

Public, Marking Space & Taking Place

Public, Marking Space & Taking Place

with Anna Raimondo (AR), Eleni Kamma (EK), Kasper Demeulemeester (KD), Loes Jacobs (LJ)

KD Since the beginning of 2021, I've retired as an artist. I was mainly active in publication and installation art, starting from HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY, photography and writing mostly. This period of working led to a certain amount of collectives or conceptual groups of which I am still part: the Local Fotothek Foundation is still active and the Tijdelijk Informatie Centrum is a production organisation. And there is also the Estate of Kasper Demeulemeester which is all the work I have made until 2021. Through the estate, which is managed by Timo Bekker, I intend to make newly discovered work available during the next forty years of my life, hopefully.

AR I am still an artist... [laughs]. I mainly work with listening as a process for encounter or disencounter. I work with LISTENING often as an aesthetic and political tool. At the same time, I am feminist for twenty years now. I am currently interested in TRANSFEMINISM, INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM and DECOLONIAL FEMINISM. In simple words: I do believe that being a woman is not biological data but it's a question of auto-determination and self-identification. As a white feminist, I am very conscious that my fights are not universal. So I believe our fights as women need to be contextualised geographically and culturally. So both listening and feminism are important in my practice.

EK I am Greek-Cypriot and I have been sharing my time between Belgium and the Netherlands the last 12 years. I come from the visual arts, but somehow I became more and more interested in performative ways of working, related to the subject I am currently investigating: PARRHESIA, which is the courage to speak up, speaking one's mind (most of the time in common view, this is where it really works). So it felt important to find new ways to work. I work along a MÖBIUS STRIP. On the one side, I am practicing my monologue, I make DRAWINGS... These are solitary activities where I take the decisions about the outcome of the work. And then there are collaborative works, DIALECTIC ATTEMPTS where I have to be confronted with others, and then we see what happens.

LJ There are some themes here lying on the table, which are public space, presence, taking space, public sphere and public time... Anna, do you want to pick a question?

AR What is 'public sphere'?

EK When we first spoke about the topics of our actual encounter, we were thinking about this difference between public space and public sphere. It was HABERMAS who addressed this distinction first but then it was picked up by other theoreticians. In a very first approach I would say that public space reminds of a physicality. It makes me think of the street, the collective, the space, the presence of people. Whereas public sphere is more a common way of thinking, to negotiate meanings. So we decided to put this topic on, as it is vital in this precise moment of sanitary crisis. I think it's a common feeling that we miss public space and we are trying

to encourage a public sphere without the presence, without the bodies. So thinking about public space, I would say it involves an embodied presence – the body, skin, smell, all that is physical – whereas the public sphere is more an attempt to put ideas together and do something with that.

- LJ It makes me think that the public sphere is something we now use a lot in order to be able to continue to do what we do. Since the public space is so inaccessible for our audience, so what we are doing here, this stream online allows us to have a discussion without an audience because we cannot invite them to be physically here. So I am very grateful for the public sphere.
- EK Okay, but to play the devil's advocate – it doesn't mean I agree – but let's also bring these other voices in, which are kind of opposing Habermas and the public sphere. So basically all these people arguing that you cannot solve everything with consensus and you really need to have this DISSENT. And so, what do we do with that?
- KD It's interesting if you look at the Wikipedia page of public sphere and public space. You can actually read the debate: Where does public sphere become public space, where does it become physical; and the other way around: Is public space also always public sphere? People are disagreeing in how to use the terms. It makes me wonder if this is not connected to the fact that, for a lot of people, the physicality of space is dissolving into a hybrid state where you are physically somewhere, but you are also virtually somewhere else. When you read Habermas and how he describes the public sphere, he even used the

word VIRTUALISED SPACE, but it didn't exist, as internet. He just meant it is not necessarily to be physically in a space, it can be a debate... But now the virtual is something that really exists. So I think this debate has now become very important. If you look at these relatively short periods of lockdown, we could still go outside and meet in parks but other parts of the world, for example, had 100m lockdowns where you had to stay in this circle for months, then your public sphere becomes your space and its virtual. And the only place where you see people then is online.

