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THE AWAKENING OF ATTENTION – PROJECTS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Historically, the public space has been and still is a reflection —or a narration, as Walter Grasskamp (1) has called it—of political wills, social fabric, cultural dynamics and economic framework, as well as of the reorganization and expansion of our cities. In this shared communal space, market place, place of the affirmation of power, of political and social manifestations, of religious commemoration and festive celebration, different forms of use converge and overlap. To continue with Grasskamp's description: "the schoolchildren's short journeys with the long distances of the postmen, the meandering way of the pickpocket and the waggly path of the dog and its master. One can shop along the urban street, live on it, display goods in shop windows and make music on its pavements, ride a bike or distribute flyers, sit in street cafés or on benches, erect billboards or put up artworks. The road outside town is just for traffic". (2)

The concept of the public sphere —a broader, more fluid notion than that of the public space— goes beyond the strictly physical distinction of the environments (public or private) in which the activities and experiences of human beings take place. According to the analysis of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, "the public sphere denotes specific institutions and practices (e.g., public authority, the press, public opinion, the public, publicity work, streets and public places); it is, however, also a general horizon of social experience, the summation of everything that is, in reality or allegedly, relevant for all members of society. In this sense, publicity is, on the one hand, a matter for a handful of professionals (e.g., politicians, editors, officials), on the other, something that concerns everyone and realizes itself only in people's minds, a dimension of their consciousness. In its fusion with the constellation of material interests in our "postbourgeois" society, the public sphere fluctuates between being a façade of legitimation capable of being deployed in diverse ways and being a mechanism for controlling the perception of what is relevant for society (...). So long as the contradiction between the growing socialization of human beings and the attenuated forms of their private life persists, the public sphere is simultaneously a genuine articulation of a fundamental social need". (3)

So it is hardly surprising, then, that in the last few decades the public sphere has been the rostrum or frame from which artists have made public their observations in the form of specific interventions or projects. If one of the *raison d'être* of art and the artist —supposing them to be in need of justification— is that of positing, with their discourses, questions that allow us to understand more fully both the world in which we live and ourselves, there can be no doubt that the sphere of the public provides material for research and reflection of the highest order, as well as a privileged platform of communication. In this sense, the re-encounter of art with life assumes its maximum significance in this type of artistic project which accepts the risk of invisibility inherent in action outside of the protection of conventional artistic circuits, in order to set up a more open and fluid dialogue.

Since the end of the 80s, the public sphere has been one of the main axes for the articulation of Andreas M. Kaufmann's discourse, whether through the creation of projects in the public domain or through reflecting —and stimulating reflection— on the implications of that concept. Kaufmann sets out from the premiss that the public space has ceased to be the mediating environment that binds together the collective identity to become instead the transmitter of an ideal imaginary which is utilized as a strategy for the mere publicizing of political and economic agendas. In this context, the artist makes use of two recurring elements —the evocation of memory and disturbance— as a way of awakening the attention and the consciousness of city-dwellers long accustomed to experiencing the public space as a domain of consumption.

Evocation of memory and disturbance are two of the elements which, with others, define this artist's projects in the public sphere, whether these be ephemeral projections on the façades of buildings or in natural settings; the use of images salvaged from the realm of the collective —and hence of the public— memory; his recently initiated series of Public Monuments, or the (as yet unrealized) proposals which exist on a theoretic plane that borders on the utopian —that is, the "no place"— and which, in their immateriality, ask to be understood as platforms for debate.

Ephemeral projections in the public space

The analysis of the way in which perception is organized, its dependence not only on natural but also on historical conditioning factors and, above all, the awareness of the malleability of perception are some of the premisses that marked Kaufmann's first steps in the field of ephemeral projections in the public space. Perfect Form (1984), his first experiment in this direction, consisted in projecting a circle onto a number of trees in a park. As a result of optical effects, the figure of the circle could only be perceived in an (almost but never entirely) perfect form from a point close to the lens of the projector. As soon as the viewer moved away from that point, the image of the circle was altered, giving way to an imprecise and distorted form. In this way, the perfection of the geometry of the circle was called into question by a simple effect of position and movement. From this moment on, experimentation with the conditions of perception on the basis of variables such as movement, fragmentation, repetition, distortion, superimposition and anamorphosis become constants in Kaufmann's works.

