that command high prices for an incredibly

small percentage of artists who enjoy this privilege. This form of validating what is and what is not considered art is a way to exclude practices that may reject market standards or forms. Entire histories and ways of working get neglected and excluded from contemporary discourse for this reason.

A statement that equates artists and social workers is uttered without considering the profound differences between what each does. These statements are indicative of one group of practitioners speaking from a fear of change and attempting to control or slow down the adoption of new ideas. What does a social worker do? A social worker has cases assigned to her. These cases are people who have a variety of “problems” as defined by an external authority, often the state. These individuals are frequently considered to be problems rather than people. A social worker has strict guidelines about the services she can provide. She has spent many years studying to do her work. She may need to provide money, food, shelter, counseling, and more on behalf of an organization, municipality, or state. Her caseload is the large number of people she has to help, often without proper time, compensation, or resources. This is grinding, often demoralizing work. A social worker often has no room to be creative and to experiment with the lives of the people she is helping. For some populations, this could be harmful or even deadly. Her role is defined both for her safety as well as for others.

An artist that chooses to make social experiments or to do work that is not producing elite market goods has very little in common with a social worker. She chooses to work with a population or topic because it will be fun, produce something exciting, perhaps deal with difficult issues, engage a large audience with ideas, but in the end the results are intended to be, in the best cases, transformative of our understanding of the human condition. This could not be much further from the important, tedious work of the social worker. It seems a bit ridiculous to have to

state this. The notion that a socially engaged artist is the equivalent of a social worker has had a lot of power in the past and has been used to not give it the consideration or resources it deserves in museums, magazines, histories and other places where art culture is produced. Today, a quick look through any trade magazine will demonstrate how thoroughly commercial art discourse dominates and how little socially engaged work is present. If it is presented, it is not on its own terms.

The use of those particular phrases equating socially engaged artists with social workers has diminished. They were readily replaced with other attempts at similar summary dismissal.

A current popular criticism is, “The art doesn’t change the world, so it fails as an art work.” This type of moralizing is dismissive of artists working in socially engaged ways. We do not hear the same outrage when others’ labor, bodies, gender, or comparable factors are exploited by a well known artist enjoying market success. An artist like Santiago Sierra makes art that looks very similar to socially engaged practice as it includes other people and an unexpected social situation, but is actually the inverse. Sierra’s work is often highly exploitative of the people it involves. His *250cm line tattooed on six paid people* is a particularly repulsive example of how his work exploits others. He paid drug addicts, desperate for easy cash, to have tattoos of lines on their backs. Yes it looks good, but it should not get a pass on this alone. The documentary photographs completely efface the identities of the people turning them into caricatures and a canvas for an artist’s work.

We hear nothing but silence from the same critics who detract from work that tries to help people rather than exploit them. There is a willful desire to banish real world effects of the production of art as if people still really believed that a work of art is magically detached – autonomous – from the rest of the world. Additionally, it is rather absurd to demand

that an artist's work, when it sets out to change abusive power relations between humans, result in systemic change. This comes from a basic mis-recognition of what art is and can do.

Artists can conjure glimpses of possible future realities. They can make tangible, however fleetingly, an entire new world by opening up the imaginary around what our future could look like. This is incredibly powerful for dislodging the feeling that the way things are is "natural" and as they should be. Art can make us see in concrete situations an entirely different direction in which our world can go. This is where the power of art ultimately lies: to imagine better, different, other ways of being in the world. Critics, and others, get confused about what this means. This does not automatically mean that change follows. In fact, it will not and cannot necessarily follow, for human societies are deeply stratified in layers upon layers of history, ideology, received ideas about how the world works, and the many things that structure our existence. Actual change comes more gradually. It is only revolution that brings sweeping changes. What people feel when a work of art opens new vistas, is a kernel of revolutionary longing.

Art works that question authority are seen as a threat to the established order. They reveal the arbitrary nature of most power relations between people. Those with power do not like to be told that their power is abusive or oppressive. They do not like to hear that their ways of doing things are disliked or that someone may feel they are unethical or outmoded. Socially engaged practice, political art practice, has the capacity to destabilize things. This is also the potential of Balfelt's work. It can operate in, and open up, toxic situations where traditional politics have broken down and certain populations are marginalized.

DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE & NOT NEEDING DEGREES TO "GET IT"

"Hey! Bloom! This Picasso guy is bullshit. Explain what this crap means!" – Paraphrasing of many typical student responses to modern art in the classes I taught at the Danville Correctional Center, Danville, Illinois from 2007-2010

I taught art history in a prison in central Illinois for the better part of three years. It was a deeply rewarding and challenging experience. I was forced to find a different language for talking about art – making it accessible without simplifying the ideas. Even as I did so, and helped students understand what artists like Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Wilhelm DeKooning, Piet Mondrian, and others might have been up to it, and I was deeply conscious of how specialized one had to become – what I was pushing on these students – to be able to "get" what was going on with the art. Producing specialized art produces specialized gatekeepers and power brokers who control access to what art is and who can experience it. I knew this from the work I did with Temporary Services and the conversations we had over the years. But, my experience in the prison focused my understanding of how deep the divisions were for others.

Part of what makes Balfelt's artwork difficult for classically trained historians and critics to deal with is that it resists specialization in the traditional sense. It is multi-trans-cross-disciplinary, or to put it more clearly, it works with what it finds in daily situations, while still bringing profound analysis and directed aesthetic investigation. If this happens to mean working with unhoused people, architects, a social service agency, and an idea of how art can open up closed thinking and social possibilities, all in one day, then so be it. This obvious mess – this convergence of approaches and ideas – is precisely what Balfelt's work, and that of his

peers, embraces and lives from. This work does not rest comfortably in any discipline. And why should it? The same voices that call for evaluations of good or bad also want the art to be situated clearly within what they recognize as art practice.

Balfelt's work sits in relation to an emerging global sensibility and approach to similarly expansive projects like *Wochenklausur*, Vienna; The Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), Los Angeles; The Futurefarmers, San Francisco; The Center For Urban Pedagogy (CUP), New York; *Growing Power*, Chicago and Milwaukee; Sarai, New Delhi; or the Rural Studio, whose projects are found throughout the southern United States.

The experimental works of Rural Studio offer many things simultaneously. They are unique ways of reusing materials to provide innovative, stunning homes for some of the poorest of rural southern Americans, often of African descent. The houses, and other buildings Rural Studio makes, exist somewhere between architecture, installation art, landscape architecture, community development, and radical democracy. They are highly creative and blur many boundaries and biases. When you see one of these buildings, you are struck by the imagination that went into it, you get lost in the interesting material use – like stacks of carpet samples bolted together to make dense load bearing walls – and you understand that this well designed place is for an animal shelter or low income family instead of an extremely wealthy family, a complete inverse of the usual way things go with this kind of design. There is an ecstatic joy in seeing the creativity in this work. It is a joy that is missing from so much contemporary art that is overly calculating and making sure it positions itself closely to what everyone already agrees on.

Rural Studio's buildings inhabit multiple positions simultaneously and are accessible to people in moving, profound ways. People understand the buildings on literal, personal, emotional, symbolic and metaphorical



LAPD mission: Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) creates performances and multidisciplinary artworks that connect the experience of people living in poverty to the social forces that shape their lives and communities. LAPD's works express the realities, hopes, dreams and rights of people who live and work in L.A.'s Skid Row. Top photo: Geseca Dawson of *State of Incarceration at Highways* Performance Space, Santa Monica CA, 2011. Bottom photo: Anna Maïke Mertens, *SOI* at The Box Gallery, Los Angeles, 2011.

levels, and this can mean fundamentally different things based on a person's history in a specific place where each is made. They conjure diversity and do not demand a reduction – a move towards a universal, singular experience. This is diversity in many different meanings of the word.

The complexity of Rural Studio's work is compounded by the fact that many people must work together to make it. This does not get effaced by the final results of a project, but is written into the fabric of the meaning produced

and how we can begin to understand it. And we know that it is meaningful because of the ethical practice of naming names, that is, of giving people credit for their labor, ideas, and being a part of the community that helps produce social value. This is in contradistinction to how a global brand

name artist functions, often with legions of underlings who come up with ideas, research materials, manufacture art works, travel to install them, and do not get any recognition for the role they play.

