

## Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Andrew:

We are extremely pleased to be able to speak to you here today. How did we, two art historians and curators at a small private university in Witten, Germany, get to Edinburgh? The story is simple. It begins in Marfa, Texas, in 1994. All of you will surely know almost everything there is to know about this town close to the Mexican border - population: fifteen hundred. There, in Marfa, 4,000 miles from New York City, we worked as writers in residence hosted by the Chinati Foundation, founded by Donald Judd. We had been working in the desert for several weeks, when Andrew McNiven came down for three days, accompanied by Shan Edwards. In these days, we got to know and like him and his work. Since then, we have presented his art in two group exhibitions. Right now, we are preparing the first show of his work in public space.

What is the position of art? What is the relationship of art, artist, curator and viewer? It seems presumptuous to ask such general questions in the limited framework of a lecture. Please do not expect universally applicable answers here. We are not going to present much more than a slide lecture, which aims to give you an impression of how we look at the work we do with art. This, then, is first and foremost a presentation of our own subjective curatorial practice. However, we would like to include a theoretical outline. Although we are aware of the fact that we are speaking to an audience of professionals here, we will not shy away from talking about what seems banal or self-evident.

Following a theoretical introduction, we will present as briefly as possible selected examples of projects realised in the last 12 years of our joint practice - and of projects we will be realising next year.

In conclusion, we will attempt to use these examples and our theoretical introduction to formulate some consequences for dealing with art today. At first, the approach to the subject will deal with a move away from something.

### **From Object to Context**

The history of art in the last decades is a history of constant transgressions. Dissolution and expansion have become elements of art's momentum. The repertoire of art's materials is not necessarily material anymore - works can consist of instructions for action or the performance of communicative processes. Abandoning the image has become a topos of contemporary art. What does that mean for exhibiting art? How are curators expected to deal with the fact that works of art are not necessarily objects anymore? How should they respond to the "dematerialisation of art"? The developments of recent years have made these questions more and more urgent. The pressure to transform is growing. Traditional forms of presentation seem subject to change.

Much has been said about the change art has undergone in the 1990s. What then is new in the art of the recent ten years. First: Artists are still painting, still working on sculptures, they are still using film and photography - pictures and objects come into being that can be shown at galleries and museums. Naturally, the art of the last ten years cannot be treated as one group. Peter Weibel subsumed some of the outstanding approaches under the heading "Kontext-Kunst" - "context art". This also served as the title of his exhibition at Steirischer Herbst, Graz, 1994. In the catalog, Weibel writes: "Once more, this book presents avantgarde positions which

continue critical and analytical tendencies of the 60s and 70s into the art of the 1990s. What follows the conceptualisation of art is its contextualisation. Weibel's description of the transformation from conceptualisation to contextualisation makes the consequences for curating a truly burning issue. If art itself creates its context, why do we still need exhibiting institutions and curators? Isn't everything the artist needs a back office administering to his creative work? One example for the art we have in mind here is Rirkrit Tiravanija's "Tomorrow is another Day".

#### **From Product to Process**

Artists today make the prerequisites and conditions or contexts in which they are working part of their work. This is why, in recent years, we talk less about "works of art" and more about "artistic practice", a term that reflects the process of production more than the product, and that leaves open the question whether it might imply not only the artist but also the recipient. Works of art are actions, attitudes, processes and games. Concerning the media, the borders between genres and disciplines have been blurred - a phenomenon labelled, in the late 1990s, with terms such as "crossover" or "hybrid images". In logical consistency, the concept of the eminent work of art has been challenged vehemently. Especially in the art of recent years, everything eminent seems to disappear, making way for a network of communication and interaction. Frequently, artists think of themselves merely as hosts or social engineers. After "outsourcing" the process of production, many of them have given up the role of the outstanding "exemplary subject", or genius even, looking at themselves as producers among many other producers. Here also, the issue of the consequences for curators becomes relevant.

