Master thesis

Contemporary art’s struggle for usefulness
An investigation into the (non-)uses and use-value of six artworks from Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION

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Introduction

In the summer of 2016, three recurring contemporary art exhibitions, the Berlin Biennale in Berlin, Manifesta, this year in Zürich, and Sonsbeek in Arnhem, focused on the sociopolitical value of contemporary art. In dealing with current local, national and international issues, the three exhibitions explored the question what role contemporary art might play in better understanding these issues. It was as if an European zeitgeist of political and economic uncertainty called for sociopolitical curating and artworks. Unlike the curators of the Berlin Biennale, the curators of Manifesta 11 and Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION built their approach on the involvement of (local) citizens. They worked from the belief that art has an important purpose, in contributing to how people organise and give meaning to their lives, not just individually but also collectively.

While working as an intern and tour guide for Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION (4 June-18 September 2016), I was intrigued by the different long-and-short-lived participations of different individuals and groups. What struck me in particular was the Open Call: an invitation to the public to make use of artworks located at park Sonsbeek. By inviting and empowering people to organise their own private or public activities, such as a party, yoga class, or lecture, the Open Call demonstrated the numerous unexpected ways in which artworks could function as platforms. The lack of rules and guidelines dared people to think big and outside the box, giving them freedom to carry out their specific aspirations and plans. Unless a certain activity may have brought damage to a work, Open Call proposals were generally approved by the curators of Sonsbeek’16, ruangrupa, and members of the team of Sonsbeek’16.¹ The production and promotion was in the hands of organisers themselves. Yet, many times the production team of Sonsbeek ’16 assisted, for example by temporarily turning off the sound, and activities were often promoted on the website and social media channels of Sonsbeek ’16.

After witnessing several Open Call activities, I realised that because of the Open Call, Sonsbeek ‘16 was somewhat different from many so-called “Social Practice” exhibitions. Whereas Social Practice artworks are typically created by means of the public’s participation, which is often partly imagined and regulated by the artist(s), the Open Call was separated from the artists’ creation of the works. Thus, instead of co-creating artworks as participants, the organisers of Open Call activities were users with a considerable freedom to appropriate artworks in any way that was beneficial for them, and often also for their audiences and participants. As activities did not have to match with the materiality of the artworks, or the approaches and ideas of the artists, the activities were not necessarily meaningful or beneficial for artists as well. The Open Call of Sonsbeek ’16 is a valuable entry point of analysis, because unlike many participatory art practices, it challenged people to repurpose artworks in ways that transcended presupposed uses (e.g. baking bread, playing ping pong.

¹ Information retrieved from the report of Marloes Verhoeven, one of the coordinators of the Open Call.
Out of the seventeen artworks located at park Sonsbeek, most of them enabled and even encouraged the public to invent uses for the works. This master thesis examines six artworks from Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION and the Open Call activities that took place inside or around these works. The six artworks include the ping pong tables created by Manila-born and -based artist Louie Cordero; an Indonesian playground, reinstalled by Amsterdam-based artist Maze de Boer; the bamboo pavilion of Eko Prawoto, an architect and lecturer from Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Slavs and Tatars’ hidden church, designed as “a space for contemplation and dialogue”; the star-shaped tent of the Berlin artist collective KUNSTrePUBLIK, which served as a platform to evoke discussion on the European refugee crisis; and the installation of Arnhem-based artist Rob Voerman, designed as an alternative bank that addressed the problem of global pollution. Other useful artworks, which will not be analysed (primarily due to fewer Open Call activities), are: Alphons ter Avest’s bakehouse, which was used by bakers from Arnhem and the public during the weekends for backing breads, cakes, and pizzas; Shilpa Gupta’s concave, oval-shaped land art work, where people could meet each other to enjoy the silence; Richard Bell’s aboriginal embassy, which called attention to the inequality between Aboriginees and Australians; and Jan Rothhuizen’s original and detailed map of park Sonsbeek.

All in all, many of the artworks were modelled after or functioned as common buildings and services: a bakery, a parliament, a bank, a playground, a church, a workshop / factory, and an embassy. As Ade Darmawan surmised in an interview, Sonsbeek ’16 established “a kind of city inside the city with new versions of institutional structures.” In spite of obvious differences, the six abovementioned works are similar in the sense that they let people reflect on the possible functions of artworks, and the usefulness of art in general. In general, Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION undermined the autonomy of art and the modernist concept of ‘art for art’s sake’, fervently and famously promoted by influential art critic Clement Greenberg (amongst others).

The question about the function of art was already important when the very first Sonsbeek exhibition was organised only a few years after the end of the Second World War in 1949. The first Dutch, public art exhibition in the open-air, Sonsbeek ’49: Europese Beeldhouwkunst in de Open Lucht (1949) (‘Sonsbeek 49: European Sculptures in the open-air’) incorporated nearly two hundred sculptures, created by over eighty artists (most of whom were Dutch, French, and Belgian). The concept of the exhibition at park Sonsbeek was inspired by a sculpture exhibition at Battersea park in London, attended by Arnhem-councillor Marga Klompé in 1948. At the time, Arnhem was still coping with past German bombardments, which had not only left many physical scars in the city, but

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2 Exhibition catalogue SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page numbers.
also in the collective memory of its inhabitants. The municipality of Arnhem envisioned *Sonsbeek '49* as a means to mitigate the collective trauma caused by the Second World War.⁵ This hope to revive the city with art, also in terms of city marketing, was ostensibly fulfilled: about 125,000 people from Arnhem and beyond saw the exhibition.⁶ In terms of the function of art, *Sonsbeek '49* as a whole can be seen as a political, but also a social and economic instrument; artworks were put to use for the betterment of a city. Given its immense success, the formula of *Sonsbeek '49* was repeated in 1952 (fig. 1), 1955, 1958 and 1966, followed by six irregularly organised *Sonsbeek* exhibitions in 1971, 1986, 1993, 2001, 2008, and 2016. Before the well-known Documenta (1955) and Münster Skulptur Projekte (1977), Arnhem managed to establish a pioneering, recurring public art exhibition.

Each of the eleven *Sonsbeek* exhibitions, in particular the last six editions, differ in terms of boldness of curatorial and artistic visions and approaches, strategies to involve or appeal to citizens (of Arnhem), and relationships between politicians, curators, artists, audiences, artworks, and public spaces. Yet, on some levels, the same challenges occurred each time it was decided that the time was right for a new *Sonsbeek*. For example, the support of people from Arnhem, whose tax money has been used, is never a given. At the same time, every edition falls under the gaze of art professionals from the artworld. Each new team of Foundation Sonsbeek, especially after the controversial *Sonsbeek '71* and *Sonsbeek '93*, arguably has to deal with the gap between uninterested or uninformed citizens and expectations from art enthusiasts and professionals. While looking back at the failures and successes of predecessors, they have to find ways to make the exhibition relevant from the point of view of different publics, including people living inside and outside Arnhem, people from various neighbourhoods, people from different milieus, as well as the point of view of the artworld, with its changing curatorial and artistic tendencies. In this respect, it seems that the question about the function of (public) art, which some *Sonsbeek* curators have addressed more explicitly then others,⁷ has been right beneath the surface of every *Sonsbeek*.

*Sonsbeek '16: transACTION* was curated by the Indonesian collective ruangrupa. Not only was it the first time in the history of *Sonsbeek* that the exhibition was curated by a group of curators, it was also unprecendented that they were not Dutch, European or American. Ruangrupa has been based in Jakarta since its foundation in 2000. An artist collective at the beginning, they have since grown into a very mixed contemporary arts organisation with about forty members of different generations, with various professions and backgrounds. Seven of ruangrupa’s core members worked as curators on *Sonsbeek '16* (fig. 2). Significantly, most of them started out as artists, and later engaged in

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⁶ Gelders Archief (Archive of province of Gelderland), inventory number 2058.1.