Collaboration, like with Rural Studio, my own work with Temporary Services, or Kenneth Balfelt's, may require an artist to hone many different skills that she was not taught in art school. She may need to undergo multiple negotiations on several levels of a project from the ground level of working with a community, to navigating layers or governmental permissions and permits, and various private structures from businesses to concerned neighbors. A good collaborator should have the capacity to listen to whomever she is working with. This is necessary for making as transparent power relations as possible. This is essential for avoiding the creation of abusive situations for any one who may join a collaborative project. It also helps if one can understand and respect differences and dissent and work for ways to reach consensus, or at least demonstrate that a minority position is valuable even if it isn't taken. Collaborative works that do not take care to follow these loose guidelines will run into many problems from people feeling alienated or exploited to a work outright missing what is more relevant to a community than to an artist.

The opposite of this is the artist sitting in his studio, commanding the work to obey each of his decisions, giving assistants directions, scolding missteps or lack of prowess. An old way, that today looks rather authoritarian and closed-minded. Perhaps this is a bit of an exaggeration, but one that is useful for understanding the barriers that inherited ways of thinking and doing put up. It is this notion of "total control" and fear of this being interrupted by democracy, multiple voices, or other challenges to this conservative idea of an artist, that lead to some rather odd claims and dismissals of collaborative art processes.

Rather than acknowledge the process involved in works like Balfelt's, we often hear a concerted effort to diminish this collaborative aspect of the work. One such criticism is that the work is more important for the group that went through the project than anyone else. This may be the case of some works of hybrid creative practice, but not each and every one. Just as the idea that all studio-based work is authoritarian is a ridiculous claim that cannot hold for all artists.

Instead of seeking market-based evaluative criteria why not shift so-called critical practice away from being a function of the market place to a collaborative producer of meaning that engages the persons being talked about rather than making assumptions and imposing ideology on top of the work? Discussion and dialog produces a culture and critique that is more productive and effective than that of an outside "taste" maker who doesn't have the experience in these kinds of projects and can't give an intimate sense of what is important about them. This is another major failure of contemporary theorization and historicization around this work.

THE CRACKS IN A SOCIETY

Don't talk about us. Talk with us. – Protest slogan used by NY-based activist group *Picture the Homeless*

Picture The Homeless is a New York based activist organization that works to empower people living on the streets. It helps people both articulate their plight to authorities and the general public while it aides them to fight for their rights and guide the discussions around the issues that effect them. Many artists, including Brooklyn-based artist/activists Not An Alternative, academics, and cultural theoreticians, like the radical urban thinker David Harvey whose writings have inspired Right To The City

(campaigns to spatialize social justice) gatherings around the world, have worked with this group.

Picture The Homeless is driven by the people living on the streets. Their slogan, reproduced above, states simply and powerfully the desire to shift the traditional power dynamic of the state vis a vis marginalized populations such as a city's unhoused. The slogan insists on giving value to their perspective. It demands that solutions do not come from top down policy, but rather emanate from concrete needs and life experiences of the people who are experts in their own conditions. This is a point that Balfelt is quick to let you know shapes his work with different populations, as he too understands, appreciates, and learns from this very specific kind of expertise. So specific, that it changes from one project to the next.

There is no society where everyone functions as the dominant culture wants them too. There are always those who fall outside of what is deemed to be the proper role for a citizen. The Danish welfare state, in principle, is supposed to provide a safety net for those who do not fit, therefore making a society that works for everyone. This clearly is not what happens. A society's problems are exacerbated especially in times of financial or cultural crisis, or during a prolonged ideological shift like the one that has been unfolding over the last decade in Denmark. Sometimes the official solution to a problem is not the one that is actually needed, but rather is the one that is politically acceptable or expedient, that gives the *appearance* of doing something, rather than actually doing something.

Kenneth A. Balfelt's art practice operates in between what is politically acceptable and what is imaginatively possible. He uses his position as an artist to open up seemingly closed situations. The expertise of some of the most marginalized of our fellow urban dwellers directs the development of each one of his projects. Different populations help shape each new project based on the conditions they face and their intimate understanding

of what they are going through. Balfelt does not occupy the position sometimes claimed by artists working in socially engaged practices that the artist is "the last free agent in society." An artist is just as embed-



A protest sign used during The Parade of the Politically Depressed, organized by the art group Feel Tank, Chicago, 2007, Photo: Bonnie Fortune

ded or conditioned by the society he lives in as anyone else. When he applies an artistic process to everyday situations circumscribing mediums, his pushing social conventions, situations, and people around to make a new picture rather than pushing a bunch of colors around on a canvas to paint a new image – then the

resulting new social relationships can alter existing ones. The difference? His process requires him to be in constant dialogue with the people and populations his work brings him in contact with thereby negating the romantic myth of unbridled artistic freedom. Balfelt may or may not aspire to create a new society, but he is definitely creating a new role for the artist in society.

Balfelt's is a powerful position from which to be working, especially when one chooses to work in the cracks of society, in those places where symbols and power do not operate very clearly, in the places where people have been written off or ignored. An artist who is trained in manipulating symbols, can do so to shift power in some surprising

ways. Artists ask questions that one typically does not ask and that would not make sense in other situations or disciplines. Artists do not have to produce practical solutions. They can ask questions like, “What does it look like when we invite public drinkers to redesign the park and come up with more inclusive public spaces?” It is hard to imagine city planners, politicians or city workers ever asking a question like this.

There is an aesthetic process, an important mental step, that socially engaged artists take that is poorly understood by theoreticians and historians. Artists are trained in school to, in a very Freudian manner, “kill the father” of art history that has come before them, that is to learn how a certain style or mode of art making is done and then to reject it, often violently. This is the avantgarde tradition. This is no longer interesting – and probably never was except to very small elite audiences – because it perpetuates really dull ideas and limits about what art is, can be, and where it can go. However, what is important to think about is the step that socially engaged artists take. They realize that not only can one reject the aesthetics of preceding generations, but that these aesthetics are directly tied to the cultures that produced them. This is the ethical dimension of art making that is so often disregarded by the market-driven discourse, which cares more about fame, attention and money. Art is tied to the culture that produces it. In some capacity, it reflects or rejects those values in its aesthetic utterances and nuances. Socially engaged artists, in rejecting prior social conventions or aesthetic in effect also reject the cultures that produced them. The Guerilla Art Action Group, in their infamous “die-in” action, in 1969, *Blood Bath*, invaded the Museum of Modern Art in New York to call attention to board members’ ties to war profits in the war in Vietnam. The paintings hung in the museum were the kind that this culture promoted. Their expression and argument was both against the practices of the board and museum as much as it was the

kind of artists and art the museum houses. It is this understanding of how aesthetics and ethics are tied together that gives the artist a tremendous amount of power to operate with what he or she does, when she refuses to bury the violence a culture produces to create aesthetic experiences that are empowering, egalitarian and try not to profit from abusing others.

Balfelt’s work asks the kinds of questions the state of Denmark cannot for a number of reasons, such as, the political climate is not right or the way the state goes about solving its problems are very different from how an artist or activist might approach them. For example, with his project *Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Addicts*, he asks a question like, “How can we make a place that is interesting architecturally and also provides a safe place for people to inject drugs based on their own special knowledge of what that entails?” He creates spaces and meaningful exchanges among populations that cities choose to minimally tolerate or harshly crack down on, but never go out of their way to take care of directly in a manner that makes them a normal, non-threatening part of daily life.

LIKE THE OLD CITY BEFORE IT, THE CREATIVE CITY IS NOT FOR EVERYONE

Populations were excluded in old versions of the city, in Copenhagen and much of the Western world. Public art has a role in this in both the old city and the creative city. Public art is used as a form of social and spatial control rather than for opening up and empowering a city’s denizens. Temporary Services has been exploring this in several different cities over the years. In 2009 we did an in depth investigation of how an abstract sculpture was used to deploy various forms of control, from the spatial to the monetary, in the Redfern neighborhood of Sydney, Australia. We were invited to take part in an exhibition, *There Goes the Neighbourhood*, put together by the artist and activist group You Are Here, that included



Public Sculpture Opinion Poll Redfern, by Temporary Services, Redfern, Sydney, Australia, 2009. Photo: Brett Bloom

particularly around the placement of public art in city space. In Sydney, we identified a public sculpture that was controversial and a flash point for many people in Redfern, a neighborhood that was traditionally made up of indigenous and working class people, but that was undergoing rapid transformations with young urban professionals and “creatives” moving in and driving up costs.