#### **The Work of Art - a Dialogue**

The productive role of the viewer becomes more and more important for the "open work" of contemporary art - this has been described by art theorists of the last decades from various methodological points of view. Hans-Georg Gadamer already based his argument on a concept of art that defines the identity of a work of art as a productive process of perception, as a "carrying out", and not as something hanging on a wall. Gottfried Boehm identifies the work of art not as an ontological or empirically objectifiable "factum". Instead, he views it as an "endowed guidance of the senses", as a "representational process in the medium of the senses." What can be called the identity of a work of art is realised in what the senses carry out. This process is neither passive nor concept-free: the identity of the work of art is the "convergence of sensuality and sense in the mode of concrete perception." Not only has the "representational process in the medium of the senses" been extended to all senses in contemporary art. More than that, the work of art is realised only in communicative actions, the emergency of act and contact. The perception of a work of art is not a reality of the second order, is not an illusionary world, and, especially, it can not be seen simply as mimesis of the real, factual world we live in. This becomes evident not only in Rirkrit Tiravanija's "Untitled" (1996) (Tomorrow is another day). It is just as true for a painting by Rembrandt or Albers. In productively "carrying-out" a work of art, the viewer experiences the work as a possible form of reality. Michael Bockemühl has coined a simple phrase for the active "carrying-out" in which the work of art is realised: "Image reception is image production." By stressing the role of the viewer (in the spirit of the 1990s), he levels the "hierarchy which usually exists between author and reader, between artist and viewer." How, though, do exhibiting institutions and curators position themselves on this open field?

### **The Space.**

The work of art communicates itself through its spatial environment. And we know now that the seemingly "neutral" architecture of museums is an illusion: architecture in all its forms has its own language. It is transmitted already in the proportions of space. Every form of architecture is located in political space, and in turn, creates political space. "The appearance of neutrality attached to the white wall is an illusion. It represents a society with fixed ideas and values." Tiravanija's example makes this clear.

### **Mediation as Experience**

With an extended notion of art, concepts of mediating and curating art are also extended. Conveying art to the public not only consists of conversations about and with art, exhibition tours, art talks and artist's lectures in museums, seminars. The very form in which a work of art is shown and the context in which it appears mediate between the work and the viewer, and have thus become parts of art production. In the context of mediating contemporary art, perhaps the most relevant issue is whether a work of art is shown at all. Thus, central questions are shifting - from "what is an object" to the "how" of the performance of artistic practice in which work of art and context can not be clearly separated anymore - as in Tiravanija's example.

In Tiravanija's case, the artist directs the context. Does this make the curator superfluous? Or will the artist simply -supply the material for a mega-artwork - as in Harald Szeemann's shows? Is there some truth, thus, in that prejudice one hears so often these days that by an enforced mediation a weakened art will keep its status? Looking at contemporary developments in art, one realises that works are not only produced for specific sites: environments in which work and spatial context form an inseparable unity. Finally, a kind of meta-art came into being, concerned only with the questions of mediation and the conditions of communication. Seemingly, no visible product was created anymore. This dematerialisation of art, the dissolving of the autonomous work of art in a communicative process has been enacted, for instance, by the artists' groups N 55. Their contribution to "Nowhere", a Louisiana show, consisted in providing chairs for relaxation and juice for the thirsty. Christine Hill's "people's boutique" at Documenta X, a second-hand store, claimed to practice communication as art. Next to the traditional options of art mediation in museums a mediation art was created - or still nothing but a new variety of economy and design?

To relieve this aspect of the burden of the new, one has to make sure of a fundamental precondition: It is not possible to think of a work of art that exists without a context which, no matter what it is, has not been created by the artist herself. It is supervised or not, people pay to see it or they don't, there is a specific time when it is performed, it hangs on the wall, appears on the screen, stands upright or lies on the floor, is positioned in a political context; it is either dark or bright, cold or warm, narrow or big, high or low, noisy or quiet, the show has a large audience or it doesn't. To remind oneself of these banalities can help to define anew the tasks of creating context, and, especially, to put these in a different relation to the artwork. Mediating this kind of art - as Tiravanija's example has shown - should not be understood as secondary. Curatorial work should not be thought about any longer as an area in which the standards applied to the practice of the curator could be different from those measuring the "work of art" or the artist. The work of the curator has become an element of artistic practice, the curator a partner of the artist. This does not mean that curating is now a new form of art. The curator is not an artist - this should be stressed once more. However, this means that the context produced by an institution or a cura-

tor should be measured by the standards of art, and thus becomes an object of artistic criteria. The curator is at once manager, administrator, janitor, builder - however, he or she has to pursue this work according to artistic standards.