- AR Related to what Eleni said, I think it is interesting to reflect on the dynamics of the public sphere, the ACCESSIBILITY. It is probably very difficult to speak about public sphere in general as a concept. How do we build this public sphere? Are we looking for a consensus? Are we looking for what we have in common, or our own uniqueness and differences? One of the reasons why I work in public space is because it confronts me with different backgrounds. Whereas often in public sphere, without the actual presence of an audience, it seems more difficult to confront my ideas because I know that more or less, you start from the same understanding.
- EK I totally agree with that part because when I decided to work with other people, you are confronted with parts you maybe don't want to interact with. If you are sitting together in an art space, there is a kind of homogeneity, you have certain status, you studied, you know what you are talking about. When you interact with totally different entities, it is more possible to be confronted with disagreement.

- LJ Yes, taking place, marking a space out there, is very confrontational.

When you act in public space, do you let your practice be influenced by whatever is happening, the unpredictability?

- KD I am inclined to say of course, but it's tricky. For example, with the work or the place Tropicana in the centre of Brussels, the idea was to go out there without having a plan and see how confrontations lead to developments. But then at a certain point, the position of the mediator emerges. Even if you say, 'I will just take it as it happens'. I realised also later on that it's tricky to generalise because it really depends on the specific context, the people who you want to work with, the specific location where you are working. Because sometimes the debate or the confrontation that you are looking for, will happen more easily if you already provide some boundaries, some limits to what this total freedom of the reaction of the other can entail. This is something I learned: you always have a generality that you impose yourself. It is like a presumed openness. So I think the specificity of where you are and who you are working with changes this...

- AR I think it is really about the dynamic. It would be fake to say, 'I am open' or to say, 'I am closed'. Neither of the possibilities are possible when you are confronted with the 'publicness' of the public space. To state that we are completely open it means to be neutral and its impossible. We always bring something with us, even if we want be porous and we want to welcome and we want to negotiate. I like to think about my projects as PROPOSITIONS, because in the proposition there is a frame, but it's kind of

mobile, it's not fixed. For example, if I made a picture of myself and I very well know what I want to do, it's like this. But if I put a mermaid's tail in the street, I've got a proposition, I've got a question in a way with me, with my body, but I don't know what will happen. There is a dynamic, I think.

- EK Moving to the public space is not really something I wanted to do, I am not comfortable there. But it was the only way to bring in my research about parrhesia because you cannot know what it is to speak up and confront the other if you stay home. So I created HYBRID STATE SETS, in a way, thinking of two mediums confronting each other. So in the moment itself something is happening, but it is also recorded. So it is possible for others to see it and possible for us to revisit what it was about. I believe what can really unite us is this common witness in art, but I tried to bring different publics in: professionals that are paid, amateurs or volunteers, and of course there is the accidental public that just passes by. Anything can happen, and it's interesting from that point of view, but when you don't take time together, it is different, you cannot be affected really. If you have a community of different people, but they are all engaged, even if it's for three days, it is different than if someone just passes by and maybe grasps something.
- AR But it could also be a modality. It is really about what you propose to activate. For example, I really like the ACCIDENTAL LISTENING. It inspires also some of my works. Basically, it is about the seconds you cross another person in that precise moment and something would happen or not. For example, in one of my projects, which is called Encouragements, I was

simulating a phone conversation with headphones. It was a very performative way to speak in public space, with my hands, gesticulating as an Italian woman. It was sentences and encouragements that I collected from other women, and then I put them together, simulating a conversation. One moment I was sitting at a table in a bar or in Parc de Forest speaking about the power of masturbation or screaming, for example, 'Push, push, I see his hair!'. So all these sentences together create an accidental listening because I was sure that the person close to me was listening. So if I start to speak about the potential of masturbation, of sex, whatever, sometimes you will think something about it or sometimes not, but there is this possibility...

EK I totally agree that you can produce an effect in that way. The problem in my case is that if people are invited to speak, and they take part in something or there is a joke, for example, and they are improvising or others participate, then it's much more difficult for an outsider to really come and speak. I haven't found my way yet in that.

KD And in that case of the example you give, Anna, were you hoping for interaction? Or was it already satisfying that the other person would take along this experience and maybe do nothing with it or talk about it to someone else, or?