We set up clipboards, with pens and questionnaires, on electrical poles in several locations within a few blocks around the sculpture asking people why they thought it was there and what they thought of it. We received a wide range of replies from those who supported the sculpture and those who wanted it removed, to those who had better suggestions of how to place it on its current site or somewhere else in the area. Indigenous folks saw the sculpture as a continuation of their ongoing racist treatment by European descendants. This sculpture was yet another form of colonization by values that they did not share. We learned that many people, both indigenous and those sympathetic to

artists from Chicago, Copenhagen, Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Sydney, Melbourne, and how they were working on issues of gentrification in their respective cities. We have devised a way of inserting public discussion and discourse into situations where it had been excluded par-

their plight, were deeply offended by the sculpture because its spikes recalled way too painfully the death of young indigenous boy, T. J. Hickey who was chased by police leading to his impalement on a fence at a site close to the sculpture. Two days of riots followed this sad encounter. To date not a single officer has been sanctioned or minimally punished. The replies we received told us that new business owners saw the sculpture as a sign from the city that their concerns were important and that the city was investing in refurbishing the neighborhood. We also learned that the siting of the sculpture was precisely where a large group of indigenous public drinkers used to gather. The sculpture took care of this and eliminated the discomfort some white Australians felt when having to encounter loud, drunken, black and brown people in public.

The city of Sydney attempted, through their semi-private development company, to put the appearance of democratic selection, participation, and placement of the sculpture, on top of what was a pre-decided and carefully orchestrated process. It was not democratic in the slightest. We presented all the replies in an exhibition, a short walk from the sculpture, for everyone to read.

Jakob Jakobsen, an artist and activist from Denmark, was in the exhibition. He presented work – videos, images and wall text – that documented various efforts to neoliberalize Copenhagen and erase dissent from city spaces. His films and texts articulated struggles that he had been involved in, particularly the City of Copenhagen’s brutal eviction and displacement of Ungdomshuset [The Youth House] an autonomous cultural center run mainly by young activists. Jakobsen wrote:

In the Spring of 2007 Copenhagen was in the grip of widespread social unrest and street fighting. The disturbances culminated on March 1 when Ungdomshuset (“The Youth House”) an anarchist

social centre, was cleared by the Copenhagen Police in collaboration with the Anti-Terror Corps and the Army. Over the next few weeks the city neighbourhood Nørrebro was ravaged by burning barricades, street fighting and endless clouds of tear gas. The police were forced to impose special emergency zones, and after a week had arrested up to 1000 activists, about 300 of whom were imprisoned. The extent of the social unrest came as a surprise to most people – to the Copenhagen City Council, which had been the catalyst for the clearance of the Youth House, and to the environment around the Youth House, which had hitherto functioned as a typical left-radical subculture.¹

¹ Jakob Jakobsen, "Normalising Copenhagen: Revolt and Gentrification", is available in the catalog for the show: <http://www.theregoestheneighbourhood.org/TGTN-eBook.pdf>.

Jakobsen's project clearly articulates what happens to people who are openly defiant to the capitalist, neoliberal city, and do not agree with the dominant narrative of the city of Copenhagen. New large-scale symbols of dissent in the city are quickly controlled for fear of their taking root and persisting. Old ones have been attacked as well, including the free town of Christiania, which has weathered nearly annual attempts by right wing politicians to disassemble it. It is clear that if you disagree too much and try to see your ideas represented fully in the spaces of the city you risk violent repression and control.

If you are not so visible a threat, but are not the kind of person the city ideally wants to have, there are other mechanisms of control. There are public drinkers in many of Copenhagen's squares. One particularly notorious spot in Copenhagen is in Christianshavns Torv [Christianshavn Square], which is tiny and has a relatively large population of boisterous, sometimes violent, public drinkers. The square is designed to be as minimally comfortable as possible to discourage public lingering and sleeping. One regularly sees a strong police presence called in to manage the

drinkers and their conflicts with one another. Enormous amounts of resources go into managing, controlling, cleaning up after, and ultimately marginalizing this group of people. Many of these folks receive state support for food, shelter, mental illness, depression or other debilitating conditions. These folks are being managed and contained by the city, but they are not being thought about in creative ways that integrate them and their use of public spaces with others.

Richard Florida's globally, pervasive idea that making your city friendly to "creatives" makes the city more attractive for investment and businesses continues to spread, despite its failure to work in many cities. When politicians and urban planners fantasize about the Floridian "creative city" they most certainly do not have public drinkers, homeless people, junkies, the mentally ill, poor and other disenfranchised people in mind. In fact, conflict, social justice, and complex meaning are banned from "creative city" spaces. This is no more clearly demonstrated in Copenhagen than in the old Carlsberg Brewery complex in the Vesterbro neighborhood of the city. The buildings, parking lots and grounds of the old brewery have been carefully curated and manicured with artists, dancers, architects, designers, fashionistas, and other "creatives".

This place is ground zero for neoliberal capitalist projections about what the city could be if their fantasies were completely unleashed and the welfare state disappeared. There are large spaces that no longer function as production facilities in the information economy. These spaces are in stark



Ropes hanging from a structure formerly used to shelter a vehicle refueling station, former Carlsberg Brewery, Copenhagen, 2011. Photo: Brett Bloom



Parking lots at the former Carlsberg Brewery turned into funky social space using elements of the parking lot in “unexpected” ways, Copenhagen, 2011. Photo: Brett Bloom

contrast to the cramped city of Copenhagen, where commercial and private space is small and expensive, and its enveloping social welfare state that stratifies society in ways that are at odds with the freemarket and its concomitant diminished state. This is a different zone of economic and social relations, that one must experience in order to fully understand. There are weekend-long product launches by major pharmaceutical companies that are built to look like giant art installations. A visitor might run into a young woman in a bikini and Darth Vader mask being photographed in a fashion shoot, or encounter the various attempts at making the parking lots and old buildings fun places to hang out and socialize with others in. There are literally “managers of cool” who bring their artsy friends in to use the spaces.

Balfelt has temporarily opened up a breach in the normal functioning of the city a few blocks away from the Carlsberg area. It is neither an



Event space Tap 2 converted for an event by Leo Pharmaceuticals complete with sports cars, a standalone passenger plane stairwell, and signs suggesting a narrative of excitement and travel, former Carlsberg Brewery, Copenhagen, 2011. Photo: Brett Bloom

oppositional leftist endeavor – it does not have the numbers – nor is it a part of the creative city.

The creative city is about fun, lack of friction, consumption, ease. Balfelt chooses another course of action for his public art. He worked with the public drinkers in Enghave Plads, a public square, to develop the project. They were dislocated from the normal place they congregated

when the city began doing construction work to build a new subway stop. He got permission to use part of the park, that was mainly a place for people to walk their dogs, to work with the public drinkers to develop a situation that would accommodate them and that could be shared with more than just their community.

I had a strong experience that demonstrated to me that something different is going on with this endeavor, something that one rarely finds in creative city projects, let alone social practices projects. I had just attended a lecture by theorist Stephen Wright. He was talking about user-driven culture and how it had the potential to democratize various forms of communication and cultural production. It seemed like more than a coincidence to have the experience we did when we arrived at the beer drinkers’ park. Stephen and I entered the park and I was telling him a bit about what was going on there. We had not been there more than a couple of minutes when a man sitting at a picnic table began telling us about the park. He did not tell us the park was art. He did tell us about various decisions that were made and how he and his friends had a role in deciding where things would be placed, putting in paving stones, and in general making

the place welcoming to the general public. There was a sense of ownership and investment in the project that is impossible to fake.

This project resonates clearly with the ethical criteria of socially engaged practice outlined above as it creates surpluses for multiple audiences and empowers a group of people excluded from definitions of regularized citizenship, and was developed through the lived experiences, needs and desires, of the public drinkers.