### **Art and Politics**

Today, anyone working in the context of contemporary art sees himself confronted with the reproach that contemporary art was elitist and incomprehensible, and thus needed explanation. Especially since art has gradually moved away from the object and its manual production, there is a sense of general confusion as to what we mean by art, and what meaning and use it could have.

In spite of frequent reports we do not perceive a crisis in contemporary art. If there is a crisis, we see it as a crisis of reception and contextualisation. It is much too rare that artistic projects are situated intelligently within contemporary debates in society. It is possible to stage exhibition projects that can take part in today's theory formation - without becoming a social worker, without resorting to "Politkunst" - naive political art. We, the curators and artists, often take political and social conditions not seriously enough. Too rarely, we develop strategies to situate our work in these contexts intelligently. However: how can this happen without limiting one's work, without turning it into a mere reaction or illustration? How is it possible to think of art as one discursive social practice among many, without giving up one's own standards?

### **TIRAVANIJA**

Tiravanija had won the "Central Kunstpreis 1996", and had been asked to stage a solo exhibition at "Kölnischer Kunstverein" gallery. He rebuilt his New York apartment in the scale of 1:1 and installed the replica in the gallery space. The replica did without roughcast or wallpaper, using a wood construction instead. All rooms were fully functioning - kitchen, bedroom, living room, bathroom. The interior furnishing of the apartment was limited to functional elements, excluding private objects: no books, no pictures, no personal souvenirs - only a refrigerator, a stove, a TV set, a bed, a table, etc. In addition, four tall palm trees were placed in front of the structure - they could be gazed at through the windows of the apartment. Additional institutional changes were made: The Kunstverein's box office was disassembled, and the exhibition space was open 24 hours a day for a period of over two months. While Rirkrit Tiravanija frequently visited Cologne - and the Kunstverein space - during this period, visitors most of the time were not able to meet the artist at the location. Instead, a very heterogeneous crowd got settled in the apartment - temporary lodgers, to be exact: there was cooking, eating, drinking, discussions and baths. People stayed overnight, people watched TV - in short, all the functions the place offered were used. The space was extremely charged with communication. The visitor, coming to the space with the expectation that he was going to see art, had to learn that there was nothing to see. Instead, this was about establishing contact with other people. Conscious of the fact that this was a temporary offer, many used the opportunity to meet for parties here - fully aware that they did not have the privilege granted by private space to always pick your guests yourself. The private and the public mixed - so did the behavioral mechanisms coming into play in an exhibition space (silence, viewing, consideration of art) and the mechanisms set off by visiting someone's apartment or party. There was no behavioral code guests could refer to - hence, completely unexpected and unpredictable situations were created, situations in which visitors either reacted defensively or