⁷ For example, Anna Tilroe (curator of *Sonsbeek 2008*) envisioned art as a means to articulate mankind’s eternal desire for greatness. Accordingly, artists are, in Tilroe’s eyes, tasked with making artworks that provide insights into who we are as human beings, and how we may want to live our lifes. See Tilroe, Anna, “Splendor in the dust”, in Heijne, Bas, Hillaert, Wouter, Janssen, Nanda, and Tilroe, Anna, *Sonsbeek 2008: Grandeur. A Jubilee*, (Deventer: Thieme Art), 2008, 11-15.
establishing cultural projects or curating exhibitions without having received much, if any, training in curating. The artist-curator is not a new phenomenon, and perhaps it has become more accepted in recent decades, but on the other hand this double role is far from being the standard. Ruangrupa’s involvement as artist-curators in Sonsbeek ’16 constituted yet another break with previous editions.

The theme of Sonsbeek ’16 was ‘transACTION’. The word ‘transaction’ calls to mind a kind of exchange between people that involves money. However, ruangrupa used the term in a more general sense to denote “any exchange that happens between two [or more] people”. Through both verbal exchanges of ideas, stories, memories, and so forth, and exchanges of objects or services, people continuously shape and reshape many different kinds of relationships with each other. Understood like this, exchanges are not just at the core of the economic system, but also underlie the countless ways in which human beings relate to the world around them and give meaning to their lives. Taking into account the different ways in which ‘trans’ and ‘ACTION’ are emphasised (in italics and capital letters), the theme of the exhibition conjures up additional meanings. A prefix word, ‘trans’ means ‘beyond’, ‘across’, ‘through’, and ‘changing thoroughly’, so in combination with ‘ACTION’, the term seems to conjure up ‘beyond action’, ‘across action’, and ‘thoroughly changing action’. These multiple meanings of ‘transACTION’, any type of exchange between people, and beyond action, suggest the active role of the public in their engagement with the artworks of the Sonsbeek ’16. Here, it is important to be aware that the public’s engagement does not happen easily by itself. For various reasons, people are often reluctant to (physically) use artworks, for instance because they are shy or question what is in it for them. During Sonsbeek ’16, different meaningful transactions with artworks were not only encouraged by the Open Call, but also by a group a devoted hosts. Day in day out, more or less every artwork at park Sonsbeek was manned by a host. The hosts provided visitors and users with valuable information about the works, ultimately enabling themselves and visitors to gain insight into the artworks’ possible meaningfulness. Thanks to the hosts and the Open Call program, the transactions during Sonsbeek ’16, and by extension the aim and the scope of the exhibition, became more visible and tangible to a larger public.

Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION clearly fostered the notion of art as purposeful. The artworks at park Sonsbeek were not created in the name of art, but rather for the sake of ‘sociality’, the process of shaping meaningful relationships between people through verbal communication. An investigation

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8. Reviews of Sonsbeek ’16 in magazines and newspapers seem to support this: art critics generally did not pay any attention to the implications of the double occupation of many of ruangrupa’s core members.
10. Exhibition catalogue SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page numbers.
into the artworks at park Sonsbeek therefore requires first and foremost a thorough analysis of the relationships that sprung from the works. From a practical point of view, this poses quite a challenge: it is an arduous if not impossible task to observe artworks and art-users in situ for a length of time long enough to gain a critical understanding of such relationships. Yet empirical research is arguably of crucial importance. As for Sonsbeek ’16, it was possible to complement empirical research on the Open Call events with online information. Apart from certain facts, such as the duration, the aim, and the question of whether it was private or public, descriptions and visual documentation of many of the activities (primarily the ones that were public) can be accessed online.\footnote{The fact that information about many of the Open Call activities is available online testifies to the influence of the internet, and in particular social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, in promoting and supporting transactions. It can be argued that many of the public Open Call activities relied on the internet. This hardly comes as a surprise, but it seems important to acknowledge that Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION is the first Sonsbeek exhibition in a time that is undeniably dominated by social media.} To comprehend the Open Call activities, the artworks of course also need to be taken into account. Examining their material characteristics helps to clarify the artist’s intentionality, insofar as this is possible, as well as the practical limitations, which may have directly or indirectly influenced the activities. Thus, in addition to the Open Call, the artworks are the second point of reference.

Through the analysis of Open Call events, and the artworks, this thesis attempts to give insight into the transactions that took place during Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION, and thus the types of relationships between people that resulted from the artworks. Within the frame of the Open Call, which was essentially created by the public without interferences from artists and curators, it can be argued that people were turned into users, as opposed to participants whose role is always partly or even entirely predetermined by artists. The investigation into the relationships is therefore based on the assumption of self-invented uses and not participation. The research findings not only shed light on the uses of the artworks, but also allow for a critical evaluation of their use-value. Ultimately, the aim is to analyse the uses and the use-value of the artworks to form an understanding of Sonsbeek ’16 as an ‘Useful Art’ exhibition. The main research question is, thus, as follows: What are the uses and the corresponding use-values of six representative, useful artworks of Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION that were integrated in park Sonsbeek?

Three sub-questions underpin the examination of the uses and use-values. First of all, who are the users and what did they aim at? Secondly, in relation to the use-value, what did the users contribute to the works of art, and what did they seemingly gain from their uses of the works? In other words, what did the users give and receive, and what did the artworks, in return, “give” and “receive”? Thirdly, and correspondingly, to what extent are the uses connected to the artworks? That is, their materiality, that may reflect their inscribed meaning and the artists’ intentions (insofar as this is communicated). On the one hand, if an artwork does not in any apparent way encourage or effect self-invented uses, these uses can be considered arbitrary, and the use-value of that artwork becomes redundant, accordingly. If uses are, on the other hand, already to a large degree predetermined by an
artwork, self-invented uses are inevitably thwarted, or, in extreme cases, no longer a possibility. I would argue that the key to determining the use-value is a critical analysis of a process of reciprocity: by using a work of art, users could gain something from it that they would otherwise not have attained, and at the same time, the artwork acquires an additional, unforeseen layer of meaning as a result of specific uses. Simply put, the user needs the artwork, and vice versa; they are not entities on their own. In the end, the use-value of a work of art is arguably not a matter of quantity, but rather of quality.

In addition to the aforementioned practical difficulty to conduct enough empirical research, the assessment of uses and the use-value of artworks remain a slippery terrain. Similar to the function of an artwork, its uses and use-value are bound by time, place, and circumstances, and therefore prone to continuous, unpredictable, and perhaps even imperceptible changes. This thesis departs from the description of art-related use by Nick Aikens, Thomas Lange, Jorinde Seijdel, and Steven ten Thije, the editors of What’s the Use? Constellations of Art, History, and Knowledge (2016). They explain use and usefulness as fundamentally contingent concepts, making it impossible to draw up hard criteria.14 Two particular theories of Useful Art, incorporated in What’s the Use? and briefly introduced below, serve as the primary theoretical framework and foundation for this thesis.

One of the most important champions of the utility and subservience of art is Cuban artist and activist Tania Bruguera (Havana, 1968). She has been developing the concept of Arte Útil (‘Useful Art’) for many years, particularly through her long-term education project Cátedra Arte de Conducta (‘Behaviour Art School’) (2003-2009), realised in Havana, and the network Association of Arte Útil (ongoing since 2011). In a nutshell, what Bruguera proposes is a different category of art, an art which is embedded in the sphere of reality and first and foremost deals with the question how works of art might function as tools for accommodating people’s needs (e.g. education, social mobility, equal rights).15 Arte Útil not only breaks with many notions prevalent in the “mainstream” art scene and market, such as authorship, objecthood, and spectatorship, but also undermines common ways of “distributing” and commercialising art, like art fairs, exhibitions, and publications.