DISTRIBUTED AESTHETICS AND THE COMPLEXITY OF CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

There is a part of Balfelt's work, which will frustrate those looking for an expected art experience. It deserves some sustained attention and reflection. You might not show up at the right time to see something. It might not actually even be for you. You could potentially miss it altogether if it is not activated through use. Or you might only get a partial understanding, if you see it only on a single occasion. The work lives and breathes through multiple understandings and engagements. Different people will see the work as different things. Balfelt's work embodies and opens diverse approaches to aesthetics, social experience, and situations that were not in place and often not possible before. Balfelt challenges our deep assumptions about who and what an artwork is for. His aesthetics are distributed across time, space, class, race, and other things that impact our making sense of our experiences.

I encountered several of Kenneth Balfelt's works on repeated occasions without knowing that he was involved, or that what I was experiencing was an actually existing art project. It was not until I was confronted with the task of reflecting on his work for this essay that I started to pay attention to what I had experienced.

Teaching combined with my own art education and my career working in multiple kinds of spaces, places and with different communities, has shown me that there is never a single, fixed, aesthetic experience of any work of art. There is an irreducible diversity, whether we are talking about a painting or the reworking of a homeless shelter, to how art is encountered. Different people will bring different life experiences and sets of concerns to a work of art. How can we expect a middle-aged, African American inmate in central Illinois to have the same experience of a work of art that a young professional middle class man from the small Danish



Enghave Minipark was a dog walker park before the change. The users went there when the Metro construction forced them out.

provincial town of Herning, or that of an elderly woman from Greenland now living against her wishes in her colonizer's country? What about the experiences of children and adults? Whose experiences do we privilege and hold up as the only true experience of the work? Difference permeates our experience of art. This does not mean that the work is completely lost in all the diversity it unleashes. It is the production of a shared social experience in which the

art is embedded, the dialog and shared experiences it provokes, and other contributing factors through which the meaning in a work of art emerges.

Talking about diversity is not a popular thing in Denmark at the moment. Diversity and multiculturalism are deeply feared by a large segment of the population. The previous Minister for Refugee, Immigration and Integration, Søren Pind (in office when this text was written), has made deeply racist statements on his blog. He has made demands for assimilation rather than integration of immigrants. He has stated publicly that we



Workshop with the beer drinkers about facilities, function and style.

should think that some cultures are better than others. There is a public policy battle over representation that is being waged in this overtly racist, propagandistic speech. This environment also effects, on a daily level, how city planners and law enforcement view people of a city.

Representation, if we do not watch it closely, can collapse diversity, complexity, and the rich inner lives of all of us. Part of being will always be slippery and resist representation. Your idea of a person based on his skin color, religion, country of origin, class background, and so on can dramatically reduce your capacity to see the inner life, personality, and all those important things that unfold just beyond the reach of words and ideology. Work like Balfelt's gives multiple points of access. People can

come into his work and shape it, maybe not restructure it, but at least bring perspectives and reflections that extend it well beyond the artist or community's intentions. Balfelt's work allows for embodied experience and empathy, which produces a deep knowledge derived through experiencing art work like this as opposed to the superficial trappings of other facile representational constructs like "relational aesthetics" or "participation", the latter being little more than playing a pre-determined role in a boring script written by someone without much imagination.



Enghave Minipark in function the first summer with "other users" in one end and beer drinkers in the far end.

An interesting part of the effect of Balfelt's work can be that his role completely fades and that he is no longer needed, contrary to the popular view of artist as supreme author or hero. Not that any one should want to get rid of him. With his artwork, he sets out to create an opening where none was possible before, crossing several social and disciplinary lines in the process. One day he is hammering out plans for a bench with chronic alcoholics and another he is meeting with politicians and city planners in a suit and tie. This type of social engagement grows and turns into what it was intended or what people need it to be and that just might not include what you need it to be.

POST AESTHETICS – when art becomes lived experience

BY MATTHIAS HVASS BORELLO

When we look back on art criticism, it is usually with a certain ongoing melancholy – a recognition of the fact that art criticism did not manage to reformulate its principles when art broke down its own white space and became social, contextual, and participatory. Since the social art experiments of the 1960s, which were gradually radicalised and politicised within the social and public sphere during the sociopolitical turn and movement of the 1990s, art criticism has lacked useful parameters with which to articulate itself.

When art operates in social, political, and societal contexts, basing itself on public involvement and participation, something radically different happens to it. It overlaps in the space that it usually operates parallel to; it opens up in order to allow itself to be used by those whom it approaches, and takes the form of a transformative tool generating new reflections and models of action for those engaged and in society as such. Art is only a starting point, an idea and framework for the actions and meanings that are produced. The work in itself only reaches its intended meaning when the public takes the work at hand. Art is not merely a symbolic activity. It is social. Art is no longer an exclusive product distributed to art's inner market. It is inclusive in a broad societal sense.

The artist as an overspecialized aesthetic object maker has been anachronistic for a long time already. What they **provide** now, rather than **produce**, are aesthetic, often "critical-artistic", services.¹

¹ Miwon Kwon: *One place after another: site-specific art and locational identity*, 2004: p. 50 (my emphasis)

As the American art critic and theorist

Miwon Kwon implies, art in the social and political turn has gained new market value as "service", which stands in unmistakably sharp contrast to "critical-artistic". The artist as a figure has become a representative for a creative reflection which the market can use and turn to in order to

obtain new creative input and capital. The artist is an itinerant brand who can transform the market's strategies into something humane, attentive, dialogical, and participatory. Only by challenging the market's profit-making mechanisms, sustaining its artistic and thus critical position, and, last but not least, transferring the project's ownership from market to *user*, can art navigate in this tightly woven net without compromising the art as a social, critical practice.

With ownership, art moves the production of value from the brand and the market to the context. And those questions, which will be reiterated in this text, will deal with this transformation and transaction as a central strategy for art; an art that, due to its earnest background, is compelled to familiarise itself with the problematics and context it operates in.

The lack of empathy – not being able to place oneself in the position of others – is the foundation for the movements and mechanisms in society that undermine the social context, and which art often confronts: marginalisation, exploitation, alienation, intolerance and apathy.

Empathy is the opposite of indifference and passivity. Empathy is the predisposition to activation, responsibility, respect, recognition, solidarity, sense of commonality, critical attitude, and meaningful involvement.

Therefore empathy is both the premise and goal for a socially based art practice.

ART AS A SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

A group of parked cars on the roof of a multi-story carpark in Oakland, California, are the framework for a project from 1994 staged by the artists Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby, and Chris Johnson entitled *The Roof Is on Fire*. 220 teenagers took part in a dialogue project with the local police in which they, in small groups packed into the cars, discussed issues such as stigmatisation, economic support for local schools, racial

predeterminations, and so on. The project also included a series of dialogues over six weeks with local police officers. Two groups, who had a very strained and stereotypical picture of one another, met here in open and public dialogue. The project was broadcasted by local television and thoroughly documented, which was to be used afterwards as a preventative social and educational tool in the city's public schools.

The Mimersgade quarter in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, was likewise a framework for a similar art project in the summer of 2006 (*SID NED! – Samtidskunst på Mimersgade/Sit Down! – Contemporary Art on Mimersgade* presenting works by the Danish artists and collectives SUPERFLEX, Parfyme, Jeppe Hein, Sonja Lillebæk Christensen, J&K and Kenneth A. Balfelt). Here too the project demanded the participation and engagement of those residing in the area, as the focus here was their own housing area and the plans for the upcoming renewal of the area, which could be critically nuanced by the project's potential.



Meeting with Johnny, the owner of Café Heimdal to convince him to let the team paint the facade. He did not believe they could manage the great task. In the end they all decided to make a new sign instead.