by provoking conversations on the purpose of such art, the food, the course of the next party, etc. No matter how they responded, visitors did not find themselves anymore in the passive role of the recipient - a role that only seems passive anyhow. With this simple intervention, Tiravanija nullified many of the fundamental laws governing exhibition institutions - not with a gesture of provocation, instead with the simple gesture of the host. At the same time, however, his work depends on the reference to the exhibition situation and its laws and would not have meaning in another location. He depends on the codes he nullifies; it is only in the transgression of borders that his work acquires the tension it is playing with. In his work, several distinctly defined systems overlap: the operating system called art, a private apartment, a youth hostel, public space. The artist himself comments: "I wanted to create a space in which the visitor would not only consume, but instead would play a part, would engage himself. I don't want an art to be looked at, I want an art of involvement." What is decisive for Tiravanija's work is the absence of the artist. This, for instance, sets his work apart from the debates and performances staged by Joseph Beuys. Tiravanija simply creates a setting for communication. In Beuys's case, communication remained an element of a comprehensive sculptural and pictorial work process: the form of this sculptural process was the goal. For Tiravanija, the work is realized only in the active communicative process of the visitors. He himself says: I actually don't think I make anything. It builds itself when it actually happens." Similarly to Beuys's art, Tiravanija's work serves as a catalyst for social processes - Beuys, however, resorts again and again, through his agency, to give pictorial form to these processes. In Tiravanija's case, the perceptible event of the form is missing - on the other hand, he avoids any form of self-display; he works on social contexts and preconditions. What happened at Kölner Kunstverein lives on only in the imagination. The visitor is not only a participant, but also an actor - the "trend toward participation" is carried so far as to leave the user with a context to work on instead of a product. Tiravanija does not leave images behind, he creates a mere basis to start from. More than that even: Only by stepping back as the producer, the artistic process can come into being. Only then, free encounters and conversations, actions and processes can be played out.

## **II. Artefact**

Our first exhibition was called Artefact. We produced this show in an industrial site - as was then the custom for "independent curators" in their early twenties. However, the space we searched and found did not belong an abandoned factory. It was part of a complex in which things were still being produced: in this case, machines for industrial bakeries. On this terrain, a haulage company and a foundry had left behind empty buildings. The two sheds between them covered a territory of 2,500 square meters, on which only thirteen works were produced. All of these works were site-specific, and all were created on the spot. The slides convey the impression of a seemingly classic form of presentation. However, from our point of view, two things were added: on the one hand, an order of the space was created in a discursive process with the artists working with us on-site for several weeks. This led to a unified production which defined the space - especially the space between the works. This, we thought at that time, was the curator's task. On the other hand we installed our own office within the exhibition, and we were present during opening hours. Our motivation was not only that we lacked funds to pay gallery guards, nor did we feel an over-intense educational eros. Instead, we were simply guided by our desire to be there - at the place where things happened, to experience it - alive, with its visitors. This, which commercial gallerists or young exhibition sites might take for granted, is what makes such a space

fascinating to its visitors: there's someone you can at least potentially talk to. A dialogue exists. This is a very simple setting that makes use of a local scope for action. While it is nothing natural for exhibitions in a different institutional setting, it belongs to our repertoire, even here, as you will see later on.

### **The Imaginary City**

was a serial exhibition we staged in the heart of Witten, a city in the German Ruhr district: population 100,000. This is a city whose only specific feature is that it's not specific. In the city center, we produced the "imaginary city" in a hall of the town hall tower. The shows were on display at the same time as the so-called "conversations of the future" on the process of urban development and the transformation of the city's industrial sector. We staged shows at a site from which the entire city could be seen. We were active in a room which every citizen of Witten knew from the outside. However, almost no-one had ever seen it from the inside - although it had been built in the 1920s, it had never been used. The starting point for "the imaginary city" was a specifically German phenomenon: We had observed that in this city almost no one believed in the power of urban and industrial culture. Even the local councilmen lived in suburban garden cities and thought of urban life as a wrong turn taken by civilization - their job was only to stop things from getting even worse. With our series of exhibitions, we intended to contribute to revitalizing the town hall - to turn it into a site in which much more moved than bureaucratic files: questions of values and meaning, even dreams. Also, we wanted to trigger a dialogue on the question what the qualities of Witten could be. In doing this, we did not resort to the models of urban planning or other designs related to architecture. With three shows, we attempted to locate at the center the point of view of the individual resident and user of the city. Also, at this sublime place, we intended to turn the passer-by into a viewer, into someone who truly sees his city, understanding it as a form, as a construct.

One of the goals of this project was to reopen such a site and in this fashion to explore anew the aesthetic dimension of the city. The second goal was the creation of a site of eminent pictorial experience - an art site.