Canadian philosopher, writer, and curator Stephen Wright (Vancouver, 1963) has also been researching and advocating the uses and use-values of contemporary art, in conference papers, essays, and as a curator of exhibitions roughly since 2000. Around 2012-2013, Wright and Bruguera teamed up for Bruguera’s exhibition Museum of Arte Útil (2013-2014) at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, The Netherlands. Wright’s essay ‘Towards a Lexicon of Usership’ (2013) (fig. 3), commissioned by Bruguera and curators of the Van Abbemuseum, served as a theoretical support for visitors. The essay has since then also been used as an instructive theoretical framework, for instance by Polish curators

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Tania Bruguera’s ideas on Arte Útil and Stephen Wright’s lexicon of Usership are examined in the first chapter of this thesis, which deals with Useful Art as a type of or new form of Social Practice. The second chapter focusses on the artistic and curatorial practices of ruangrupa, within the context of Jakarta and Arnhem. In order to create more insight in ruangrupa as an arts collective, several of Bruguera’s and Wright’s ideas about Useful Art are, if possible, related to ruangrupa’s practice. Six artworks at park Sonsbeek, as well as their uses and use-values, are analysed in the third chapter. For the most part, the analysis of *Sonsbeek ’16* as an Useful Art exhibition draws from Stephen Wright’s lexicon, because it seems that his proposed theoretical concepts lend themselves better than Bruguera’s writings to an examination of useful artworks that were not explicidy created as Arte Útil / Useful Art. Although Bruguera aptly explains defining characteristics of Arte Útil in several short (conference) papers, crystallised in Arte Útil criteria that are adopted by the Association of Arte Útil, she has not yet written an extensive theoretical essay like Wright’s lexicon. In comparison to Bruguera’s texts and criteria, which partly overlap with Wright’s concepts, the lexicon provides a more detailed and elaborate description of Useful Art. The fourth and final chapter first of all briefly touches upon the position of contemporary art within society, in order to reflect deeper on the possibilities and risks of pursuing useful artworks and the implications of *Sonsbeek ’16* as a Useful Art exhibition. Secondly, I will examine the heteronomy of Useful Art, that is, its embeddedness in society, by using the ideas of French philosopher Jacques Rancière (1965) about the heteronomy and autonomy of art to shed light on the concepts of art’s usefulness and uselessness. Underlying the final chapter, and this thesis in general, is the assumption that an intensified focus on the uses and use-values of artworks becomes increasingly important within the field of contemporary art to strenghten the position of art in society in the future.

CHAPTER 1

What is Useful Art?

The only moral act is the useless one, and the only useless act is the aesthetic one. The artist is the only man who performs an act for no useful purpose; he is, indeed, opposed to its usefulness. His behavior is completely, unalterably, and profoundly futile.17

–Barnett Newman

In this fragment from an unpublished tribute to Arshile Gorky, American painter and sculptor Barnett Newman (1905-1970) singled out the profession of the artist as the one and only genuinely moral and useless occupation. Newman’s statement about the futile work of artists seems somewhat nihilistic, and perhaps surprising since he is an artist himself. In retrospect, we know that in Newman’s time artistic practice was not just considered useless: by secretly promoting Abstract Expressionism, the CIA used art for the sake of political ideology during the Cold War.18 Similar to Newman, political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) has also argued for art’s superior and exclusive claim to uselessness. According to Arendt, in ‘The Crisis in Culture’(1960-1968), art is “deliberately removed from the processes of consumption and usage and isolated against the sphere of human life necessities.”19 Today, many artists and people working in the field of contemporary art might disagree with Newman and Arendt, emphasising that many artists and art practitioners deliberately engage critically in developing socially relevant practices that are useful for society. It is safe to say, however, that few people have discussed or are nowadays discussing (contemporary) artworks and their affects in terms of use and usefulness. It is generally believed that art has a certain purpose, though some people will of course steadfastly consider art useless, and yet the union between art and utilitarianism seems to be a no go.

By taking as its point of departure Tania Bruguera’s conceptualisation of Arte Útil and the essay ‘Toward a Lexicon of Usership’ (2013) by Stephen Wright, this chapter analyses what ‘Useful Art’ might entail, and how it might be considered an alternative contemporary art practice. To determine how Useful Art is different from “mainstream art” in museums and galleries, I will examine

what can be called the Modernist paradigm and its – perhaps to some extent still – dominant theoretical concepts. For the lack of a better term, I use “mainstream art” to refer to a category of art which is generally considered and accepted as art, and supported by certain (unspoken) accepted beliefs, vocabularies, theoretical frameworks, methods, etc. Aside from its ambiguous meaning, the term “mainstream” is problematic, because it is often left unexplained why and how certain art practices become more mainstream than others. As artist and theorist Luis Camnitzer rightly claims, mainstream art is a gatekeeper phenomenon as it is not build upon a democratic foundation: “In reality, ‘mainstream’ presumes a reduced group of cultural gatekeepers and represents a select nucleus of nations. It is a name for a power structure that promotes a self-appointed hegemonic culture.”

The main research question of this chapter is as follows: what is Useful Art, and how is it different from mainstream art? In order to examine Sonsbeek ’16 as an ‘Useful Art’ exhibition, it is important to consider to what extent Useful Art differs from comparable socially engaged art practices that started to emerge in the beginning of the 1990s, which seemingly take the use of works of arts as their trademark, often, however, without adopting the words ‘use’ or ‘usefulness’. The second research question is, thus, to what extent Useful Art can be seen as different from the wave of diverse socially engaged practices from the last two to three decades.

1.1 Defining the use and usefulness of art

If art did not have any specific use-values, its centuries-long tradition would likely not have existed. Yet, in general, relatively scarce attention has been paid to the use and usefulness of works of art, resulting in the fact that they have been grossly understudied. An important early contributor to the study of art in relation to use and usefulness was the English art theorist and critic John Ruskin (1819-1900). Influenced by transitions in the Industrial Revolution era, Ruskin’s writings and lectures about art are strongly imbued with ideas about the nature of (English) society and human life. In Ruskin’s lecture ‘The Relation of Art to Use’ (first published in Lectures on Art, 1870), skill, beauty, and likeness were described as the three main elements of artistic practice. The mastering of skill, which Ruskin repeatedly underscored and extensively elaborated on, is determined by the ability to truthfully represent the world. By drawing parallels to botany, geology, and zoology, he stressed the importance for artists to possess knowledge of other scientific fields. In doing so, Ruskin denounced the autonomous position of artists, and the later modernist idea that artists are retreated from society. Ultimately, the artist’s primary task is, in Ruskin’s eyes, to get closer to the truth of human life by

22 “It [art] must never exist alone, – never for itself; it exists rightly only when it is the means of knowledge, or the grace of agency for life.” Ibid., 76.
producing works of art. What therefore defines art more than anything else is its “serviceableness” (Ruskin’s choice of word).\(^\text{23}\) Ruskin’s vision on art and use was replete with utopian implications as he seemed to posit art as the main instrument for gaining knowledge of the world, and ultimately for creating a better society for everyone. Thus, underlying Ruskin’s lecture about the production of art and its value is his belief that usefulness is the universal foundation of art, which perhaps makes him a Social Practice or Useful Art theorist \textit{avant la lettre}.

Over the past four years, the confederation L’Internationale has been taking John Ruskin’s legacy forward with the research program \textit{The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989} (2013-2018). L’Internationale unites six modern and contemporary museums from Europe: the Moderna Galerija (Ljubljana, Slovenia), Museo nacional centro de arte Reina Sofía (Madrid, Spain), Museu d’art Contemporani de Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain), Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (Antwerp, Belgium), SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey), and Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, The Netherlands). Partners of L’Internationale that have contributed to the research program include Grizedale Arts (Coniston, United Kingdom),\(^\text{24}\) The University of Hildesheim (Hildesheim, Germany), Liverpool John Moores University (Liverpool, United Kingdom), and University College Ghent School of Arts (Ghent, Belgium).