One of the projects included in *SID NED!* was the Kenneth A. Balfelt project *Café Heimdal – Here You Can Find Shadow*. Balfelt's contribution was, as in many other occasions, a project based on dialogue, with its starting point, like *The Roof Is on Fire*, in a social conflict

in the quarter. For a long time there had been a tense relationship between the regulars of the local pub, Café Heimdal, and some of the male youths with primarily immigrant backgrounds from the school in the area (Heimdalsgade Overbygningsskole, HGO). Balfelt here explains his intentions for the project, which turns the typical idea of ‘urban renewal’ upside down:

*“Normally, when urban renewal or city planning is undertaken, architects, urban planners, or other socially advantaged people are the ones conducting investigations into needs and ideas of various groups, like the socially disadvantaged, the marginalized, or subcultures. My idea was to put two of these groups together and then let them create a kind of ‘mini-urban renewal’. Hopefully it would show that they can do it themselves, and that the resources are there, even though we may be biased to think the contrary”.*²

² See quote p. 153

The schoolboys who had previously clashed with the regulars of Café Heimdal were to enter into a lengthy dialogue with the ethnic Danish public from the pub, in order to find out how they imagined the pub might be refurbished (the framework for the mini-renewal). The schoolboys, guided by the artist, would then carry out the regulars’ wishes – an invitation which both parties accepted: a very demonstrable proposal, which contained a very important agenda underneath, namely to encourage the two groups to begin a meaningful dialogue with one another. The conversations, in which the boys interviewed the regulars, ended (despite the regulars’ satisfaction with the existing look of the café) with the goal of a new façade sign for the pub, which was then produced by the boys with artistic guidance from Balfelt. The sign to this day is on the facade of Café Heimdal, as tangible evidence of this reconciliatory dialogue and process.

Two comments in relation to the project are worth investigating, because they show where and when the actual recognition of the project occurs. Both of these are social and empathic recognitions, which occur in the project’s epilogue:

‘Tine’, who is the daughter of Café Heimdal’s owner, explains:

Many in the neighborhood were talking about it and were curious about it, like other bars and neighbors, but also that it made the newspapers, radio and the television, was very positive. It is a good way to build integration. They come and see what kind of people we are, and the other way around. You know, we also run into many prejudgments about ‘bodegas’. But what they saw was that we’re just ordinary people. [...] I’ve thought a lot about whether or not it had any effect. But it’s really hard to say. Of course I hope that we’ll be able to live together, all of us, but really it’s not getting much better here in this neighborhood, I’m sorry to say, and that’s a pity because they’re just as Danish as we are. Whether the project helped, I don’t think I can give you the answer. But I think about it a lot.

And, with the same rationalisation after the fact, Balfelt himself explains:

*When I spoke about the Café Heimdal project, there was a jolly lady who suggested that we should repeat the project at the HGO school afterwards and carry out a renewal over there too. It’s a brilliant idea, and shows a totally deep and intuitive sense of what my project is about.*³

³ www.publik.dk Project newspaper: Interview with Kenneth A. Balfelt, p. 8

It is this artistic agenda and challenge which manifests itself in a number of Balfelt’s projects: *Radical Horizontality – Shelter for Men* (2002-2006),

No One Can Wake Up (2004), *Empty Offices vs. Homeless* (2002-2003) and *Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Users* (2002-2003).

It is the users, or as Balfelt calls them, the ‘super users’ (those directly involved and actual users in the context), who deliver the valuable resources and models for solutions to the project, *not* the artist. Art is only an ideological and practical framework – the concept and administration – not the final execution. Without participation, no art. And without art, no engagement either as this project shows. It is in any case the basis for the legitimization of projects such as this. Art, through its platform, its more direct language, freer rules and greater space for reflection, can engage a public to be involved themselves, express opinions, take control of its own social determinations and obtain a distinct possibility to actually affect public presumptions and context.

It is precisely this premise that will be the salient point here: that the public participates. What should and can art actually do, and what does it mean to the public and the evaluation of art projects such as this, when they are dependent on context and public participation?

THE SOCIAL POTENTIAL OF ART

Within the early avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the later neo-avant-gardes in the 1960s and 1970s the assumption was, that art needed to transgress its traditional way of working and the art institution as a framework, to enter into a more critical and direct exchange with society. Ideologies that were pulled to the fore by, amongst others, the French Marxist theorist Guy Debord from the late '50s, and the German conceptual artist Joseph Bueys, whose ideas shaped the notion of art as a social structure, power and tool. There is, as these historical facts sum up, nothing new about art that makes itself available as a social catalyst and expander of societal perspectives, values and

patterns of action. And in 1986 one of the founding British artists within the socially engaged field (notably with the project: *The West London Social Resource Project* in 1972), Stephen Willats states:

*Artwork that seeks to instigate changes in the way we perceive the dominant value structure, so that we can engage in a more person-based consciousness, must establish links with social reality. In this case a consistency must be sought between the consciousness that underlies the artist's practice and the methodologies employed in the artwork itself, since the more the work is directly related to the lives people lead, their problems and their aspirations, the more central its meaning will become.*⁴

⁴ Stephen Willats: "A Social Model of Art Practice" in *Society through Art*, HCAK, 1990.

As prescribed by Willats, the art of the 1990s articulated an explicit social, critical, and political agenda, both intentionally and practically. The development of a ‘directly related’ art practice became the branding significance of the 1990’s. Another early example is John Ahearn’s social interventions in the South Bronx (with *Rigoberto Torres, between 1981 and 1991*) where he, as a newcomer in a socially strained quarter, attempted to give voice to a social underclass and create a counterbalance to the negative stereotyping in the surrounding society: an attempt to re-articulate a local area marked by poverty, prostitution, drugs, and illness.

Here the artist aims to intentionally turn himself into a tool in a social problematic, and primarily for those who are stereotyped. The art will integrate itself in the context and the public – who join in – as it simultaneously attempts to use its privileged status consciously as a medium for this. Thus we are dealing with a complex and pronounced dialogical relation between art and the public context in which it operates.

These are works that include a genuine social context, which comment on economic exploitation and social imbalance. Where politics lacks a grip on social problems, art ideally steps in, so as to generate a less-limited dialogue in which official top-down initiatives are replaced by a flat democratic and dialogue-based structure. Here art carries the potential for something socially alternating. Art, in other words, is regarded as being able to change a condition in both a social and political context by building on the potentials concealed in the site of the artwork.

Despite this artistic agenda, during the last five decades the relation of art to the public has caused problems for many art theorists and critics, where a distanced aesthetic judgement is confronted or even compromised by ethical and political agendas.

Appropriated, performative, conceptual, transient, and even interactive art are all accepted by art world critics as long as there appears to be no real possibility of social change. The underlying aversion to art that claims to “do” something, that does not subordinate function to craft, presents a resonant dilemma for new genre public artists. That their work intends to affect and transform is taken by its detractors as evidence that it is not art, Suzanne Lacy complained in her ground-building introduction in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* in 1995.

A further philosophical problem for art criticism was and still is that one is obliged to follow art's movement into the social field, and thus link art with social dogmas and productions: aesthetics with ethics. The *beautiful* with the *good*: a problem of art theory and thus a problem of art criticism. And if art, just as Lacy suggests, really wants to change something, how and

with which parameters should we, in that case, measure and evaluate these potentials for change?

THE BEAUTIFUL ADMINISTRATION

Several theorists have attempted to relate critically to these complex processes in contemporary art, and overstep the boundaries of art theory between aesthetics and ethics, where participants and dialogues in art become aestheticized, and social parameters are transferred to the administrative form, structure, and implementation of the artwork. Among the broadly recognized contributors we find Nicolas Bourriaud: *Relational Aesthetics*, 1998 (English version 2002); Grant H. Kester: *Conversation pieces: Community and communication in modern art*, 2004; Miwon Kwon: *One place after another: site-specific art and locational identity*, 2004; and Claire Bishop: *Artificial Hells – Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, 2012. Hand in hand with these theorists, the parameters of art theory, in their encounter with the public, are reformed from traditionally having been concerned with the administration of beauty to now being concerned with the ‘beauty of administration’ in their encounter with the public.