We did not aim to illustrate urban issues in the medium of art. The first purpose was to create a lofty place at the heart of a very problematic situation. Of course, one of the decisive attractions of the site was that it pointed to a dialogue between the art and the perception of the city. This dialogue at first took place in the images of Tim Trantenroth: pictures without people. The extreme perspectives of these pictures enabled us to hang them in extreme positions - an outstanding combination in a space that was really not made for showing paintings. Tim Trantenroth had created about half of his exhibited works based on motives he had previously drawn in Witten.

The second show, "Ferne im Innern" (Distance inside") presented five artistic positions which, in wholly different ways, dealt with the horizon, or: with the borders of the territory we experience physically. Therefore, they were engaged in a dialogue with the experiential possibilities of this site. The third and final show was "Ortszeit / Local Time". Here, we asked about the effects the world of objects really has on people. Has the sensual effect of the environment been stressed too much? Or have we simply become resistant to the demands made by our environment? "Local Time" showed three artistic positions, which in very diverse ways explored the question of

the relationship of people and the things that surround them.

"The imaginary city", as a series of exhibitions, positioned itself at the heart of the local political discourse on the future of the city of Witten. Especially the opening talks made contributions to this political discourse - so, however, did the conversations in our office which was located in a room under the tower hall. Still: As the slides have shown, the art remained "untouched". It did not become "Polit-Art". The hall in the tower, for the time of the exhibitions, was defined as a utopian space. Literally, it was elevated - above the everyday context. A public space, which had been a room of seeing even before it was turned into an exhibition space, was entered into urban life. The hall became a platform of discourse, an interface between artistic and political space, between city and university. In what follows, you will see how this process continues today.

### **Bleibe**

(German for: A place to stay) was the only project we have curated so far in the context of a traditional art institution. A major Berlin festival for contemporary art intended to present young positions in theater, music, design and the Fine Arts. We were invited to curate the central art exhibition. Instead of presenting a trend or talent show on the state of the art, we decided to create a thematic context integrating design objects, theatrical plays, live music. Our theme was "deceleration", "staying". In this fashion, we responded ex negativo to the demand for an informational show on the newest trends. Instead of creating input for the ever accelerating art system, its speed and its hypes of tendencies and artists, we wondered where people were concerned with issues such as staying in one place, with slowing down, with spaces and situations in which one rests and stays. And we were wondering whether it might be possible to make the viewer feel the need to remain in an art site - as a non-permanent lodger, not as a trend-flaneur. We wanted, quite simply, to create a show with staying qualities: without being cozy, without creating fluffy art. The text accompanying our show puts it this way:

Bleibe means: A PLACE TO STAY or please stay! Or: Stay here! Acceleration is all the rage. Innovation and the hype were never as dominant as today: the structures of our lives have become ever more dynamic, our lives are governed by the experience of active and mediated nomadism. However, in the background, the flipside of this phenomenon increases in significance: the desire to stay. In the operating system called art, legitimized first and foremost by permanent innovation, staying in one place is taboo. At the same time, the question "what remains?" and the concern with overcoming the transitory and volatility play decisive roles in contemporary art. Young artists search for the place and origin of their own consciousness. They examine the tolerable intensity and durability of actions. They make attempts to describe their position in "real life," they navigate in global contexts to explore the relationship of "here" and "there".

"Bleibe" produces an electric field between acceleration and deceleration. 33 artists - such as Richard Billingham, Christine Borland, Douglas Gordon, Olafur Eliasson, Katharina Grosse, Andrew McNiven, Ross Sinclair, Apolonija Sustersic -, nine designers (or design teams) and the "quartier vier" architects design images and experiential rooms exploring the significance of our place in an accelerated world. Their works construct a complex web of possibilities for perception and communication. A broad spectrum of artistic production, ranging from painting to services offered, generates rooms of entirely different definitions which become sites for such events as scenic readings and concerts. Here, it is possible to watch, listen, relax, read, debate, eat, and

drink: activities that any museum could facilitate today. In contrast to the traditional separation of museum space (subdividing exhibition areas, library, administration, cafeteria, museum store), these functions merge in "Bleibe" to form one site of activity, unified in form and content. Furniture and other design objects become parts of the project, exploring themes such as flexibility, variability, and recycling, while also offering a site for relaxation and concentration. Developed specifically for this project, the architecture by "quartier vier" lays out zones with different characteristics that produce a responsive field of reference for the art works. Through this, the visitors move, though not as silent flâneurs between supervised exhibits. Instead, a site emerges where one can feel like a guest, a user, a temporary denizen. An open office ("Guest Curator's Office") by Apolonija Sustersic is installed in the exhibition rooms, tagged "art in dialog." There, the curators responsible for "Bleibe" invite informal discourse - at any time.