The evocation of memory by means of the projection of images which allude to a place's past and which, in their confrontation with the architecture, appear as ideals of reality, is the point of departure for other projects, such as the one realized on the Kunsthalle in Kiel (1991). Onto the façade of this building, reconstructed after the end of the Second World War, the artist projected the elevation of the original Kunsthalle as it had been designed by the architect Georg Lohr in 1910. The past, as an ideal image, thus appeared in direct confrontation with the reality of the building constructed in the nineteen-fifties. At the same time, the splendour of the Jugendstil was contrasted with the pessimism and sobriety of the post-War period. In response to this confrontation between reality and ideal, present and past, Manfred Schneckenburger has emphasized the subversive potential of the projection, which "überdeckt die Realität und deckt die Wahrheit auf. Sie rekon-

struiert einen Zustand und entlarvt den Zustand der Rekonstruktionen. Das zielt keineswegs auf simple Korrekturen oder gar Restauration, sondern illuminiert Kaufmanns Grundfrage nach dem Verhältnis von Ideal und Wirklichkeit. Die Projektionen schlagen vor, dass beide weniger Kontraste als fließende Übergänge sind. Hier visualisiert Kaufmann seine ästhetische Theorie". (4)

The memory of the place in conjunction with the technical transformations experienced in the world of work as determinants of the restructuring of the collective identity provide the articulating axis of Ortlos (1996). This project was carried out at the Gasometer in Oberhausen, a construction emblematic of the past of this industrial city, a city which has since been converted into a cultural centre. Onto this architecture, so characteristic of the Ruhr region (the Ruhrgebiet), Kaufmann projected a series of drawings relating to mechanisms of industrial construction; these drawings, borrowed from the archives of local institutions and companies, caused the memory of the place to blossom forth in a quite unexpected manner and confronted this with its present-day transformation. The ephemeral and immaterial nature of these light projections, which in their movement appeared on the architecture of the gasometer and on the surrounding spaces, served to evidence the (almost) forgotten industrial character of the region, whose crisis and transformation were determining factors in its search for a new cultural identity.

Another of Kaufmann's ways of engaging with the collective memory, as a variant of the public sphere, is through the images which go to make up the communal imaginary, which he has explored in a number of projects both in and outside the public space. Here the history of art as not only an archive of memory and human knowledge, but also a realm of recognition and personal memory is present in the numerous projections carried out during the first half of the 90s. This is the case with *Die Trennung von Licht und Finsternis* (1991), which projected the celebrated figure painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel on the exterior and interior walls of the Bochum Museum. Projected over 24 hours, the play of natural light contributed to the dramatic effect of the disappearance/appearance of the figure, which was not only transformed into a literal commentary on the scene painted by Michelangelo but confronted the spectators with the recognition of their own personal memory. In the case of other projects carried out in Japan, the fragmented and anamorphic projections of the silhouettes of Michelangelo's painted figures in the context of Japanese architecture (as in *Creation of the world* [1993] in the temple of Gyokozouin or *In the light of the floating world* [1994] in Amagasaki) emphasized the contacts and discontinuities between the cultural heritage of East and West.

The encyclopaedia, as a mechanism and warehouse of human knowledge and as a transmitter of individual and collective identity, is the starting point for *Machina Encyclopaedica* (1995), an installation in the Wewerka Pavilion in Munster using 20 slide projectors. From this glass-walled construction, Kaufmann projected a battery of images taken from the *Encyclopaedia Brockhaus* so that these could be seen from outside the building. The cumulative character of the images, combined with the superimposition, distortion and movement of the projections, revealed the coincidence and/or divergence of our individual and social precepts, as well as the distinction between the recognition of the images and the personal memory with which they are associated.