In exhibitions, symposia, publications, education programmes, and staff exchanges, \textit{The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989} focusses on the production of art in relation to two key historical periods of political and social change in Europe: the emergence of democracy in the mid-nineteenth century, and the 1980s towards the end of the Cold War.\(^\text{25}\) In addition, the researchers of the program embark on discussions of the uses of art and the future role of artists and art institutions in building transnational, European bonds of knowledge, culture, and identity. The overlap between the three research directions are formulated in four themes: “Politics of Life and Death”, “Decolonising Practices”, “Real Democracy”, and “Alter Institutionality”. Research results regarding these four themes can be found on the platform L’Internationale Online.\(^\text{26}\) When it comes to exhibitions on art’s uses and usefulness, the Van Abbemuseum in particular has made important contributions. In 2013-2014, they co-organised \textit{Museum of Arte Útil} together with Tania Bruguera (this exhibition will be discussed later on). The exhibition \textit{Confessions of the Imperfect, 1848-1989-Today} (2014-2015) followed, which was co-curated by Alistair Hudson (director of the Middlesbrough Institute of Art).

All in all, \textit{The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989} has been delivering a wide range of different studies (e.g. artistic practice, curating, education) on different types of artistic production and


\(^{24}\) Grizedale Arts created ‘The John Ruskin Memorial Blog’ to expand John Ruskin’s legacy. Contributors to this online blog explore “what Ruskin might mean to artists, curators, producers and publics today.” See https://www.grizedale.org/projects/force.of.culture/the.john.ruskin.memorial.blog/ (last accessed on 30 October 2017).

\(^{25}\) See http://www.internationaleonline.org/about (last accessed on 30 October 2017).

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
traditions arising in different historical contexts across Europe. Past and present correlations between art and political and social changes seem to be one of the central entry points through which the researchers attempt to formulate the uses and usefulness of art.

From the perspective of art, it is semantically difficult to define use and usefulness. Hypothetically speaking, these concepts could apply to every experience of a work of art. In the context of art, the connotation of the word ‘use’ seems to be the physical interaction between the viewer and the artwork, but use can also signify a mental process, for instance when a viewer gains insights from the artwork just by looking. In addition to physical, cognitive, and psychological uses, which can produce both visible and invisible results, it is also possible to distinguish practical uses, like sitting, from non-practical uses, like playing. ‘Usefulness’, ‘utility’, and ‘use-value’, which permeate many of our daily activities, pertain to the adequate and advantageous functioning of something or someone. Contrary to the Oxford dictionary, which defines the word ‘usefulness’ as “a quality or fact of being useful”, 27 the editors of the previously mentioned volume What’s the Use? argue that the usefulness of art is a subjective and time-bound notion. In ascribing usefulness to something or someone, there is the risk of valuing or describing something that is only useful to some people, under (a) specific circumstance(s), or at (a) specific moment(s). 28 Usefulness is, in any case, always a result of, often various, uses; by using a work of art, an individual or a group can identify its usefulness (or uselessness). Accordingly, it can happen that a work of art is classified as useful and useless, simultaneously or successively. This makes the notion of ‘usefulness’ equally, if not more, iffy than ‘use’.

A recent volume that gives insight into the uses and functions of public artworks is The Uses of Art in Public Space (2015), edited by Julia Lossau and Quentin Stevens. The research is mostly empirical, based in part on many hours of observation of and interviews with locals and passersby. Notably, the book combines explorations of figurative, static sculptures, and artworks which seem to belong to Social Practice. For example, Laurent Vernet discusses the uses of the bronze sculptures Taichi Shadow Boxing (1983) and Taichi Single Whip (1985) by Ju Ming, and the Monument to Queen Victoria (1869), 29 all situated on Victoria Square in Montréal, whereas Julia Lossau examines public participation in Graham Fagen’s project Tree Planting (1998-2001). 30 Most of the contributing authors pay attention to slippery concepts like public space and publics, but neglect to elucidate the other elusive term – use.

27 See https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/usefulness (last accessed on 1 March 2018).
In her study of public artworks, Karen A. Franck defines two modes of use. Artworks are either used as a symbol (e.g. for protesting, writing messages, commemoration), or as ‘a physical prop’ (e.g. vandalism, lying, sitting, or climbing on top of artworks). According to Franck, the first mode of use sometimes also includes the use of a work as a prop. The second mode of use is characterised by a resistance of the meaning of an artwork, and therefore Franck seems to suggest this is a bad mode of use. Franck’s two modes of use are somewhat problematic given the fact that it is difficult and perhaps erroneous to differentiate “good uses” (meaning is taken into account) from “bad uses” (meaning is not taken into account). It is not inconceivable that people use artworks as props, whilst also slightly referring to the (possible) meaning or message of the works. The way in which someone sits on top of a work, or takes a selfie with it, might correspond to the work. As Julia Lossau and Quentin Stevens remind us, users often “find their own purposes in the aesthetic objects and experiences presented to them”.

It can be argued that the meaning of public art always partly or entirely follows from the various ways in which they are (mis)used, be it as a physical prop or otherwise. This, thus, makes it hard to delineate the uses of works of art as symbols or props.

Quentin Stevens and Julia Lossau distinguish symbolic and performative uses. Symbolic uses pertain to the artwork’s materiality as a carrier of meaning; performative uses concern the production of meaning through the bodily engagement of the spectator. These proposed categories can be related to the traditional frameworks of Aesthetics (symbolic uses) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to the realm of “Relational Aesthetics” (performative uses). Whereas a study of Aesthetics is traditionally concerned with the often static material qualities of art, a study of Relational Aesthetics is focused on the role of art engagers in bringing artwork to life. Thus, with Relational Aesthetics artworks, the relationship between people and works is key, and the materiality often becomes a byproduct. If we consider Relational Aesthetics – or should we say Social Practice? –, Stevens’ and Lossau’s description of performative uses seems only useful insofar as it enables us to identify Relational Aesthetics artworks. The term performative uses seems insufficient for further analysing and categorising these artworks; when scrutinizing the puzzling hybridity of Relational Aesthetics / Social Practice artworks, which pop up in streets as well as museums, a new vocabulary is needed for grasping different types of performative uses, dependent on different artistic mediums and (multiple) roles of the public (e.g. audience members, co-creators, passersby).

In What’s the Use? Constellations of Art, History, and Knowledge (2016), the editors explain use and usefulness as relative categories, continuously under construction by human relationships in
the presence of the artwork.\textsuperscript{34} The contingencies of use and usefulness thus have to be traced in affective responses, an endeavour posing a whole new range of methodological challenges. How can we, for example, arrive at procedures for conducting empirical research on the uses and use-value of art? Giving impetus to research on the use and use-value of art today, through the lens of the past, the volume \textit{What’s the Use?}, nonetheless, demonstrates that use offers a valuable starting point for tracing the functionings of art within today’s society.\textsuperscript{35}

1.2 Arte Útil

Tania Bruguera has been devoting her artistic and activist work and teaching to developing Arte Útil (‘Useful Art’) for more than ten years. As an alternative art movement, Arte Útil was, however, not officially coined by Bruguera before her essay ‘Reflections on Arte Útil’ from 2012. Arte Útil has to be understood as a different vision on the function of contemporary art in society. Taking the potential of art a step further, beyond its ability to (re)present critical reflections on or possible solutions for societal issues, Bruguera advocates artworks that produce something visible from which people are able to profit in their daily lives. To accomplish this, artworks have to be embedded in everyday life in order to become effective tools for social change, up for grabs for those who want to use it. Bruguera envisages artists no longer as “geniuses” who express individual experiences or thoughts, but instead as teachers, negotiators, behavioral builders, or – giving up their individuality altogether – as social structures, transforming viewers into users.\textsuperscript{36} The merging of art and everyday life calls for an equal evaluation of aesthetics and conditions in society for determining the artwork’s political effectiveness; according to Bruguera, art and ethics are therefore interdependent.\textsuperscript{37} She proposes to think about aesthetics first of all in terms of ethics, hence her division of the word ‘aesthetics’ into ‘aest-ethics’.\textsuperscript{38}

Arte Útil also inevitably intermingles with politics. Emphasising the transformative quality of Arte Útil in interviews, lectures and essays, Bruguera alludes to the urgency to transform society (“Arte


\textsuperscript{35} Following the proposition of \textit{What’s the Use?}, to create an “understanding of the present through reflecting on the past appearing in the present”, it might be interesting to do a comparative study of the utility of art during the first Sonsbeek exhibition in 1949, and the latest Sonsbeek in 2016.