Critical necessity is, especially for British art theorist Claire Bishop, a topical agenda, as art's socio-political turns have made socially engaged art into remunerative political capital in the neo-liberal, creative economies of the '00s without much critical differentiation.⁵

⁵ Claire Bishop: *Artificial Hells – Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, 2012, see the section Creativity and Cultural Policy (pp. 13–18)

If one wishes to relate in an artistic–critical way to these socially intervening projects, one ought to, by way of this theoretical influx, look at how the relation between the artist and the public is administered. One must transfer ethical parameters to the administrative elements in art. In other words,

aestheticize participation and the dialogical processes. According to these theorists, participation is part of the ‘production of the work’ itself and must therefore be intuited from an artistic starting point, and not exclusively from a social, political, and ethical point. The foundation for theory and criticism is the question of the beautiful participation, and how the artist manages to administrate this. Through the readings of the four theorists mentioned, some collective and recurrent qualitative (and pragmatic) criterias could be sketched out:⁶

⁶ This is a sketch of recurrent criteria, which the four theorists advance (Nicolas Bourriaud’s criteria concerning ‘inter-subjectivity’, Claire Bishop’s criteria concerning ‘participation’, Miwon Kwon’s criteria concerning ‘integration’, and Grant H. Kester’s criteria concerning ‘empathic dialogue’)

- Is it possible for the user to participate freely?
- Is the project marked by an equal dialogue?
- Can the users translate/recognize the codes which the art project utilises and carries?
- Is it possible for the users to influence the art project and its structure?
- Can the users appropriate some social-related and recognition-related tools, which can be useful in the social context they are in?
- Does the art project hold empathic qualities?

THE DEMOCRATISATION OF DIALOGUE

Grant H. Kester uses the term *dialogical art* about this collaboration, dialogue, and community based art. The intention of this art form has long been the same, according to Kester, who draws a long thematic thread from the 1920s onwards:

– *Creating an open space where individuals can break free from pre-existing roles and obligations, reacting and interacting in new and unforeseeable ways.*

Kester reaches down in the basic mechanism itself, of which this art is based, and which the traditional art critic has not developed terms to qualitatively evaluate, namely the dialogue. Kester does this by fetching theoretical inspiration and tools primarily from the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (*An Aesthetic for Democracy*, 1999), and the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas (*The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*, 1962), who are both significant voices within the understanding of power relations and power production in the mechanisms of the dialogue.

The dialogical situation is bound by ethical dimensions, and with regard to the art and the artist’s position, intervention and actions are placed in a grey zone: Very little can be anticipated; the artist’s knowledge of the public context, within which intervention occurs, is often limited; the audience is an unsettled entity, and how does one sense the participants’ acceptance of the artistic presence and engagement? In these cases the inexpedient scenario is that art, despite its good intentions, becomes a *re-producer* of a socially unfit and stigmatized public.⁷

According to Kester, the knowledge, which the mechanisms of dialogue ought to build up, has the designation *connected knowing*.⁸ Two mutually related mechanisms manifest themselves in the production of this contextual knowledge:

⁸ Grant H. Kester: *Conversation pieces: Community and communication in modern art*, 2004, p. 113

⁷ Grant H. Kester’s term for this failure is *dialogical determinism*

- **Recognizing** is the *empathic recognition* of the other and is aimed at the artist’s interaction with the participants, whom the artist should recognise in the perspective of the social context they speak, judge, and act from. This includes the participants’ history as a precondition for entering into a dialogue, and position in a social and political sense – the capacities participants

now have are social, linguistic, rhetorical, educational-related and knowledge-related.

- **Identifying** is the empathic identification in art's dialogue with the public, where a *redefinition of the self* happens dependent on what extent we are capable of relinquishing our prior *self*. It is through the empathic dialogue that we might be able to concede from our own interest (also as an artist), and in the universal exchange of interests borne by the understanding of evident arguments, our mutual connectedness as human beings.⁹

9 *ibid.*, pp.113–114

But processes such as this place new demands on the temporal dimension in social art projects. The parties should understand that the intervention is not merely a visit free of obligations. In the preconditions for a 'beautiful' dialogue, the timeframe is therefore central, because the trust which a good dialogue demands is built up over time both in the introductory and evaluative phases of the project.

*Dialogue and the trust necessary for dialogical interaction grow out of a sustained relationship in time and space: the co-participation in specific material conditions of existence. But the nature of contemporary art patronage and production works against this kind of sustained commitment.*¹⁰

10 *ibid.*, 171

THE EMPATHIC DIMENSION

By entering into and conducting oneself critically in the conditions of participatory-based and dialogical art, Kester strives to enable critical tools for a legitimate social aesthetic, which can set a standard for art's interventions. They are sensitive movements and structures separating the exchanges of artists and participants, where one criterion stands

particularly central to the question of the artist's administrative role in the work process: empathy. And with reference to the six criterias listed earlier, empathy functions as a common criteria, ability and premise for a social art practice building on participation, integration, dialogue, inter-subjectivity and administration of context-based processes. Empathy in approach, process and product.

Empathy practised to a full extent is an utopian ideal, but according to Kester, there is an empathic model, a production model, and a mediation model with three sequences, which can lead to an empathic effect through preparation, process, and epilogue:

- Creation of premises for solidarity (with art as a free empathic space for dialogue)
- Intensification of solidarity (in art via the process of exchange)
- The example's nuanced corresponding to a ruling unanimous agenda/representation through art's empathic dialogue (via a more diverse and complex illustration of the conditions in the social structure and debate through art)¹¹

11 *ibid.*, pp.114–115

Empathy is an ever more seldom human trait in our society, social conduct, and commercialised communication. But as Grant H. Kester himself emphasises, and art again and again exemplifies: – *Empathic insight can be produced.*

A POST-AESTHETIC

In conclusion, if we turn back to the starting point of this text, the question is: What links a feeling of empathy and the sentient subject? If art can produce, or maybe rather exemplify, an 'empathic' model, which Kester's theory demands, how – and when – do we recognise this?

As was characteristic of the reactions in connection with *Café Heimdal – Here You Can Find Shadow* (2006), the legitimate recognitions are produced not in the direct response, in the process itself, but rather in a post-response, which analytically relates to that which is overlooked. The socio-aesthetic recognition places itself precisely in the reflection of how one acted and reacted in the situation, and then which suggested changes of conduct this realisation could possibly lead to – in retrospect. In 1983, Susan Feagin connected art and ethics in an analysis of the aesthetic pleasures that are produced in connection with tragedy (as far back as antiquity, the idea of feeling functioned as an evaluative space for large societal and human questions of normative character), and as most can recognise, grief and sorrow are not something we connect with direct pleasure. No, the mutual pleasure of tragedy does not occur in the direct response (grief and sorrow) but in the indirect “meta-response”, as Feagin calls it – in the following study of the reaction to tragedy, where we perceive and find pleasure through our empathic capacity as humans to feel sympathy for the situations and destinies of others.¹²

It is in the rationalisation after the event – in a *post-aesthetic* – that the ethical dimensions occur as a recognition with a societal-ethical potential. This is where empathy connects with the subject and unfolds as a real phenomena, which continually is the potential and at times the product in Balfelt’s projects in Mimersgade, in Mændenes Hjem, and the community around them. It is the post-aesthetic recognition that leads to new thoughts, and new patterns of action.

It mirrors this comment from Katrine Damgaard, social education worker at Mændenes Hjem in Copenhagen, who was a central part of FOS and Kenneth A. Balfelt’s project, being based on site, in the project:

Now you hear comments about the refurbishment, either because they don’t understand it, or because they think it is cool or terrible. It is not so much what they think about the design, it’s more the fact that they now think something or other. It is great that they take a position on it. I am happy to be a part of a process where the milieu is prioritized. To see whether the different rooms can create different forms of togetherness, which hopefully are differently positive. If nothing else, the project is an example of taking these people seriously on a level that has not been considered before – the artistic and cultural level. And it is a recognition that they have an opinion on the environment they move around in.