In this project, it was important to us to put together the show as a unified space of activity. We wanted to eliminate what makes big exhibitions seem like passages, and we wanted to be present as janitors and hosts - an unbelievable luxury in view of the fact that of course we were already at work on our next project. In this case, these were our jobs at Witten/Herdecke University, the continuation of our work in the city, and our next project in public space - a project in the country named "Echo's Pool".

In the following minutes, I would like to sketch the basis from which we have been working since 1999: our connection to the university, our jobs there. Then, I will conclude this talk with a final project in public space, a project that moves in a political mine field.

Since 1999, all our external projects were organized from Witten/Herdecke University, a university which has begun offering culture studies as a major only this semester. Before, the only disciplines had been economics, medicine and dental medicine, biology, music therapy and the science of nursing. However, no matter what they major in, students participate in obligatory courses in the arts and humanities one day per week. With a program called "art in dialogue", we collaborate with artists in trying to work on the interfaces of art, the sciences, and other contexts in society. We invite artists to work at the university, to teach seminars or workshops with us - or by themselves. We also ask them to produce their art in the university and to co-organize public events with us. The aim of our work within the university is to reevaluate and to enrich the university space through art. And secondly, the goal is to create a possibility for students, faculty and staff to meet outstanding artists. In a series called "artists in dialogue" visitors have included Barbara Köhler (Germany), Apolonija Sustersic (Slovenija), Beat Streuly (Switzerland), David Hardy (Germany) along with Victor Victor from France and Miki Nitadori from Japan, Thomas Locher (Germany) and Andrea Wolfensberger (Switzerland).

#### **Apolonija Sustersic: project at uni-wh.**

Using the example of the artist Apolonija Sustersic, I would like to show you what this work looks like. We invited Apolonija Sustersic, a Slovenian architect and sculptor who now lives in Amsterdam, to at first explore sites for art with us in the university building. What we really had in mind was to ask her to create flexible architecture for our great hall. What she did, however, was to use the winter semester 1999/2000 to work with students on conducting interviews with

students, faculty and other staff as well as patients of the university hospital. She wanted to picture what demands users of the building might make, and how they could imagine working with art in this space. She went about this in a framework of a public action she called "Space Therapy - Action 1". A setting was constructed in which anyone who happened to pass through the great hall of the university was asked to fill out a questionnaire or to serve as an interviewee. The reward was simple: a glass of freshly pressed orange juice and a hand- and lower-arm massage applied by a physiotherapist. The artist uses this kind of exchange - a basic principle of her work - to picture the perspectives and expectations of the users of this university space. And she understands space not just as something built - space to her represents all the activities and events taking place within it. The result of this research was a red couch, 25 meters long, installed in the hall since June 2000. It is possible to look at this couch as a simple design object. However, it transformed the room completely, giving it a wholly new social dimension. The building, which had previously served for representational purposes only, now became a site for communication. The difference between the couch and a design object is in the process which led to the development of the idea for this couch, and which can be viewed as a kind of research-performance on the social space of the university. Today, Zofa is the favorite meeting place of all the users of this room - it appears as if it had been there forever.

#### **Other works produced in the university I will show briefly.**

Beat Streuli: Portrait for Witten - wintersemester 2000/2001

In November 2000, Beat Streuli delivered a public lecture about his works in the event series "on zofa." A conversation with Prof. Dr. Dirk Baecker, Dr. Karen van den Berg, Jörg van den Berg and the audience followed.