AR Probably the second. It depends on the project, how you want to push your listening and communication. In that case, I was really thinking about the invisible communication; the RESONANCE. I like this poetic possibility. In other projects I impose my sound, for example another time I went out with a composition of orgasms in how

to make your day exciting because I was very bored about the public space in London. It was so predictable that I decided to make this contagious sound composition, as orgasms are not a neutral sound, they impact you physically. And I wanted people to react, but it was in London so not that much happened. [laughs]

KD The POTENTIALITY is an interesting element in the idea of public space and sphere. Even the minimal reaction an intervention in a public space can cause can be a very large thing for me. For instance, there was this small series of interventions we did with the Fototek Foundation in the Herbert quarter in Ghent. We put really small photographs of toy cars on walls and on windows and they were mostly gone the day after, or maximum a week after. In a way, this was very disappointing because a part of you wants to have the respect of the community as reaction to the fact that you give something to the public space. But the reaction of someone tearing it from the window, or someone taking it because he or she likes the photo, that is maybe even more interesting. And this kind of tension connects to our last question: Is it more interesting to know what will happen, to write the script and limit the possibilities or to just do one small act and then leave it to how it evolves? And I like it when you can't know how the other will react. Because then you can also go further and try new things.

EK At the end of the day, it always goes back to control, and to us. Like how much do we want to be challenged?

LJ In the second conversation, we also spoke about the preparatory phase, making the protocols, what are the

limits that are set, and then the letting it go. And they are all part of the work. And that also includes different audiences. It's nice Eleni that you say you are also recording because this is an extra phase you add to the process.

EK The best way for me to see it is like a continuous rehearsal. So it is never finished, it always goes on. Sometimes it works and sometimes it fails.

AR I think that in works that are more performative, it's very important to collect failures. When I was a beginning artist, I was so afraid to fail, and I also had another concept of failure. Now this idea has changed. It is very precious to me when I am wrong. Especially with the dynamics, not with the object. One day we should make a seminar about all our failures. It could be helpful.

EK In an exhibition you never show the failures. What do you do? You select the things that work. But it's also nice to expose and make visible what didn't work.

LJ It's good to give those things a place... Shall we pick a new question?

EK What is presence?

We are speaking about presence in public space, right??? If I think of what I am trying to explore these years which has to do with *parrhesia* – speaking up – presence is that moment where you expose yourself, it's about exposure, finding a way to articulate, maybe by speaking (which is very Foucault, the discourse) or by standing somewhere in public space... Standing as a protest can be really affective. Thinking of Gezi park one of its most iconic performances was 'the standing man'

by Erdem Gunduz. Just by being there with his body in the space, this was a presence that effected very much the whole situation. So presence can take place in many ways, but it has to be somehow through your body. And going back to our discussion, if something happens virtually or not: whatever happens online is mediated through a screen. That's the difference.

LJ It's funny you say, 'exposing', because it assumes a fragile position and showing something that you maybe don't want to show.

EK And this is the whole thing with public space and presence, because we are all so equipped to hide ourselves through what we say or how we behave and that moment we'll just strip.

LJ I think that links to your project very much, Anna!

AR I was thinking to something very particular. In a video (call) I see myself as an object, my presence is not really presence. It really misses my body, my three-dimensionality. I work a lot with radio already before the pandemic, and I always speak about myself as a radio creature, I never speak about radio presence because I am very much aware that eventually, my presence is a projection of the listeners. For me, definitely, presence is related to the moment/the present and to the body.

EK And the voice is the body. It is not just an image.

AR And the silence. To stand in a space is reclaiming a silence, but it is still bodily.

KD For me, it's a very complicated matter... In the estate of Kasper

Demeulemeester, there is a whole series of works which is called absence, which investigates how you can create a personal absence while being in some way present. The main question was: does presence always entail an identity of a specific person who is present? Or can the person just be a visual presence, but not herself, not in his role? This was in 2019. But now the past year I think there is a new element to consider: PROXIMITY. Because presence is, like you said, Anna, very much connected to the mental image of an individual, being somewhere in time. We say for instance: the voice is the body. But if the voice is transmitted through a device (for example, video), it doesn't work in the same way as when there is proximity. I work a lot with children, in longer trajectories, and even if you try to create an interesting virtual context for them, it just doesn't work.

This leads me to fantasise that, apart from our five or six senses there is another sense, a sense of proximity, which is a total of all these senses. Maybe it's more like an oral thing where we sense the proximity of others, where we interact through pheromones, all these things that we do not consciously process but which are very important for our existence as a human being and our connection with the world in general. So I think we should add this concept of 'proximity' to the debate about 'presence'. You can also call proximity 'nearness', and then, of course, it is connected to a word that maybe the others would like to react on, something that has already been mentioned before during the preparations of this talk: intimacy.

EK Yeah, I am not sure if it is about proximity, but it has to do more with the fact that senses are falling

apart when they are transmitted and the fact that they are transmitted through a device. It's definitely something to consider, I agree. As we start to perceive things differently through this, what does it mean to communicate in this new way?