Private realm / public sphere

The projecting of images from the inside of the transparent architecture to be viewed from the outside evidence, in *Machina Encyclopaedica*, an interior/exterior, private/public dichotomy (5); this dichotomy is perceived as conflictive in *Nein!* (1996), a video-installation project carried out in the context of Art Special Hansa (6); here a video projection showed the faces of adolescents of different races (the students at the school) shouting "no!". The video was projected onto a sheet of water in a container which had loudspeakers installed underneath it, so that the vibrations produced by the acoustic impulses created ripples on the surface of the water and, as a result, distorted the image. The physical alteration of every negative response, together with the implications of negation as such —an issue which the artist had previously discussed with the students— constitute the principal aspects of this poetic and fatalistic vision of the individual's chances of rebelling against the codes of society, with a special emphasis on adolescence —as an age of transition and of the search for and definition of individual identity— and its presentation in the social domain.

The same conflict, approached from a less fatalistic, more easy-going perspective, appears in *My favourite things* (1998), a video installation for the Kölner Ausstellungs-Projekt Brückengang, which consisted of a construction-site container placed in the street. Looking in through the windows of the container, the passers-by are surprised to see the image of a man who apparently lives in the container, acting in a completely private manner and ignoring the fact that he is exposed to the gaze of the public: playing the piano (not exactly a virtuoso), reading a magazine or eating canned food. It is not so much the lack of enthusiasm with which he carries out these more or less anodyne activities, but rather the displacement into the public sphere of behaviour belonging to the private realm that causes surprise and irritation in the passers-by, who find themselves turned into "accidental" spectators of the subject's privacy.

In this sense, both *Nein!* and *My favourite things* equally demonstrate —albeit with different nuances and implications— the different codes that order behaviour and experiences in the realm of the social and the private, as well as the conflict (or estrangement) that is generated by the shifting and swapping of these codes.

While in *My favourite things* we were witnesses to a fairly personal definition of the public space on the basis of a fictitious character, in the recently initiated series *Public Monuments* Andreas M. Kaufmann films real people in the act of carrying out an autonomous and authentic formulation of their existence in public. *Carlos* (1998-9), the first of the *Public Monuments* series, is a video shot on a busy shopping street in Cologne in which we see a handicapped person balancing a ball in the air using his crutches and his head. As the artist himself explains, "Carlos, the real main character of this video, integrates himself in the public space. He does it by making an intelligent use of his natural limits and the possibilities provided by the site. One never has the impression that Carlos is begging. On the contrary, he seems totally identical with himself and what he does. One witnesses a unique mode of personal definition in the public space. With his appropriation and

and redefinition of a part of the public space, Carlos becomes an authentic public monument that confronts the spectator with the use and perception of the collective space". (7)

In this sense, Carlos exemplifies the redefining of the concept of the monument in the wake of the increasing inability of the political and religious powers to define the notion of the "public" by means of monuments regarded as symbols of memory and the glorification of the heroes who defined our collective identity. It comes as no surprise, then, that in this age of the end of idealisms and of the predominance of the concrete efficacy of dystopias —or small-scale utopias— the new public monuments should seek to identify themselves with the individual of a space in the public sphere appropriation (often linked to commercial ends). In this context, Carlos defines his own space in an intelligent and unusual way, not only in a metaphorical sense, but also in terms of an aesthetic formulation, by means of the describing of an immaterial space drawn by the movement of his crutches.

From the public space to the public image of the media

"We have gone from the public space to the public image (...). The primary city is a city in which what predominates is the public space, it is topical, whereas in the 20th century it is no longer so bound up with this. We go from the theatre-city to the cinema-city and then to the tele-city. From a topical space to a teletopical space in which the real time of the broadcasting of an event is imposed on the real space of the event itself. Tiananmen Square in 1989 was an extraordinary revelation. Here we had a teletopical event of the mass-communications media as important as the landing on the moon twenty years before, in 1969." (8)

With this declaration, Paul Virilio sketches a perfect portrait of what we might define today as the global public sphere, determined by the leading role of the electronic technologies of communication and information, which re-draw the system of relations that connect the history of private life to a system of global information and which reduce aspects such as location to secondary status. Similarly, chronological time —by nature extensive— is transformed into an intensive time of instantaneous novelty in which the individual, momentary gaze is more important than memory.