In the winters semester 2000/2001, we also invited David Hardy. He taught a seminar with the Parisian filmmaker Vicot-Victor and the Japanese-born photographer Micki Nitadori. The title of the course: "How to make a movie with ten deutschmark?" The course description read:

The fact is not to learn how to spare money. The 10 DM movie production is the result of an experience: when you try to make a film with a few friends by your own, you meet them in a café before filming, and spend approximately 10 DM to offer them a coffee, some cigarettes and a few croissants. After that ceremony, you and your crew are ready to go on working. The collective feeling is born thanks to the breakfast. Now you have understood the essential point of our work: the film-making has to be a really collective work during a convivial time. And the project which interest you is a development of that experience. We don't want to work as we do in Paris. Here, the collective creation will begin from the script to the cutting-room, thanks to that concept: the Cadavre exquis, a classical method from Dadaism and the Surréalistes. The most important thing would be to share a strong complicity in the group. .. The technical part of making a film will not be really approached: our preoccupation is much about the collective creation on writing and filming, about what is between these two activities, about how you can manipulate the pictures and the sounds while editing it, and to show how the collective energy can be a good stimulation for creation.

What resulted of this was a sensational film - much more than a document of an ecstatic cooperation, the film was shown in April 2001 in a public event.

Thomas Locher

one of the founding figures of "context art" developed a piece for the big wall in the hall that was concerned with issues of communication theory.

Kundschaft – art creates public spaces

Our continuing cooperation with the city I would like to touch on briefly. Under the heading "Customers" we invited Apolonija Sustersic (SLO), Judith Samen (Germany), Ayse Erkmen (Turkey) and Andrew McNiven to create concepts for communicative public spaces in the city center - hence, something entirely different from conventional pedestrian zone furnishing. This project was much more about redefining public space, even in terms of function. The questions "What? For whom? And Why?" were taken as starting points. Düsseldorf artist Judith Samen created an outline for a snack bar. She called it: die Fettecke: The Grease Corner: French Fries in Witten. In German this translates as: Fritten in Witten. Her work redefines an important part of Ruhr district everyday culture. The Slovenian-Dutch artist and architect Apolonija Sustersic developed the concept of a student club designed to bring university life and students into the city, and to connect a debating club, an art site, and a cafe, pub or restaurant. Andrew McNiven's concept "Witten Apparatus Cinemascope" transformed the town hall tower dominating the cityscape into a hybrid of lighthouse and cinema. The Turkish artist Ayse Erkmen presented a draft for a new square into whose stones rail points were to be inserted - a reference to the rail system that shaped the urban development of Witten, and at the same time, an addition of a dynamic structure to a "dead site".

Echo's Pool

Our most important external project at this time is "Echo's Pool". It can be described as a project that establishes five lasting artistic works in the environment of five Jewish country cemeteries on the Lower Rhine. As already suggested, this is a project referring to a field that in Germany is extremely charged politically. Here, it is perhaps especially relevant to ask how political art can be without losing its own standards, without becoming a simple extension to a political debate, without becoming mere illustration or a mere projection screen for content and interpretation, which would be beneficial neither for art nor for political discourse.

At first, our project:

Starting point of this project was the discovery of fascinating sites - Jewish country cemeteries. There are hundreds of these little-known places on the Rhine alone. The Lower Rhine was one of the oldest Jewish settlements in Germany.

These sites are fascinating because they have remained unchanged since they were built one hundred to three hundred years ago. Still, they are functioning - because this earth, according to Jewish belief, belongs to the dead lying here, waiting for the End of Days. Thus, Jewish cemeteries are both sites of the past and sites of the future. In a way, time is annulled here. And these are places that sometimes look like Land Art projects - places full of spiritual and sculptural power.

None of the sites is used since the thirties of the last centuries some of them earlier since with the beginning of industrialization most of the Jews left the region and the persecution of the Jews destroyed the Jewish congregations in the Lower Rhine in total.

In German culture, these sites - if they are ever looked at - are seen only as Holocaust memorials. The local congregations install plaques which call to mind the nameless fascist violence even at these sites where the dead do bear names. In this manner, Jewish culture and history are reduced to the extermination of the Jews - and Jews as individuals are reduced to the role of victims.