LJ Yeah, I think every device, the camera, the microphone, they are all filters, they disturb... our presence maybe also.

KD It's also not neutral. We can pretend that they are not there but they really impose more than a filter. They impose even a different reality on us. Since smartphones became a standard fixture of our lives, there is this new sense of connectivity, and I mostly am aware of it when my battery is dead or when I don't have my phone. There is a sense of loss.

EK It makes me think about radio as a medium and how we deal with mediums coming in... I am not a connoisseur on this matter, but once upon a time radio was invented, voices could be transmitted, this was really revolutionary. What is happening now is that maybe we feel overwhelmed by all these media possibilities and you can feel left behind.

AR Concerning radio, it has been the medium of dictatorships as well, but it has been also a revolutionary tool, so it's always about the intention that is behind the medium. I don't have a clear idea of what we are talking about, but what you [EK] just said, is probably what I feel. I feel overwhelmed, I cannot stand the Zoom and WhatsApp meetings anymore, I feel that I am not speaking with people anymore. Probably it has something to do with what Kasper was saying about

the physicality, the proximity. It is enough to see people that are framed. You miss a lot of the communication.

LJ That's also what your work is about, it's about the gestures, hesitations, what they all drop.

AR Yeah, it's so mediated that at one point there was a meeting with different art institutions via Zoom and at the end I cried. I didn't know how to feel, if my contribution was useful... You miss all the reactions when you are on the internet. It's very alienating. Too much...

KD We are talking about the mediation of our existence through devices, and I look at the papers laying on the table right now. There is the title of the theme PUBLIC TIME. I have to think of the invention of public time, when trains started running, when all of a sudden villages had clocks. Before this there was no 'public time'. Between the moment when you went to the church and when sun went down there was personal time, but not public time. It was not something shared with other people. I think these kind of evolutionary changes are too much for us to process while they are happening. We only live through our bodies and we live through these changes. Now with our phones, we ALWAYS have the time.

EK I want to interfere here because what I liked about the public time, and now I refer to Cornelius Costoradiis: he speaks about public space in Ancient Greece as this kind of project of AUTONOMY, because for the first time people are coming together and have to make choices together. So he says that actually public space cannot exist without public time. They really need each other. But public time is that mo-

ment where the collectivity can inspect its own past, its own deeds. For them there was historiography: writing down what the citizens decide together. So I guess the whole problem comes back to what really binds us together. If it becomes only public time in the sense of a machine, we don't take any other RESPONSIBILITY than just obeying the time. We don't inspect together...

LJ And didn't it also include that things people decided on were put up somewhere. And then there was the possibility to reread actually what was being discussed or agreed upon.

AR In Kasper's INTERPRETATIONS OF PUBLIC TIME, I see there is a kind of imposition of the public time: for example, at this time you have to pray, at this time you have to wake up, at this time you have to start working, and so on... And radio actually had a strong impact in our Western society. Because it really decides when to be at home, when to go out, etcetera. For Eleni, the public time is more a POSSIBILITY OF DEMOCRATISATION OF TIME. And this reflection makes me think again about the public space, because in public space as well there is this intimidation of the public, and we feel victims of the public space, because we have to behave in a certain way, we have to be there at this time and not another time, there are physical boundaries about the private/public spaces... And I think that we as artists, we try to intervene to make it common and democratic. This is another tension that I feel.

LJ It makes me think of what you said before that the actual presence, proximity, that we often want to hide, and that you (Anna) are showing this in your project Queer Codes. The women who testify in the project

say, I don't want to hide here... and making that visible is then actually... It's good to claim public time maybe for actual collective reconsidering.

EK You cannot arrive to public space without that, somehow.

AR Probably in radio you could try to push toward public time. Because radio could be really an agora, without presences, but I really believe in it. I am a fan of the possibilities of this medium. You can really speak about public time if you make it interactive, of course. And it has been like this for a while. I don't know if you know RADIO ALICÉ from the seventies in Bologna. It was very revolutionary radio from an aesthetic point of view, political point of view. And they were really connected to the workers movement in the city, to the students... They were activists running it, all of them, and they organised demonstrations live, there was no internet, just phone and radio. It was a live testimony of what was happening during the demonstration.

KD It's interesting to consider this Ancient Greek situation. Because it could function as a metaphor for some other things we already spoke about. Because of course, this public time where people could see their past, react on it, was only open to a very limited part of the population who could read. If we take this as a metaphor and put it back upon some other things we said earlier; about the confrontation: if you consider our work and our propositions, and then you imagine that there are also people who can't read, now it's of course no longer an issue of literacy, but it's more a question of reading the text, reading a message, getting information to someone else who is

not like you, engaging, and try what the Greeks probably did not intend to do, to breach the boundary to who can read and who cannot read...