The global public sphere and the role played by the media in the (re)creation and definition of reality (9) is another of the themes explored by Andreas M. Kaufmann. The central role assumed by the media in the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and, more specifically, the way in which intimate personal information was presented —down to the most minute details— to the public (the statements made before the Grand Jury were broadcast in their entirety on the Internet) provided the catalyst for a project still in progress, Oval Room, that explores the situation created by a media that is always on the look-out for new occurrences.

The political, social and psychological dimensions of the full public knowledge of all the details of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair are explored by Kaufmann by means of the reproduction of the Starr Report by actors using deaf and dumb sign language. The lack of privacy of a language that is

eminently visual, and whose users are therefore obliged in public situations to invent their own codes of discretion, evidences the vulnerability of privacy in the face of the all-consuming appetite of the media. At the same time the formal resolution of this work is of key significance, set up as it is like a mobile with a number of monitors which show the actors in the roles of the different characters. The situation of unstable equilibrium, continually varying, serves in the context of the Clinton-Lewinsky case to evidence the shifting solidity of their positions with regard to public opinion and, in a more abstract sense, the fragility of the individual and his or her privacy before the implacable and merciless verdict of the media mechanisms that declare themselves to be the spokespersons of the community.

The structure of counterbalanced weights clearly manifests the situation of the different agents (public figures, the press and the audience) whose future is irremediably interdependent. There can be no doubt that this unhealthy dependence reflects the imperious need of today's society to get closer to reality by way of its most morbid aspects. A good indicator of this phenomenon is the success of television shows such as Big Brother broadcast on Dutch television, of Web cameras that show people's daily lives in the most literal detail, or of the numerous reality shows that offer their participants those Warholian 15 minutes of fame in exchange for publicly confessing their most secret desires, which are compulsively consumed by an audience eager for hard-hitting experiences.

(Virtual) zones of reflection

In ...Und hin und wieder... (1998-99), an unrealized project in collaboration with Thorsten Goldberg, sign language was used once again to awaken our awareness in relation to the codes of communication deployed in the public space; in this case, in the Berlin metro.

In Alexanderplatz Station on line 2 of the Berlin metro, Kaufmann and Goldberg planned in the first instance to cancel out —by painting them grey— the spaces normally reserved for visual communication, overwhelmingly advertisements, and then to project onto each of the columns in the station slides showing the different positions corresponding to the deaf-and-dumb alphabet. The sequence of slides was to correspond to a series of phrases which related in detail scenes or thoughts associated with Alexander Platz. The translation of the meanings of these alphabetical symbols, not accessible to most of the public, would be set out on pages displayed in a small box.

Surprise, unease, disorientation and irritation in the face of an unexpected or unknown situation or at the shifting of established codes is once again the mechanism utilized by Andreas M. Kaufmann in this and other projects to arouse interest and awaken consciousness. Nevertheless, some of the artist's most recent projects in the public sphere are situated on the utopian plane, understood as a "no place". At this point, Kaufmann considers both the reflection on the notion of what is "public" and the material realization of these works in the public space to be equally relevant. Thus, his projects are designed to be presented in the form of an exhibition within the museum, as documentation, as computer simulation, as publication or as debate on the Internet.

With these proposals, the artist sets out to articulate various (virtual) zones of reflection and stimulus for debate and discussion.

One of these projects is the proposal presented in the context of the exhibition Denkpause (10). In the proposal for his intervention, Kaufmann utilizes simulated images to put forward his vision of the city, in which the signs which organize traffic flow are transformed into sculptural forms, whose volumes not only negate their original ordering functions but turn them into their opposites; in other words, into genuine obstacles to the smooth flow of traffic. By way of this observation, not devoid of irony, the artist alludes to the not-always logical organization of the public space while at the same time recalling the not-always correct use of the presence of art in our communal environment.