Útil has a different society in mind.”\textsuperscript{39} Indeed, she not only classifies Arte Útil as a form of social practice, but also as activism. By referring to Arte Útil as “a feasible utopia”, and “a zone of ethical ecology” where exploiters and the exploited share the same morals, she embarks on a future purpose of art to battle power relations and inequality.\textsuperscript{40}

In collaboration with curators from the Queens Museum of Art (New York) and the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven), Bruguera has described eight criteria for Useful Art projects. These guidelines are being used by the Association of Arte Útil, a network of art institutions (Grizedale Arts, Van Abbemuseum, Tate Liverpool, Ikon Gallery Birmingham, and Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art), the Liverpool John Moores University, and the previously discussed confederation L’Internationale. The eight criteria are: propose new uses for art within society; use artistic thinking to challenge the field within which it operates; respond to current urgencies; operate on a 1:1 scale; replace authors with initiators and spectators with users; have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users; pursue sustainability; and re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation.\textsuperscript{41} These Arte Útil criteria read like successive goals, of which the final two appear to be especially ambitious. As discussed before, the uses and usefulness of art can be considered as highly unpredictable and often temporary, demanding constant critical reassessment. Given the seemingly inevitable need for occasional revisions, and the likelihood that usefulness “dries up” after a while, pursuing sustainability is arguably very challenging. Perhaps sustainability is only feasible to a certain extent. The same might be said of the final criterion, to re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation. Repurposing aesthetics as a system of transformation, by which Bruguera seems to denote both a political and ethical transformation for the sake of a more equal and just society, seems an ambitious, and also a somewhat ambiguous criteria. Even if an Arte Útil project meets the first six criteria, it is possible that it hardly inspires any political and societal change, or only results in (a) temporary and / or small-scaled change(s). In case an Arte Útil project contributes to, for example, the positive adjustment of a gentrification policy in a certain city, this issue remains a sensitive and complex topic of debate in other cities around the world. So what are possible parameters for successfully re-establishing aesthetics as a system of transformation?

Tania Bruguera’s most important research projects on Arte Útil include the long-term community project 	extit{Immigrant Movement International} (New York, 2010-2015), and the “exhibitions” Arte Útil Lab at the Queens Museum of Art (2013) and Museum of Arte Útil at the Van Abbemuseum (7 December 2013 - 30 March 2014). Additionally, Bruguera and the Association of Arte Útil have


\textsuperscript{40} In an interview, Bruguera stated: “Arte Útil is not about opportunities (of getting rich, of advancing your career) but about changing the balance of power. To define it, I use the phrase: “Arte Útil imagines, creates, and implements socially beneficial outcomes that make the world work differently.”” O’Neill, Paul, “Art: Interview. Tania Bruguera”, \textit{BOMB}, Vol. 128 (Summer 2014), see http://bombmagazine.org/article/10071/tania-bruguera (last accessed on 6 November 2017).

\textsuperscript{41} See http://www.arte-util.org/about/colophon/ (accessed on 22 February 2017).
also been compiling Arte Útil case studies in an online archive since 2013, partly through initiating open calls. By December 2017, the archive incorporated a total of 269 case studies. Already over two hundred case studies were displayed during Museum of Arte Útil (fig. 4). This exhibition can be seen as the final stage of Bruguera’s research, in which she posed the question how a museum might become useful as “a civic institution for production and output”.\[42\]

Upon entering the Van Abbemuseum during the running time of Museum of Arte Útil, visitors were given the choice to enter the museum as a user, granting them free access to the exhibition, or as a regular visitor, in which case they had to pay and could see both the exhibition and the permanent collection.\[43\] Rather than exhibiting finished artworks, Museum of Arte Útil invited people to freely use the rooms in the museum for their own purposes, for instance for meetings, workshops, or rehearsals. To allow visitors to contemplate the museum’s use-value, and to inspire them to use it and add case studies to the ‘Archive Room’, Arte Útil case studies were presented in seven thematic rooms. The themes reflect several strategic aims of Arte Útil: ‘Use it Yourself,’ ‘Institutional Re-purpose,’ ‘A-Legal,’ ‘Space Hijack,’ ‘Open Access,’ ‘Legislative Change,’ and ‘Reforming Capital.’ Among the diverse case studies, of which most are site-specific, were projects from across the world dating from the 1950s until (March) 2014. In the room Legislative Change, for instance, visitors learn about the Dutch movement Provo (1965-1967),\[44\] and Theater of the Oppressed: Legislative Theater (ongoing since 1956) established by the Brazilian politician Augusto Boal.\[45\] A more recent case study shown here is Jeanne van Heeswijk’s project Freehouse: Radicalizing the Local, part of the neighbourhood Afrikaanderwijk in Rotterdam since 2008. Apart from Arte Útil projects taking place outside of Eindhoven, other documented initiatives are specifically developed for this city and the exhibition, like the Honest Shop (fig. 5), co-created by the British organisation Grizedale Arts. A trade shop where people can sell self-made items like scarfs, ceramics, and jewelry, and have to pay a relatively small percentage of the profit, the Honest Shop promotes the local production and purchase of ‘honest’ products.\[46\]

Projects like the Honest Shop invoke questions about the agency of people in relation to the museum, and how a museum of modern and contemporary art might function differently, as a more progressive institution serving the local needs of people. Museum of Arte Útil can be described as an experimental exhibition, speculating on the future role of art and museums. However, by showing historical examples of Arte Útil, Bruguera demonstrates that Arte Útil can also be seen as an

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\[42\] The exhibition is not a ‘one-man show’, but rather co-created with the curators at the Van Abbemuseum, “Art: Interview. Tania Bruguera by Paul O’Neill”, BOMB, Vol. 128 (Summer 2014); see http://bombmagazine.org/article/10071/tania-bruguera (last accessed on 28 February 2017).


unofficial, and perhaps slightly subversive movement with a long tradition, progressing largely under the radar of the art world. Explaining the idea behind Museum of Arte Útil, Bruguera refers to the position of Arte Útil in today’s art world:

> What we propose is the right for this [Arte Útil] to be part of the conversation in art, because it seems that when things are useful or they go beyond this kind of traditional way of seeing art, then they are dismissed as not art. We want to say, ‘Okay, we agree that everything else exists but there can be another way’.  

Bruguera’s claim that Useful Art is not acknowledged as art begs the question what – or who – needs to change in order for it to be taken seriously by the mainstream art world. Stephen Wright deals with this in his essay ‘Toward a Lexicon of Usership’ (2013), the “theoretical toolkit” accompanying Museum of Arte Útil. The next subchapter examines to what extent and why Useful Art is at odds with common, Western ideas about what constitutes art and how it functions. In the third subchapter I will then use Wright’s lexicon to see what kind of lexical change might be desirable or necessary.