I think the responsibility that Anna mentioned earlier is very important for what we do or try to propose.

Just our city now here, and the complexity of society with communication tools, bringing information from all around the world, there is no longer one imposed history. And then there is this question of literacy.

How to make what you are making legible to others?

EK It's important what you touch now. For Costoriadis, *parrhesia*, 'to speak up', can only work together with responsibility of the citizen. It is supposed to be this moment when I speak to you and I am trying to deform your ethos, so we engage in a discussion. And you listen to each other. As artists we have to think about this. How do we reach out to other people who don't have the same background?

AR When you work with participatory dynamics and with public space, there is this confusion. But I realised that as an artist, I don't want to be an educator... The main thing for me is listening. For example, I am feminist. I don't want to work just with feminists. I also want to work with someone who is probably more feminist than me, but doesn't use this word, or probably not at all. This confrontation with different people also puts me into question. Of course, there is this verticality because I edit these voices, so I am conscious about my power but it is not my intention to educate, otherwise it becomes very paternalistic.

EK Makes me wonder about contemporary artists that want to interact

with more political issues, or more in public space. Do you feel that the word 'artist' covers enough?

AR I use the word 'artist' because it is the easiest one. As an artist, there is always a political dimension in my work, in the process of encounter and disencounter and listening... As long as I work with people I feel a double responsibility: there is an ACCORD DE CONFIANCE (an agreement in trust). Even if it's my work, often the content comes from the participation of other people.

For example, in *Queer Codes* I interviewed several women. We had this little agreement that when the interview is finished, when I will work on it, I will make them listen to that because I want them to feel comfortable with my intervention. As an artist I intervene, I sign my work with my name. But I wish for my work to be the beginning of a platform, that one time won't have my name. The idea is to create a little community around the things that are putting us together.

It's important that as an artist I don't give the voice. I hate this definition. When I started with radio a lot of years ago, it was a community radio dealing with activism, feminism, and we used this definition: to give the voice to women, and it needed some time for me to realise that this is very paternalistic and vertical! Today I prefer the idea to share the microphone. It's more about doing a proposition, creating a certain context.

EK When I was doing a residency in Italy, I was feeling that I didn't know the space, so I was thinking: what's the way to work? And then I thought, what if I become an amplifier? That the other people can speak, through me? This way I am being more like a mediator, but at the end I am still an artist.

LJ An artist has different languages, not only the one of educator. And I think this is important to formulate: what is the actual intervention in this or that work?

AR If I have to define my work or intention: I don't want to be an educator, but at the end of the day there is *parrhesia*: I am a feminist so I am aware where I speak from, so of course if I hear something that is far away from a man, a woman, a child... I always arrive with questions. So there is this verticality, a tension. And my questions are open, but there is always an intention.

KD With a participatory project, it is also possible to get a reaction that is totally the opposite of what you've been talking about for a long time... It makes me think about an experience I had two years ago when I was working with a group of children of four years old. At that time, I hadn't really separated the position of the educator and the artist working with a group of children. There was a boy who really didn't want to do what everyone else was doing. He just started to destroy the work of the other children. I tried to stop him about three times, but he kept on destroying... And then I became angry and we had a fight. When the situation was getting out of control, I realised that the importance was not to educate these children, but to share time, which is to me almost synonymous to life, with this group of children in my personal way. Failure was no longer an option, because success was no longer an option. It was really an epiphany. Because if you have the sense that what you are doing has the potential of failing, then you have to question yourself: Am I really sharing my time or imposing something to the people I am working with?

KD Shall I draw a question?

Do you feel like you have a mandate to work in public space?

KD This is something which is present in your work, no Eleni? That you want to share this feeling of having the mandate in public space... So that others can also feel empowered to take the mandate?

EK I cannot think of it in terms of mandate, but I can think of it in relation to myself. I would say I don't really have the mandate to work in public space but somehow I have the mandate to deal with some public questions in relation to that. What I like about *parthésia* is that it's always a negotiation between me and others. So how to create possibilities for that? In that sense I have a mandate, yeah. How about you?