In another conceptually related project the artist analyses the eminently commercial nature of the present-day public space, the loss of its role in the definition of identity and its consequently increasing uniformity in Western societies, and more and more in the former Eastern bloc as well. On the basis of these premisses, his proposal is as radical as it is practically unrealizable (from a purely logistical point of view). Under the title Bilderpause, the artist proposes to make all the billboards, signs, images and texts (including the product price tags displayed in shop windows) disappear from a stretch of the Schildergasse, a street in Cologne's main shopping area. The disorientation that this unexpected situation would create in the passers-by might then be the catalyst for that moment of reflection which the artist seeks to provoke, and for the possibility of a redefinition of the public space. In this process, the defining factors would be not only the commercial interests, but the real users and benefactors of these, the individuals who make use of the public space; with the manifestation of their claims they would cease to assume their passive role as potential consumers and become true protagonists, free to make their capacity for expression felt in the communal space. The forthcoming presentation of this project on the Internet, with the opening of a forum for discussion and the exchange of ideas, will no doubt contribute to stimulating this space of reflection and action that the artist is seeking to create.

Having reached this point, it is revealing to note the development of the formulations of Kaufmann's discourse in his engagement with the public sphere. Both the ephemeral projections on the façades of public buildings and the utilization of images belonging to the collective memory serve not only to emphasize the spatial qualities, but are articulated with one another by means of the effect created in the spectator (the mechanisms of projection understood as appearance/revelation) through the disturbance of his or her experience in the public space.

The approach to this problematic is oriented in Kaufmann's most recent works towards the notion of the global public sphere; in other words, a domain that is more voluble and less demarcated, one that has clearly ceased to be an element of definition of the collective identity to become a showcase for commercial interests and the absolute supremacy of the mass-media. The surprise and unease that Kaufmann sets out to create with his projects have no other function than that of producing an estrangement which inevitably awakens awareness —anaesthetized by the accu-

mulation of information— and stimulates reflection, as a necessary first step prior to action. Kaufmann's projects thus function as catalysts for initiating a change of values, of attitudes and of points of view in relation to the public sphere. Rather than pursuing unrealistic utopias, his aims are based on a faith in the power of the sum of individual experiences and initiatives to bring about change.

Translated from Spanish by Graham Thomson

NOTES

(1) GRASSKAMP, Walter. "Art and the City", in Sculpture. Projects in Münster 1997 (catalogue). Verlag Gerd Hatje, Münster 1997 (p. 7).

(2) Ibid. (p. 11).

(3) NEGΤ, Oskar; KLUGE, Alexander. "The Public Sphere and Experience", in October # 46, MIT, Massachusetts, fall 1998. (p. 66).

(4) SCHNECKENBURGER, Manfred. "Die zerbrechliche Schönheit der Licht - Bilder", in Auftritt der verwunderten Schönheit (catalogue). Städtische Ausstellungshalle am Hawerkamp, Münster. (Pg. 10).

(5) Kaufmann had already addressed this problematic in an early incursion into the realms of cinema with the film Paris '57 (1984), in which there emerge elements of the visual grammar that the artist went on to develop in his work. In this film, Kaufmann specifically confronts and superimposes images taken from his own family background with filmed sequences of places in the city of Paris that had some significance for himself and his family.

(6) Art Special Hansa was a project conceived and directed by Uta M. Reindl with the support of UNESCO in which artists were invited to develop a work in the context of the Hansa-Gymnasium in Cologne which would incorporate the involvement of the school's students.

(7) KAUFMANN, Andreas M. "Public Monument: Carlos" (1998-99) in Dokumentationen, Cologne, 1999.

(8) VIRILIO, Paul. "Dromología: la lógica de la carrera. Una conversación con Giacío Daghini" in Media Culture. Claudia Giannetti (ed.). L'Angelot, Barcelona, 1995 (p. 78).

(9) This problematic had been addressed by Kaufmann in an early performance and also, in more explicit fashion, in the installation Zwang und Wiederholung (1994).

10 Denkpause is an exhibition produced by Petra Stilper which consisted in a number of different people (artists, intellectuals, politicians...) connected with Cologne to talk about their vision of the city.

Published in: Andreas M. Kaufmann: here you are. Mit Textbeiträgen von Siegfried Zielinski, Montse Badia, Jan Winkelmann und Uta M. Reindl. Hrsg. v. der Städtischen Galerie Wolfsburg. Köln (Salon Verlag) 2000