And if we should look back at the need to understand this kind of involved practice as art, then we find this no-bullshit answer from a visitor during *Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Users* (2002):

It’s probably okay to categorise it as a kind of installation art, which generates a debate in society, but it might not be so important whether we mark it as one thing, as long as it creates debate and an example of a solution model for people.¹³

¹³ From the documentary *Protection Room – Injection Room for Drug Users* (2002): <https://vimeo.com/47297260>

Art, and in this context Balfelt’s projects, seek to develop and represent new premises for empathic models; models we experience the outcome of when the work is acted out, and a recognition we finally collect when we critically analyse what they were – and will be – able to bring about in the context. According to the American activist and art theorist Brian Holmes, it is exactly this analytical recognition, which binds itself to a socio-politically engaged and anti-capitalist art, transgressing an easily-renewable and easily-digestible aesthetical pleasure:

Access and immediate dialogue, however, are only the beginning. What's surprising is the way the sensations and ideas of the artwork resurface in later conversations, in other works, texts, projects or programs. Without disappearing, the figure of the author tends to disperse into appropriation and remix. Direct references to the content of a piece are less important than a lingering affective presence, a kind of memory echo that creates an aesthetic atmosphere. In capitalist society such atmospheres also exist: but they are engineered at a distance, according to instrumental calculations. In a cultural community the modulation of the environment by all the participants is the tacit act of creation that binds the group together and, in the best of cases, extends an invitation for others to join.¹⁴

¹⁴ Brian Holmes: "Art after Capitalism" in *It's the Political Economy, Stupid* (ed. Gregory Sholette & Oliver Ressler), 2013, p. 167–8

It's a personal conviction that criticality in regard to social art practices withholds a demand for *engaged analysis*, and, like Kesters writings clearly exemplifies, tries to bring the critical analysis to the premises and process of the concrete artistic engagement, and at the same time transgress the conventional norms of art lingua and protectionism with a cry for pragmatism. Discussions on art definitions and autonomy are highly irrelevant, if the intentions of artistic intervention are contextual. As this text (and publication) hopefully brings to public light; both artist and context, artwork and participant, theory and criticism are naturally compromised by the social ends and processes in dealing with real issues and unstatic social norms and actions. In the same spirit, the criteria and critical assumptions present in this text are not fully applied models but ways of transforming theory into critical tools that enhance the modes of dealing with socially determined art practices and works. The highlighting of a post-reflection in this theoretical context points at the social knowledge production these art practices carry, and

as this publication facilitates, it is by analyzing the post-reflections (and actions) of this knowledge production produced by an artwork that we can actually critically reflect on the intentions, administration, structure, contextual empathy, relevance and impact it actually had.

The Art of the Possible: Realistic Pragmatism and Social Service Image Myths

BY DANIEL TUCKER

TAKING A STAB AT AN UPHILL BATTLE

During my early childhood, my father ran a shelter for homeless and substance addicted adults. Following the Vietnam war, the closure of mental health facilities, and immense cuts to city budgets from the Federal government, the late 1970s saw an increase in “street-based people” in the United States. Under the Reagan administration this intensified, with the dramatic decrease in affordable housing¹. Combined with

¹ From <http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/135/reagan.html> "In the 1980s the proportion of the eligible poor who received federal housing subsidies declined. In 1970 there were 300,000 more low-cost rental units (6.5 million) than low-income renter households (6.2 million). By 1985 the number of low-cost units had fallen to 5.6 million, and the number of low-income renter households had grown to 8.9 million, a disparity of 3.3 million units".

the increased availability of hard drugs, this was the social landscape in which my father worked on a daily basis. The work was rewarding, while also exhausting, and exposed his heart to the devastating stories of people's hardships and his mind to challenging ques-

tions with no clear answers. His body took its own beating, as he was frequently dipping in and out of office work, kitchen work, and breaking up fights over beds, booze and food while dodging the occasional stabbing attempt.

Reflecting on this history and its ongoing manifestations, the role of art in relation to society may not seem particularly urgent to explore. But with the the political and humanitarian efforts engaged in an uphill battle, perhaps there is nothing to be lost and something to be gained from exploiting the formal and communicative potential of art to take a stab at another solution.

BODIES AND IMAGES

The mere presence of homeless, vagrant, dispossessed bodies in the lives of those with homes and basic necessities does not in and of itself create enough urgency or will to resolve social/economic inequity. This is observable to anyone who has ever been in an urban area and

As the project developed, Balfelt considered how the idea of a highly visible injection facility would resonate as an image of the social and political issues described above. Balfelt's stated intentions were:

to enable a multi-faceted debate on injection rooms. The debate on injection rooms had gone on for a long time. There had been statements from experts, Narkotikarådet (Narcotics Council) and various ministries, but the debate had been exclusively in the spoken and written language. I wanted to bring a visual contribution to the debate.

He worked to gain recognition and representation of the project in the media and soon found himself in contact with the police. With threat of being jailed for initiating this project, the artist decided to forbid actual injection in the space – without providing advanced notice to the drug users with whom he had been in touch about *Protection Room*. Still, the idea of the project circulated widely in the press. Ceremonial events surrounding its opening drew in some Social Democratic political figures who were encouraged to publicly comment on the possibility of injection rooms in their policy agenda following the announcement of *Protection Room* (a possibility which has since been realized for the first time in Denmark).

Balfelt's work never achieved functionality in the way that drug users may want or need. One such user, Jørgen Kjær, interviewed after the project was over and the media attention had died down, feared that the decision not to tell users it would not be used for injection made it "superficial" and indicated a lack of trust. He explained that it was really just a "sketch of an injection room" as an art project and pointed out: "If we had made an injection room we would have chosen to prioritise the practical more highly over the aesthetic." For Sophie Hæstorp Andersen, a local politician, it was not a problem that it was an art project as she

believes there needs to be visual representations of society's problems and reminded her of the pedagogical role of being a public official. A local social worker involved in the issues that *Protection Room* was engaging, Preben Brand, concluded that without actual users in the space that it reinforced the idea that "it was all about politics."

Considering these results, this work recalls an art project dealing with homelessness in the United States: *paraSITE* (1998) by Michael Rakowitz. While there is some level of functionality in *paraSITE*, both projects function as what Rakowitz has called an "agitational device" whereby a designed object, developed in partial collaboration with people living on the streets, is asserted by those people as a material manifesto and symbol in the visual landscape. As Rakowitz has explained,

This project does not present itself as a solution. It is not a proposal for affordable housing. Its point of departure is to present a symbolic strategy of survival for homeless existence within the city, amplifying the problematic relationship between those who have homes and those who do not have homes. The mentally ill, the chemically dependent, those who are unable to afford housing, men, women, families, even those who prefer this way of life are included among the vast cross section of homeless people in every urban instance. Each group of homeless has subjective needs based on circumstance and location. My project does not make reference to handbooks of statistics. Nor should this intervention be associated with the various municipal attempts at solving the homeless issue. This is a project that was shaped by my interaction as a citizen and artist with those who live on the streets.²

2 This widely circulated statement by the artist has appeared in numerous blogs, including <http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/006428.html> (accessed 7/23/13)

While I am not arguing for an interpretation that solely relies on the artists' intentions, a close examination reveals a symbolic rather than service-oriented work. If read as a work of social service, it would be deemed a failure as no such injection room service was ever provided.

Balfelt argued that the debate around drugs and injection rooms was stale and needed the infusion of a new perspective – making media attention crucial to his conception of the project. From that vantage point, it worked: *“It was reported in around 30 newspaper articles, eight radio items and six TV items during the 3 weeks the project ran for, and for some time afterwards”* Balfelt reported in his evaluation documents. It offered an image and physical example of what such an initiative might look like in the absence of any such examples. Following these assessments of the work, I must conclude that *Protection Room* functioned primarily as a campaign to disseminate a provocative image-myth (asking *what if* there was an injection room?) in the media and public imagination. It should therefore be evaluated as such.

Had the injection room become functional, it would have thrust the body of the user into the social sphere under newly aestheticized terms – no longer simply ignorable, but as the recipients of a new and highly visible public service that encourages rather than discourages their presence. But without the sustained involvement of such people, the project is rendered into an *“agitational device”*, an image-myth of what could/should/might be.

THE ART OF THE REAL

In the 1930s, a young Saul Alinsky was crisscrossing the Back of the Yards neighborhood of Chicago's Southwest Side talking to union members from the meat packing plants and neighboring residents about his

theories on poverty. Soon he had convinced the union that their work would be greatly improved if there was a parallel organization outside of the workplace – a union for the neighborhood – and the modern concept of *“community organizing”* was born.