KD I think also the question is here in the list of questions because of the fact that private companies or governments seem to own a general mandate to impose their message upon the public and public space, whereas the individual has to take the freedom to express themselves. In my work, it is often about realising this matter and then taking the mandate (not necessarily having it). Maybe as a way to question the silent mandate that large companies, corporations or governments have taken upon themselves. A known example in Brussels are the digital advertising boards, screens in public space that can show any message at any time. I don't have the feeling we ever asked if we gave the government the mandate to impose these kind of screens on us. But society is accepting it, let's say, because we are also not attacking it. So the small interventions I do are about

questioning this feature. For instance, with the Tijdelijk Informatiecentrum we created a temporary information board in the public square in Meerhout for the summer. We specifically didn't ask for permission to do it because you cannot create a mandate for yourself by asking permission for it. You have to find the limits, maybe cross it and create this vagueness. And in this part there can be democracy.

AR I never really asked myself this question... I've been realising that one of the reasons why I work in public space is also to measure my potential freedom, to see how far I can go. For example, I did a project in Brussels which was called '*Mi porte al' mare*' (Bring me to the sea). I put on a mermaid tail so I could not move alone, and then I asked people to bring me to the sea. I didn't ask for permission. The project *Queer Codes* was an exception, as it was in collaboration with La Centrale. As an artist alone, I never ask for permission. For me, it is really about re-appropriation of the public space. To see where I can arrive. I have to think of the moment I really fell in love with Brussels... If you make the comparison to London: if you put a radio on the floor, after five minutes someone will come to ask if you have authorisation. When I decided to put on a mermaid tail at the statue (the fountain) of Anspach at Place Saint-Catherine (it was four o'clock in the afternoon, September, there was sun and a lot of people passing by), and at one point a police car was coming, but they didn't do anything. Probably, I was just lucky, but I personally feel that as an artist in Brussels you can manipulate things, touch the city.

LJ Maybe this is the city giving you all a mandate.

AR When Kasper was speaking about your intentions [EK] with your work, I think about this quote by Michel Foucault, you know these sentences that really accompany your life [laughs], he said: Transgression makes visible the limits of the limit. I use it a lot in listening experience. For me transgression makes also audible the limits of the audible. I think in our work (Eleni), there is this attempt to make it clear that our limits are fictions, that we can move it.

KD But this is also a thing to watch out for. Because if Brussels is the place that gives the mandate so easily, then how to find these limits of our limits? Because they are there, maybe they are just harder to find. But once you start filling in administrative forms to get money for instance, you realise there are limits. And not everything we think of as public space is public space. Sometimes it is private, or it is not advertised as private but then you try to do something there and all of a sudden there are security guards coming up... And so I think a city like London makes it very visible that the level of control is very high, here we have the sense it's different, but maybe it is just better hidden. So we have to question and push ourselves continuously.

And the privilege we have as artists is also something to consider. Imagine all the people living in Brussels and imagine they all would try to do what we do, they would not get away with it, like hanging posters or putting on a mermaid's tail. As artists, we have the mobility to visit all kinds of worlds in Brussels. For us, public space can be very large, but it's not necessarily the case for a lot of other people. I always have this emergency sign in my head that says:

'if it's too easy, something's wrong'.

LJ New question?

What media do you use in public space?

AR My body often, but not always, my voice, radios... Actual radios. In this actual moment, I am working with QR codes in public space, and mostly I use a dispositive that is related to the activation of listening. But now I am sick of the digitalisation. I stated now that from September on I will work with people as medium.

LJ Maybe the conversation is also a medium.

KD I think the conversation is a medium. More and more, it is not a form if you consider all the things that cannot be transcribed: interaction, silences, physicality, movements you make while trying to talk... And also a thing in time which makes it a medium. It's a thing that happens at a certain moment in time, it is not repeatable, it can only repeat a recording, but then the recording has become the medium. I discovered this recently through a project in BRASS in Vorst, where a whole installation led to a series of conversations and this is actually where the work is happening, the rest is preparation and the documentation.

EK I was using body and voice to speak about that and interaction. Definitely, it is about actual presence, but that's the tricky part, I am not a real performer. I participate. And I used to put up constructed state sets in public space, where some people are really involved but some people are just passing by, not aware of it, and then something happens or doesn't. The best thing I remember is when things got really tense. There was this massive

disagreement between the professionals versus amateurs, because the amateurs were really enthusiastic and the professionals were pissed off. It was the most parrhesiastic moment [laughs]. But the problem is that you cannot record everything. I think also the script that I made with all the different scenes is also a medium.

LJ The protocol is a medium.