### 1.3 The Modernist paradigm

If you would randomly ask people to describe art, everyone would likely give a slightly different answer. Yet, the ontology and evaluation of art are of course far from merely subjective. There are many (unspoken) assumptions, traditions, vocabularies, methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and so forth, which we consciously but also unconsciously use to identify, evaluate, and canonise works of art. Stephen Wright refers to them as conceptual edifices, and he alludes to their omnipresence:

> We dwell in conceptual edifices. They shelter and confine us, with or without our consent, even in the great outdoors. (...) We use them for our purposes, for without users, they are just empty shells; with time, they come to bear the brunt of usership’s wear and tear and ultimately can no longer contain the uses to which they put.”

Some voices in the art world are arguing that a number of conceptual edifices are no longer useful, and indeed the time has come to ‘retire’ them, as Wright put it. This specifically concerns the edifices delivered by Modernism in the twentieth century.

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Barnett Newman’s thinking on art’s uselessness, expressed in the opening quote of this chapter, and the writings of other artists, like Ad Reinhardt, continue to be overshadowed by the art criticism of an American critic of their generation: Clement Greenberg (1909-1994). Often named in one breath with Modernism and Jackson Pollock, one of its key figures he admired and promoted, Greenberg’s best known writings are primarily focused on a formalist critique of abstract painting. Put simply, he proclaimed that a good painting is about the intrinsic qualities of the medium (flatness, rectangular shape, and paint), which must be the sole subject matter. The aesthetic value of a painting should therefore be measured by its ability to show the medium-specificity of painting. Whenever a painting is suggestive of something else, it is no longer avant-gardist but tending towards kitsch, a term Greenberg uses in his polemical essay ‘Avant-garde and Kitsch’ (1939) to condemn a commercial and sentimental domain of art for the masses that easily falls prey to political ideologies.49 Only by establishing an autonomous realm based on the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’, avant-garde art might ensure cultural progress “in the midst of ideological confusion and violence”.50 Greenberg believes that artists ought to make art that self-criticises art itself by focusing on its own potential. In his article ‘Modernist Painting’ (1960) he declares:

The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.51

Greenberg’s ideas on the self-referential objective and autonomy of art are echoed in the writings of younger theorists like Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss, and remained very influential at least up until the 1970s. With the arrival of the New Art History of the 1970s, however, Greenbergian formalism was also denounced by theorists, for example by Lawrence Alloway in his essay ‘The Arts and the Mass Media’ (1958), T.J. Clark’s essay ‘Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art’ (1982) and Kay Larson’s article in Artforum with the fierce title ‘The Dictatorship of Clement Greenberg’ (1987). Also worth mentioning is Donald Kuspit’s book Clement Greenberg: Art Critic (1979), one the earliest lengthy, critical examinations of the critic’s influence. His first sentences read like a conclusion, and they seem a little prophetic: “The significance of Clement Greenberg cannot be overestimated. He is

50 Ibid., 8.
the designer and subtle manipulator of modernism, which is the single most important theory of modern art.”

Clement Greenberg may be “the designer and subtle manipulator of Modernism”, but to some extent we have the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to thank for this. No doubt Greenberg was inspired by Kant, whom he appointed as “the first real Modernist”, but how he drew upon major works of the philosopher has been a topic of debate stretching several decades, and goes beyond the aim of this thesis to discuss in detail. Here, I will briefly outline the main themes from Kant’s Critique of the Power of Judgement (1790), considered as his most influential work on art, to show how Greenberg’s ideas resonate with Kant’s and arguably ended up being the cornerstones of the Western, Modernist paradigm. Kant’s Critique of the Power of Judgement contains two parts; first the ‘Critique of Aesthetic Power of Judgment’ and secondly the ‘Critique of Teleological Power of Judgment’. The ‘Critique of Aesthetic Power of Judgment’, in which Kant addresses art, first examines aesthetic judgements on the premise of four moments, matching the four functions of judgements (quality, quantity, relation, and modality).

With respect to the first moment, Kant writes that judgements on beauty are at all times ‘disinterested’. Different from subjective judgements about the agreeable (“I like red roses”), aesthetic judgements are objective and cannot be determined by personal interests (“This is a beautiful painting”). For Kant, aesthetic judgements are also the only free judgements, independent from both the senses and reason. Accordingly, he believes an experience of beauty equals experiencing the freedom of the imagination. Kant’s use of the word ‘freedom’ to reserve a special position for beauty and aesthetic judgements seems related to Greenberg’s motives for underscoring art’s medium specificity as the one and only correct subject matter. So long as painters would concentrate on the medium specificities of painting, without making concessions to elements external to art, like politics and mass culture, Greenberg imagined they would be able to secure the autonomy and progress of art – and therefore its freedom.

Concomitant with the first moment, the second moment concerns the universal validity of aesthetic judgements. Utterances like “this is a beautiful painting” entail the claim that everybody would agree, even though in reality this would probably not be the case. For the third moment, Kant defines the concept of purposiveness. By this he denotes the one and only purpose of beauty: to remain

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56 Ibid., 95.
57 Ibid., 228.
58 Ibid., 96, 97.
totally purpose-less.\textsuperscript{59} Transferring this purpose of purposelessness to art seems tricky, because artists arguably never start working without having anything in mind. Even if artists make artworks intuitively, they will probably know for themselves what drives them as artists, and perhaps they also have an opinion about the purpose of artists or art in general. Kant would state that the artist’s purposes – more accurately any person’s purposes – have nothing to do with aesthetic judgements as the notion of beauty can never be fully spelled out and therefore has to stay end-less. “Beauty is the form of the purposiveness of an object”, according to Kant, “insofar as it is perceived in it without representation of an end.”\textsuperscript{60} In ascribing purposelessness to art, he effectively places artworks in opposition to utilitarian objects, which do not possess open-endedness since their form to a great extent follows their function (for example, all teapots have similar shapes and measurements to make them suitable for pouring tea). In addition, the concept of purposelessness implies the freedom and autonomy of artworks.

Kant claims that in addition to purposes, ‘charm and emotions’\textsuperscript{61} are far removed from pure aesthetic judgements. Although experiences of beauty usually involve feelings, he argues it is a mistake to see affects as the source for judgements about beauty.\textsuperscript{62} Instead, the formal qualities of a painting or sculpture (e.g. its colors), which can be pleasant on their own and ‘universally communicated’\textsuperscript{63}, are the basis of art’s purposelessness and aesthetic judgements. Because of his emphasis on form, Kant has been appointed as the father of formalism.\textsuperscript{64} Unlike Kant, who describes form as one among other conditions for aesthetic judgements, it can be said that Greenberg ranks form as the principal condition for aesthetic judgement. Furthermore, Greenberg seems to go at least one step further by demanding that formal qualities ought to be self-referential.

A fourth moment and final criterion for aesthetic judgement, according to Kant, is necessity. This criterion follows from the claim of universality of aesthetic judgements introduced in the second moment; for Kant, a claim to universality is automatically also a claim to necessity.\textsuperscript{65} The validity of a claim to necessity, and thus the validity of aesthetic judgements, depends on whether it qualifies as an “exemplary necessity” and not a “theoretical objective necessity”\textsuperscript{66}. By exemplary necessity Kant means a type of necessity which does not stem purely from certain laws, rules, or protocols. Exemplary necessity has to be grounded on a comparison (for example between two paintings with similar subjects), whereas theoretical objective necessity is about imitation (for example following the steps for building a house or fixing the engine of a car). Thus, unlike theoretical objective necessity,

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 105, 106.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 107-109.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid. 109.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 39, 123.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 121.
the exemplary necessity is never a fixed category. As such, to Kant, aesthetic judgements are universal, although they can never be translated into universal, a priori laws, guidelines, knowledge, etc.