Alinsky went on to theorize this work in two guidebooks, indispensable to politicians in the United States, the first *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) and finally *Rules for Radicals* (1971). The second book resonated with young activists of the New Left who were burnt out on protests and wanted to get things done and was marketed directly to this generation, carrying the subtitle *“A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals”* on its cover. Alinsky explains in the introduction:

As an organizer I start from where the world is, as it is, not as I would like it to be. That we accept the world as it is does not in any sense weaken our desire to change it into what we believe it should be – it is necessary to begin where the world is if we are going to change it to what we think it should be. That means working in the system.

After attacking idealists and ideologues, he later follows up with

Political realists see the world as it is: an arena of power politics moved primarily by perceived immediate self-interests, where morality is rhetorical rationale for expedient action and self-interest.

From this foundation, *Rules for Radicals* outlines basic tactics for organizing in a community, developing a campaign, and handling communication. His emphasis on the creation of symbols to encourage unity positioned his pragmatic realism in an image war with bosses, politicians

and neighborhood polluters. Not unlike the tradition of tactical media (described by filmmaker and AIDS activist Gregg Bordowitz as: “*It is, what is, when it needs to be*”³), this style of community symbol creation adapts itself to the style, context, rhetoric and conditions of its target. This

kind of fluidity is predicated on an assumption that the people you are organizing know what they want (or that the organizer knows what they want, and will use their charisma to convince the people of that objective being desirable).

The pragmatism advocated by Alinsky has inspired generations of organizers and organizations to implement an approach to image production that targets the “arena of power politics” described above. These campaigns tactically assert sympathetic images into the daily news cycle in order to pull public opinion and support into their favor. An example of this kind of thinking can be found in the Rukus Society’s *Checklist for Effective Direct Action Media*, in which they outline what to do before the action:

1. *Decide what person or persons will be in charge of media strategy.*
2. *Settle on one simple message.*
3. *Choose a strong image that clearly communicates the message.*
4. *Craft sound bites that communicate the message and enhance the image.*
5. *Choose a date and hour for the action that will maximize your chances for coverage.*⁴

⁴ Rukus Society’s Checklist for Effective Direct Action Media can be read in full at <http://ruckus.org/article.php?id=107> (accessed 7/23/13)

A training manual of the SEIU (Service Employees International Union), the largest and fastest-growing union in the United States, outlines this in their media strategy:



Stand Up Chicago protest on June 14th 2011. Photos by Daniel Tucker.

*Media coverage and advertising can help to [...] Maintain morale among your members; Give customers, clients, investors, and others in the community reasons to cut off economic ties with the employer; Encourage politicians and regulatory agencies to take actions that support our campaign or to at least stay neutral; Encourage members of other unions and community groups to get involved in strike support activities; Make individual managers nervous about the effect bad publicity may have on their careers and reputations; Successful use of the media also is important to counteract management’s propaganda*⁵.

⁵ Excerpted from the training manual “Pressuring the Employer” published by the liberal website <http://crooksandliars.com/david-neiwert/> right-wing-union-bashers-trying-turn following an attempt by conservative media to “expose” the union’s pressure tactics. (Accessed 7/23/13)



Stand Up Chicago protest on June 14th 2011. Plenty of coverage by the news medias. Photos by Daniel Tucker.

The result is that large organizations orchestrate the bodies of their membership into images of engagement, outrage and desperation by the less powerful (workers, teachers, students, the poor, etc). The hope of this kind of organizing, choreographed for the ease and convenience of the nightly news is that the powerful start to feel threatened through images running counter to their aesthetics of power and control.

The community organizers deployment of images often require manipulation of the “real” in order to produce authentic-seeming and high quality compositions that will adequately resonate with the target audience. This dimension of public relations can at times compromise the empowerment agenda articulated in the rhetoric and stated mission of such

organizations of marginalized people. Unfortunately many organizations seem incapable of balancing these goals, resulting in an unevenness of quality across the field of community organizing. Some invest in the cultivation of leadership and empowerment by those most affected while projecting poor quality images of themselves in public, while others accept a more professionalized structure and often hierarchical division of labor suitable for the projection of sophisticated image-myth campaigns, often rationalized by the Alinsky-ite conception of a pragmatic realism. This distinction can be articulated as a difference between two approaches: a redistributive (of wealth and/or resources) and a representational (a depiction of a social/economic order) approach⁶.

⁶ While my use of this dichotomy stems from my reading of the work of Walter Benn Michaels on photography and diversity, this kind of distinction has been elaborated on very constructively (and quite differently than Benn Michaels) in the book *Redistribution Or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* by Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (Verso, 2003)

REDISTRIBUTIVE IMAGE-MYTHS

In some views images are considered the domain of artists, with the creation of representations being synonymous with the creation of art. And while the production of sophisticated images has also been a tool of successful politicians and activists (as with those described above), it has always benefited from the skills central to most art in terms of framing, composition, symbolic imagery and distillation of complexity into form. This marriage of politics and representation has often manifested in the form of documents.

Today much contemporary art is preoccupied with documentation, especially for artists working with both the subject matter of social consequence (most artists do this) and the form of the social (other human beings). The documentation forms a particular kind of representation – one imprinted with the social form through the implication that this image will only work through its circulation. This creates a distinction between

what the work is *of* and what it is *about*. The work is a representation of an injection room, or “sketch” as described above by a potential user. But the work is about the need for debate about injection rooms. This distinction is where I locate the artist’s intentionality, and the primary difference between images which are self-consciously produced as art and the activist image campaigns described above.

This tension is palpable in the participant evaluations of Balfelt’s work shared about Protection Room. The user, the politician, and the social worker all articulated the outcome and effect of the project differently. Without having direct contact with the individuals myself, my crude interpretation of these differences is that they fall roughly along the participant’s proximity to power and their attitude towards the political projects of redistribution versus representation. Consideration of both factors allows for a combination of the Realpolitik and the ideological together. For example, while a Social Democratic politician may be ideologically committed to redistribution of resources, their situation within the “arena of power politics” and representational government may give them a proclivity to appreciate the symbolic introduction of public debate catalyzed by *Protection Room*. On the other hand, a drug user or social worker concerned more tangibly with criminalized and precarious bodies in the street – may be more inclined to read a debate as “politics as usual” in the absence of any new resource distribution.

How did we get to this inability to balance redistribution and representation? Is it that political activists since the innovators of tactical media in the Civil Rights and early Environmental Movement have become so preoccupied with image campaigns that it has superseded any ambition to actually win? Is it a problem with ideology – a lack of articulating what, how and for



Protestors in Chicago stage a symbolic arrest for news media. Photos by Daniel Tucker.

whom the redistribution will be directed? Or is it simply that the challenges are too immense to be counteracted like the uphill battle that my father encountered in the 1970s and 80s in a climate of massive dispossession?

Historically, the desire to make an image is not the explicit ambition of a social worker, a politician or a community organization – yet they all make images. In many cases, all they produce is images – representations of politics in action, of the dispossessed getting served, of the powerless fighting the powerful. Perhaps it is time for a more intentional discussion of the relationship between realistic pragmatism and image myths?

COLOPHON

Art as Social Practice – A critical investigation of works by Kenneth A. Balfelt
Edited by Matthias Hvass Borello

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Art as Social Practice – A critical investigation of works by Kenneth A. Balfelt looks at a number of vigorously debated collaborative projects undertaken over the past twelve years in and outside Denmark by artist Kenneth A. Balfelt.

It contains both introductions to five projects, interviews with the people involved in the projects and finally four essays trying to reflect on the impact of these kinds of artworks.

As in many other social art practices Balfelt frequently works with a highly-defined and often marginalised group.

“Kenneth A. Balfelt’s art practice operates in between what is politically acceptable and what is imaginatively possible.”

–Brett Bloom

We will therefore

meet people involved directly or indirectly in the projects – also those who are not normally heard in the field of art criticism or not normally encountered by the public – in our effort to vitalize and qualify the critical language on social practices as a part of the contemporary art field.

Art as Social Practice is a publication on contemporary art practices concerned and engaged in social issues and life with theoretical contributions by Barbara Steiner (DE), Brett Bloom (US), Matthias Hvass Borello (DK) and Daniel Tucker (US).