EK Yeah, in a way it's really between observation and activating imagination. And then I have leftovers from that process that I think are worth taking care of. For example, a little extract that shows how people responded, or a costume that someone wore, a note, etcetera.

KD For a long time my medium in public space was photography. At first, I used it in a classic sense: recording images in public space. But then at different moments I became aware of the performative aspect of photography in public space: the act of publicly taking a picture, people's reactions, how you move when you are taking a picture, also how other photographers become very sneaky in making photographs without people noticing, so it's a hidden act... So the medium of photography became a thing in itself. It became less about the images but more about the presence or absence. I have to think about this project I did a long time ago, where instead of this usual set-up with a camera, a photographer and a subject or object to photograph, I created a very large camera system inside a caravan in a park. It created a kind of private sphere, where people met inside this caravan and they didn't know it was a camera until they went inside. Blindfolded, they had scripts to follow. There, the medium of photogra-

phy became a little bit the opposite of what it should normally do. There was a long moment of privateness which became really a secret. People almost never talked about what happened inside. The only thing the camera did because they operated the cameras themselves was document a moment when they were there. And so afterwards, people started projecting messages on these images, because the images were published a year later in the same space as the caravan, with the questions, but they were actually totally in the private sphere. So there I tried to invert all these kind of mythical aspects that are told about photography, like capturing a special moment... But then it evolved until a moment where there was just me in the public space and I left the camera behind and it was still evolving from photography, but where was no image, no camera...

LJ It offered a situation...

AR It's crazy what you are saying because all the things I have been doing in this last 20 years, I relate it to my radiophonic formation. Even there is my body and the presences of people, I am still very aware of this background: in the language, in the type of communication that I enact, so I can definitely believe what you are saying.

LJ It's funny that all your media lead back to... Maybe that's the mandate that is given by your education then.

EK The one thing that is guiding me through all these years is this conflict between the image and the word.

LJ And where did this conflict come from?

EK Well, a friend of mine is saying that we are formed by our complexes... This is what makes us move. So I like to make drawings and I am happy to be on my own, but then you feel you also want to communicate. And the words have this power, so you want to master that as well. But sometimes it also shows different systems, like how you communicate with the one and how with the other.

KD I try to get a new question from the bottom of this pile here. Okay, this question refers to the recent past:

Public versus private versus intimate? What changed and how do you deal with these changes?

AR I can go to the conclusion. Now there is this tendency of 'doing if it's public'. We always have to make efforts to create a public moment. And it's quite exhausting. On the other side, when we try to make things public and common in the form of a Zoom meeting, Google meeting, etc., it also exposes me to my intimate dimension. I don't have a studio nowadays so I work at home and it makes things very complicated because I live in a small apartment. There is this exposure of your private space, and I don't feel comfortable with it.

EK I think it's kind of semi-public. This situation of sharing space from behind your computers.

AR Anyway, the conclusion is that I am completely sick of it. And I think it's a common feeling. I hope it will be passed soon.

EK I feel traumatised. I don't know when I will be recovered.

AR And also this pressure, to find the

good in the bad, I am just sick of it. Of course, I know that I have to wear my mask and I hope other people will do it too. But how to come back to the public space with a question? I think it will be a process. A process also to come back to the proximity, it is also about the contact of bodies.

For example, shaking a hand...

We will have to deal with this also as artists, with the limits of this crisis.

It's a very big question for me.

KD I feel the crisis has brought some things into focus which were already there before but became more visible. The tendency of distance for instance, isn't this something that was already progressing? This leads me back to the question: how to organise a social contract? How to define in a more generalised sense what can be private, public and intimate? How to construct this discourse in a world that has been shaking up already for quite some time. And now it's really in focus. These changes of these three words (public, private, intimate) are really embodied now. You are thinking about your individual being in confrontation with the public being. You always relate it to the 'I' and the 'you'.

This subject-object division also leads to ideas of what is public and what is private. Maybe we forgot the sphere behind it, and we have to take a step back. Maybe we have to discover this deeper layer, of connectivity, because our private sphere has been sold, no? To private companies...

LJ There was no negotiation happening. Our opinion was not asked. So I think making the negotiation visible is already a big contribution to the public space, and your works also do that.