In summary, the basic similarity between Kant and Greenberg is their attribution of an aesthetic function to art. Additionally, they both focus on differentiating art from other human objects and activities, allocating it to an exclusive and autonomous domain. Kant’s theory on the evaluation of beauty and art mainly rest on the concepts of disinterestedness, freedom, and purposiveness. Correspondingly, the grounding concepts for Newman’s formalist art criticism are medium specificity, self-referentiality, non-sentimentality, objecthood, and form.

In the world we live in today, Clement Greenberg’s advocacy for art’s progress within an autonomous, and seemingly undemocratic sphere seems obsolete. We now know, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that even in Greenberg’s own time the separation between art and society was to some extent contradictory to reality, for one because Abstract Expressionist works were likely instrumentalisated for Cold War propaganda. Greenberg’s emphasis for painting has also lost its relevance. Given the fact that the globalised art market has an increasingly strong hold on the art world, and many art museums, fairs, and exhibitions are either financially supported by the state or sponsored by big companies, the political autonomy of art indeed becomes more unimaginable. Furthermore, the border between art and society is now more blurred than ever due to the internet, which so many people access through smartphones they are carrying with them wherever they go. Thanks to the possibility to access the internet on smartphones, people can obtain information about art anytime and anywhere without having to set foot in a museum or gallery. Different social media websites, of which apps are installed on most smartphones, sometimes even unpredictably offer unwanted information about art to smartphone users. As a result, Dutch cultural philosopher Henk Oosterling proclaims, artists can no longer occupy an outsider’s perspective in present-day society:

Only when you realise as an artist that [such] an autonomous position no longer exists, can you start working from a new position. (...) There is no “outside” because everything is connected to everything else. Only when you realise this you can get to work and celebrate your creativity.67

Yet, perhaps for valid reasons, autonomy is and has to remain valuable within contemporary art discourses (this will be further analysed in the final chapter). By arguably laying the foundations for a

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Modernist paradigm, Clement Greenberg’s art criticism continues to have effect on the ways people – both art professionals and publics – perceive and evaluate contemporary art. This will be demonstrated by an analysis of the stir around the British collective Assemble in 2015.

Assemble is a London-based group of eighteen young architecture graduates, “sort of architects, sort of not, sort of maybe”, who have been working on projects across the United Kingdom since 2010. Their name might refer to the collective’s origin, but it also epitomises the collaborative nature of their work methodologies. Assemble is best known for the ongoing community project Granby Four Streets (fig. 6), which has been taking place in the eponymous area that is part of the neglected, state-owned neighbourhood Toxteth in Southern Liverpool. Together with the Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust (founded in 2010 by a committed group of residents with the aim to have a say in the area’s makeover) and the Steinbeck Studio’s, Assemble renovated ten houses and set up the ongoing Granby Workshop, where people can buy all kinds of home-made products – very similar to the above described Honest Shop. Thanks to their nomination for and eventual winning of the prestigious Turner Prize in 2015, Assembly made progress by obtaining extra funds for Granby Four Streets. All of a sudden, by winning the Turner Prize, Assemble also received worldwide attention from the art world. Even though some controversy is almost common after the awarding of the Turner prize – the classic question ‘is it art?’ often pops up –, Assemble’s win was arguably much more frowned upon than that of winners in previous years.

In many respects, the winning of Assemble constituted a break in the then thirty-one-year-long history of what is probably England’s most important contemporary art prize. Not only was the prize in the hands of a collective for the first time, it was also a first that the judges awarded “architects” and not an artist. Furthermore, since Assemble works closely with many people, authorship and individual artistic skill play virtually no role. And unlike previous winners, Granby Four Streets is an ongoing project which, both in scale and its objective to assist the local community, does not resemble ‘museum art’. Whereas the artworks of the other nominees were on view at the Turner Prize exhibition in Glasgow, Assemble’s contribution was A Showroom for Granby Workshop (fig. 7), which was basically a model standing in for the actual “artwork” in Liverpool. In this regard, the Showroom hinted at the institutionalisation of artworks and their inevitable isolation from the outside world. In the eyes of The Guardian-art critic Adrian Searle “it shows a revulsion for the excesses of the art

70 See http://assemblestudio.co.uk/?page_id=862 (last accessed on 9 March 2017).
market, and a turn away from the creation of objects for that market."72 Expressing their confusion about the choice of the Turner Prize judges, some critics also speculated on how the winning of a non-artists collective might reflect the state of British contemporary art.73

Most of the critics emphasise that Assemble’s members are not artists and that their work does not qualify as art, and they do not forget to mention the fact that the members themselves agree with this. It can be said that critics were right to question the awarding of a prominent contemporary art prize to “architects / designers”. After all, architecture, design and contemporary art are considered as different disciplines. Assemble’s defiance to the labeling as either architects, designers or artists suggested, however, that it may be important to contemplate the possible common ground between architecture, design and contemporary art. In the end, all these disciplines are affected by the ever-changing, globalised world in which political, social, economic and technological shifts follow in rapid succession. The judges of the Turner Prize did not address cross-disciplinarity, or perhaps ‘post-disciplinarity’, as a potential strategy for artistic practice. In a world where certain boundaries between people are increasingly blurred, for instance due to the common need for cyber security and global sustainability, I would argue that the judges have missed an opportunity to stimulate thought on the possible allegiances between architects, designers, and artists, in terms of finding innovative approaches that positively impact communities and societies.74

The criticism aimed towards one of the judges on the online discussion platform e-flux conversations is worth discussing in more detail. On e-flux conversations, London-based curator Morgan Quaintance attacks Alistair Hudson, museum director of the Middlesbrough Institute of Art, who as it happens is also the co-director of Tania Bruguera’s Association of Arte Útil.75 Known as a promoter of Useful Art and the useful museum, Hudson is accused by Quaintance of making “a hollow, tokenistic gesture of pseudo-radical intent, instrumentalising a depoliticised architectural collective in order to drive home a point about ‘useful art’”.76 Claiming that Assemble’s win causes a loss of face for contemporary art, Quaintance sees the legitimisation of useful art a as threat to


74 Contrary to the Turner Prize judges, ruangrupa seems to be more aware of the possible overlap between architects and artist, because they invited architect Eko Prawoto to make an architectural artwork for Sonsbeek ‘16. See chapter 3, page


76 Ibid.
contemporary art’s distinctive open-endedness and its purpose to criticise normative ideologies and state power. In other words, art has to remain “radically useless” and autonomous in order to avoid being subsumed by the neoliberal system. In a critical response, lecturer John Byrne argues that Quaintance’s division between “useful depoliticised art” on the one hand and on the other “useless political art” is far too simplistic. In fact, the rethinking of art’s usefulness in society might offer a different understanding of art’s political potential, because it moves successfully beyond the commodification and commercialisation of art objects and the people from the upper classes who profit from this. Seen from the Marxist division between the use-value and exchange value of commodities, useful art seems to try to withdraw itself from the domain of exchange value, where the value of an object is relative as it is measured by the value of other objects, or a matter of “what the fool will pay for it”. For Byrne, excluding Useful Art from the discussion of art, thus upholding the question ‘is it art?’, is falling for the ideological trap of neoliberalism that contemporary art supposedly wants to challenge; “a wilful misrepresentation of the truth in the interest of a dominant class”. Byrne makes a strong point here, because it is important to acknowledge that the sceptre of art is ultimately in the hands of a small group of people, who generally have no real interest in legitimising a different type of art.

The controversy arising after the winning of Assemble corroborates Tania Bruguera’s claim about the reluctance, and in the case of Morgan Quaintance, rejection, of art professionals to accept Useful Art as a category of art. Part of the reason behind this may be that the artistic layer of Useful Art, the artist’s contribution, is often somewhat indiscernible and unclear. As will demonstrated in the next sub-chapter, this can be solved to some extent by exploring and adopting new theoretical concepts. In today’s multitude of artistic practices, Useful Art is still relatively invisible because it is, as I have discussed, very much understudied and therefore lacking theoretical anchoring for explorative research. To further grapple with the fundamental disparities between principles of Useful Art and mainstream art, I now turn to Stephen Wright’s lexicon of Usership.

