Politics of Things
What Art & Design Do In Democracy

Jorinde Seijdel

Editorial – September 28, 2012

This *Open* is exceptional in several respects: as a result of radical government cutbacks on art and culture in the netherlands, it is out of sheer necessity the last issue to be published by SKOR | Foundation for Art and Public Domain and nAi Publishers – SKOR will cease to exist in its present form as of 1 January 2013.[1] At the same time, *Open* 24 is special because it was made with the help of three art lectorates (research groups at universities of applied sciences that revolve around specific knowledge domains): Art and Public Space (Gerrit Rietveld Academie, chaired by Jeroen Boomgaard), Arts in Society (Fontys School of Fine and Performing Arts, chaired by Pascal Gielen) and Autonomy and the Public Sphere in the Arts (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, chaired by Peter Peters).[2] Also involved in the realization of this issue, through the lectorate Art and Public Space and its research programme ' Making Things Public', were Sher Doruff, a researcher in the area of experimental methods within the practice of artistic research, and visual artist Yvonne Dröge Wendel, who is conducting doctoral research on the relation between people and things, and who earned an international reputation with her object-performance *Black Ball*.[3] The lectorates acted as financing partners and partly as guest editors, an experimental collaboration with a great chance of succeeding due to our undeniable common interests in regard to the production of knowledge on art in the public domain, something which is becoming only the more apparent in the present Dutch society marked by market thinking and populism.

'The Politics of Things', the subject matter of *Open* 24, is also a little out of the ordinary in relation to previous themes. it is not an urgent political, social or cultural trend, such as populism, mobility, post-privacy or transparency, but sooner a school of thinking related to the philosophy of technology and object-oriented philosophy. That's also precisely where its interest for *Open* lies: to a large extent, the *Politics of Things* is about processes of democratic publicness and publication in the network society, and the role of issues, objects and art within that. At the foundation of this discussion is *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, a book and exhibition from 2005 by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel. Starting with the premise that parliamentary democracy is under pressure in the globalized society, they asked themselves how a democratic politics can function more optimally, and what the role of art is within that. The politics of things thus has a political-philosophic dimension in which power, for example, is investigated as an effect of networks of connections and interactions between people and things, and space is given to things and issues that are seldom represented in connection with democracy.

This *Open* is about what a thing like art does in democracy, how art makes publics, and is a thing that interacts with other things and people and influences them. Latour's approach makes it possible to avoid the oppositions and dualisms that often paralyse the discourse on the arts in the public domain and goes beyond distinctions such as "applied" or "autonomous", ' emphasize Boomgaard and Peters. As Doruff asks: 'What' s been happening since Latour and Weibel went public with their exhibition and catalogue? has there been a perceptible tendency towards an ecology of practices that precipitates sustainable difference in the sciences and arts when publics matter?'

Open 24 includes an introduction to the current Politics of Things and considerations on art and public space through a Politics of Things lens, such as the essay by Peter Peters and Ruth Benschop reconsidering the renowned public art work *Tilted Arc* by Richard Serra, or the text by Peter-Paul Verbeek on how art can examine the political role of Things – and implicitly, the article by Mariska van den Berg on artistic practices for the city. The contributions in this issue also show new perspectives on the public and democratizing effect of art. The 'art thing' is bringing back uncertainty in political systems and thus can stimulate a 'democratic autonomy', postulates Pascal Gielen in the column.

The introductory essays by Boomgaard and Doruff give a clear picture of how the Politics of Things offers purchase for actual practice and prompts more abstract, philosophical reflections. These qualities converge in the essays by Noortje Marres and Fiona Candlin, who both discuss the politics of technology, things and issues, but from different points of view. Bernard Stiegler's essay 'Interobjectivity and Transindividuation', introduced by Pieter Lemmens, is above all a richly experimental approach to our technical condition in the era of hyper-capitalism. How art can be made and examined from an awareness of 'relational thingness' is expressed in the contribution by Yvonne Dröge Wendel and her Object Research Lab, with a text by Sher Doruff and Maartje Hoogsteyns.

It only remains for me to say thanks to SKOR and NAi Publishers for the collaboration from 2004 to 2012, and also to the authors and readers and all who have made *Open* possible. Hopefully we will meet again through *Open!*

Jorinde Seijdel is an independent writer, editor and lecturer on subjects concerning art and media in our changing society and the public sphere. She is editor-in-chief of *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain* (formerly known as *Open. Cahier on Art & the Public Domain*). In 2010 she published *De waarde van de amateur* [The Value of the Amateur] (Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam), about the rise of the amateur in digital culture and the notion of amateurism in contemporary art and culture. Currently, she is theory tutor at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and Head of the Studium Generale Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. With Open!, she is a partner of the Dutch Art Institute MA Art Praxis in Arnhem.

Footnotes

1. *Open* will continue in 2013 as Foundation *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain* in the form of digital and printed publications and lecture programmes. For more information on SKOR and *Open!* see: www.skor.nl and www.opencahier.nl.
2. In the Netherlands, lectureships are research groups affiliated with universities of applied sciences that link education, practice and applied research in socially relevant areas.
3. See: www. yvonnedrogewendel.nl.

Tags

Art Discourse, Democracy, Design, Philosophy, Public Space

This text was downloaded on November 4, 2026 from
Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain
onlineopen.org/politics-of-things