AR All these topics make me think about

- how to create forms to be together? It is something we artists have in common. How do we formalise to stay together in this moment? I have a new project, still about Queer Codes in Anderlecht, which I want to do in September. Because I want to propose another form of interaction with the participants and I hope in September we can stay more together. But in the meantime I cannot really imagine forms now. It's a challenge.
- LJ A big one. Because we cannot keep on changing the dates, postulate.
- AR I think I found strategies so far, also with Queer Codes... Because it's digital, with audio, it's safe... And for September I am thinking to reduce the scale of the groups, it's another basic strategy. I am already thinking of another way of gathering. But it's not enough. It's really about the opening of art spaces. How can we provide forms of being together that are good for everyone? The COVID-safe places will be very inaccessible for people who cannot have the vaccine. It will be a big challenge, and also for the artists, not only the politicians.
- EK I have tried a little bit to work online. Some experiences I liked and it produced a kind of spending time together and thinking about public time. Even the pad we created, I was very enthusiastic about it. You really see how the thoughts are formed on the spot, and then you react. Maybe we just have to accept that for a while we cannot be super active. Maybe we have to retreat and let it go. It is a bit violent to myself, to always try to come with a fantastic solution.
- LJ Also the hyper flexibility that is asked demands its toll.
- AR It really depends on the person. I was hyper active before COVID, in general I am a hyper active person. I need to see people, I need to speak... So far I decided not to complain with my restrictions but now I cannot stand it anymore, it's a frustration and there are no actual solutions. Waiting is the solution...
- EK What I want to do is just go back to drawing. Maybe the moment now permits more for that.
As artists we have to be smart and efficient and we have to come with a solution, but for a moment we don't have this solution. Not to say that I just give up, but it's also dangerous, this idea of conforming.
- AR For the first time in my life I really feel obedient. It's not just blind obedience because I also share the reasons why, but still.
- EK Some things are here to stay. Like the increased use of internet. When COVID is gone there will be a new reality. But in relation to how many things will still be public and in what way, I think it will be in a more private way. Even banal things like meetings...
- LJ There will be a moment where we need to reclaim this outside again. Because we are very much prohibited to go there, there are a lot of constraints.
- AR And the limits will be more visible, probably. They are actually already.
- KD A lot of what we say and do is an attempt to be explicit with what we mean by art and being an artist. But now moving to a trans-COVID future I think it's striking how we talk about this. The weight that we put upon ourselves is very big since we take this mandate to go to the public space, to make work happen there, there is a lot of effort that comes with this step. We feel it's a path that we want to explore, but then I want to introduce the role of the mediator again. Because 'art' is a word that can hide a lot of confusion, which also creates possibilities, but maybe in the evolution of the practice, it could be interesting to be outside the practice of the artist, or art itself. And Anna, you say I don't want to be the mediator, Eleni, you said I want to go back to drawing...
- EK And you say you are an ex-artist. You are retired. What about the mediator?
- KD I find it an interesting matter to think about. What could happen if the mediator, not being an artist, could be valued more as a role in contemporary society and in the future? If you imagine a large theatre with a lot of people, maybe there will be three mediators; maybe there should be more. Because people project the role of the mediator onto the artists, between the public and the work, or the public and the world. And I don't necessarily think this is a given. It could be a choice of the artist. We share a feeling responsibility towards the world. But I sense also a danger...
- EK That's why I believe in my möbius strip. Because when I can draw, I also take care of myself. I see it as a feeding system. I can feed myself so I can feed others.
- AR During the first lockdown, for the first time in my life I was really taking care of my body, my rhythms, what I ate. Because I really had this feeling that it was an important moment of self care, because otherwise I cannot give any care to anyone. But now I really feel I have to come out.
- EK Yes, you took care, but you also censored yourself. Because you didn't say that you were also angry. Now you will take care by just drawing out.
- LJ We will keep gathering you around the table.
- AR At the end of the day, as artists working again with people with participatory practices, with public space, and so on, there are a lot of projections by people on us, some that we accept, and some maybe not. But in my own case, I feel that apart from the responsibility, there is a personal, subjective, egoistic drive to know the people, to know the world; curiosity. And in some projects, I feel a mediator, in some not. Each project is different. You are not always the same artist.
- KD I was also thinking about the fact that we are sitting here. And the existence of nadine gives us the possibility to have this conversation, to share this conversation, and this position of the mediator, nadine as an example of the mediator is also fragile in a way. Right now in Belgium, we have to focus more on the artist themselves in subsidies, and I have my doubts about this new direction of the Flemish government. nadine, like a mediator, has a very important position to help artists who want to be in the context of society, to help them to connect. But now that these institutions are closed, I hope that this is something that people realise now, that they are really important.
- LJ We are now at the end of this conversation.

And there are still 20 questions laying
on the table. It's for another time.