These sites as such are not in need of art. In part, they already possess an extraordinary pictorial power. But it became clear to us that this context needs new images, because the plaques and pictures that now frame these sites get in the way of reception by making memory coded and narrow. At sites which themselves have pictorial power which allow us to experience Jewish beliefs views of life and death directly, the plaques only connote the images of heaps of anonymous corpses. These pictures are now omnipresent in the media. Rightly so, the Holocaust must not be trivialized. However, if there are always the same images which keep us from looking at the complex cultural and religious context of Jewishness - and if this happens at these sites, too -, then we destroy this culture once more by a misunderstood sense of political correctness, reducing it forever to the role of the victim. This is where we find ourselves in Germany at this point.

For these reasons, Echo's Pool takes a different approach, making it possible, through art, to let a different reading of these sites come into view - a reading that is not fixated on the Holocaust. The artists we invited are: Christine Borland (GB), Stefan Kern, Thomas Locher (both: Germany), Jörg Lenzlinger/Gerda Steiner (Switzerland) and Richard Serra (USA). ABSATZ m dt. Satz!!!

It took a long time and many debates until we had found a group of artists who felt challenged by this setting. Also, we felt confident that these artists would develop truly unexpected images that would make looking at these sites a richer experience without resorting to moralist preaching.

This summer, we produced an exhibition to present our project to the public. Perhaps a view of this show can make clear that what was needed here was an introduction of a new pictorial language to the subject.

Stefan Kern, for instance, works on the borderline between art and design. His functional sculptures design social spaces. At the same time, they possess symbolic power. Gerda Steiner and Jörg Lenzlinger will design a salt house. In it, salt crystals will be growing, making visible both the energy of dead matter and the symbolic world of the Old Testament. This house will be cared for by a high school class. Richard Serra is somebody who in his works is not only concerned with basic human needs, and in whose art the exploration of death plays a very significant role. Thomas Locher's most important medium is language, especially the interactions of text and context. The inability of language to produce communication plays a very important role in his works. For him, language speaks mostly of what it cannot say. In Christine Borland's case, finally, we were convinced by her basic interest in the mutual relations of deconstruction and reconstruction, and her concern with life as a phenomenon. Also, she approaches the issue of what we mean by life by exploring its backside - by examining the images of death. Her most important materials include bones and skull preparations. Her work shown at the Duisburg exhibition was based on seven copies of anatomical skull preparations from the collection of the Institute for Anatomy at Münster University. In a computer-aided procedure, she reproduced these to give

them a new dignity of representation.

She isolates objects and (their) stories from the contexts we conventionally assign to them, to make them reach a new status of being perceived, to channel them into new systems of interpretation.

Until all works have been completed, it is impossible to predict the results of the project "Echo's Pool" - and completion, if worked on with five different congregations, can be a communicative strong-man act.

#### Conclusion

In our talk, we, as art historians and curators, for once did not talk mostly about artists. Instead we discussed our own standards. What we wanted to make clear is how we attempt to produce highly diverse settings which create synergies between different sectors of society, settings in which art exists as one discursive practice among many - not as a closed referential system. We think of ourselves as interface agents creating contexts that should be as stimulating as possible.

At the beginning, I have observed that artists today increasingly work as hosts or social engineers. Next to Tiravanija, one could name Dan Peterman as an outstanding figure in this context. I do not want to call this tendency absolute - this, our other projects have shown. After all, they include a sizeable number of artists who paint and sculpt in a very traditional sense. Something else is crucial: We have learned something from artists such as Tiravanija - from their call for finding new forms of production and display beyond the incestuous art scene. When we talk about "Context Art", then, we are not talking about the self-referentiality of art - the way art speaks about the art system. When we talk about crossover we do not mean the crossover of different artistic forms of expression. We mean crossing over the boundaries between art and science, art and politics, art and economics, art and education. One essential thing that we have learned, however, is: If we cultivate these overlaps, it becomes all the more significant to insist on the borders and differences between the disciplines. Only that will create a productive tension.