1.4 Toward a Lexicon of Usership

Stephen Wright’s ‘Toward a Lexicon of Usership’ is an alphabetically ordered list of established terms we inherited from Modernity, and new terms suitable for replacing them, which come together in different modes of usership. Instead of adopting Bruguera’s term Arte Útil or Useful Art, Wright coins the neologism ‘usership’ as the central concept for grasping Useful Art practices. And whereas

77 John Byrne is also the co-coordinator of the five-year-long research project *The Uses of Art: the Legacies of 1848-1989* (2013-2018).
79 See also Chapter 4.
Bruguera’s conceptualisation of Arte Útil is exemplified by criteria that apply to a specific type of art, usership is postulated by Wright as “a new category of political subjectivity”⁸⁰ that is not merely traceable in contemporary art, but permeating all spheres of present-day societies. According to Wright, the border between producers and users of knowledge is not so stark as it once was.⁸¹ Indeed, WikiLeaks (2006), the Panama papers (2015), the Paradise papers (2017), match-fixing in sports, but also increasing revelations about fake news and speculations on the hacking of America’s presidential election by the Russians, for example, seem to point to what Wright detects as “a broad usological turn”,⁸² engendering ‘active users’ who are simultaneously producers and vice versa. Transpiring for instance in the “liberation” of information and knowledge, usership is “a self-regulating mode of engagement and operation”.⁸³ To further explain this, Wright draws a parallel to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1889-1951) clarification of language as a self-regulating game. For Wittgenstein, languages are not merely constituted by written words and sentences, but simultaneously shaped by knowledge about the use of these words and sentences. He coined the term ‘Sprachspiel’ (‘language-game’) to underscore the inherent a priori and a posteriori dimensions of every language.⁸⁴ Wright similarly believes that theoretical knowledge about usership, as an activity that takes place in reality, stems from understanding the real uses of usership.

According to Wright, usership breaks with many dominant notions, prevalent not merely in the field of contemporary art but throughout neoliberalist, Western societies. The top three of expired terms, according to Wright, are expertise / expert culture, ownership, and spectatorship. Whenever people use and re-use what is already available as they see fit (e.g. “plagiarism, appropriation, repurposing”⁸⁵), as opposed to passively “receiving” and “consuming”, the authority of experts is inevitably contested. All the knowledge they have gained and continue to work from, which has been translated into policies, technologies, algorithms, and so forth, is then potentially weakened – put “on loose screws”, as the Dutch expression goes – by the creative, subjective, or maybe opportunistic appropriations of users. New appropriations of available knowledge by users might lead to a product’s improvement, for example, or maybe it fuels scientific research. Yet, Wright notes that in the skeptical eyes of experts, users are by definition misusers.⁸⁶ It can be said that users are, in return, sometimes entitled to be skeptical and critical of experts, whose expertise every so often lacks transparency, for instance when facts are deliberately withheld from the public. The pharmaceutical industry has, for

⁸¹ Ibid., 469.
⁸² Ibid.
⁸⁶ Ibid., 469.
example, become notorious for not being transparent enough about production costs of certain medicines. As a result, for example, pharmacists in the Netherlands are now increasingly attempting to produce extremely expensive medicines in order to by-pass large pharmaceutical companies. The endeavour of pharmacists can be defined as usership.

Usership also defies ownership. By liberating knowledge from the (ideological) control of experts, or more broadly speaking the people with power and capital, users undermine patents, copyrights, contracts and other constructions that are devised to warrant ownership. However, rather than abiding the law, users find ingenious ways to legally loophole systems by operating in what Wright calls ‘grey zones’.87 This strategy is reflected in the modes of usership he stipulates: Extraterritorial reciprocity (working beyond the traditional territories of art, in reality), Gaming (playing with the knowledge there is); Gleaning (freely using leftover resources of others), Hacking (opening up what remains unquestioned); Idleness (creative and expressive) (innovative uses of what is already available and widely used); Piggybacking (distributing something by using already available services or resources); Poaching (undermining barriers set up by the ruling classes), and UIT (‘use it together’) (usership is never an individual venture).88

Finally, more specifically in relation to contemporary art, usership opposes spectatorship. As most artworks are made to be seen and not to be touched or wielded, spectatorship seems a sort of self-evident characteristic integral to any experience and evaluation of art. For Wright, spectatorship is not only completely different from usership with regard to the role of the art-engager, but also in the sense that it involves an entirely opposite kind of art.

Following Wright’s line of thought, it can be said that spectatorship concerns ‘performative art’. A difficult but nonetheless trendy term in contemporary art discourses, the performative has been borrowed from linguistics. It was first defined in 1955 by the British philosopher John Langshaw Austin (1911-1960) as the “reality-producing” part of speech.89 Initially, Austin attempted to isolate performative speech acts (“I declare you husband and wife”) from descriptive ones (“We are husband and wife”).90 He later came to the realisation that the use of language is innately performative, whether it has to do with simple descriptions like “The sun is shining today” or less straightforward sentences like “It seems to be a sunny day”. Just as speech is always about doing something91, every work of art is, according to Dorothea von Handelman, performative and capable of producing imagined realities external to its own materiality. This makes the performative a problematic label.92

88 Ibid., 476, 477, 478, 481, 485.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
Stephen Wright does not refer to performative art, but instead uses the word performative several times in combination with ‘frames’ and ‘capture’.\(^{93}\) He explains performative framing and capture as the transformation of an object into a work of art, which fundamentally depends on the underlying, constitutive mechanisms of the art world (famously made plain by Marcel Duchamp’s urinal one hundred years ago). This transformation into a work of art happens regardless of the production process of an object, whether it is ‘already-made’ (like Duchamp’s urinal or bottle rack) or not. The object itself is retained, but at the same time its newly-acquired status as an artwork completely changes the object, because the beholder perceives it first and foremost as a work of art. By receiving the status of art, the object becomes ontologically framed and captured. The artworld with its dominant conceptual edifices and institutions has long been acknowledged and criticised as the root of art’s performativity, for example by art critic Arthur Danto.\(^{94}\) Despite the artworld’s critical introspections, known by the collective noun institutional critique, Wright insists its performativity remains “an inherent blind spot”.\(^{95}\) And as long as artworks are performative, that is, as long as they operate under the flag of art, art-engagers are in Wright’s opinion merely spectators. Whereas spectatorship is maintained by performative art, in Wright’s view, usership-driven art practices depend on radical imperformativity.\(^{96}\) He states:

To perform usership would be to spectacularise it, make it an event – that is, to negate it, to make it into *something else* [my italics]. Here the distinction between spectatorship and usership is clearest cut: spectatorship is to the spectacle as usership is to… the usual.\(^{97}\)

Thus, Wright would assert that all types of art are performative except for ‘usership-driven practices’ (he uses the term Useful Art only once).

To further explain the contradiction between spectatorship on the one hand, and the imperformativity of usership and its connection to the usual on the other hand, Wright introduces the concept ‘1:1 scale’. Although inspired by cartography, where a scale comprising two numbers and a colon show the distance on a map in relation to the actual distance, the meaning of 1:1 scale is exactly opposite to the functioning of maps. By referring to usership as operating on a 1:1 scale, Wrights


\(^{94}\) Arthur Danto was one of the first art theorists who stressed the importance of the artworld by claiming that without it people would be unable to identify artworks. He uses Andy Warhol’s Brillo Box artworks as a primary example to illustrate this point. In his essay ‘The Artworld’ (1964), Danto writes: “To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld.” See Danto, Arthur, “The Artworld”, *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, No. 19 (October 1964), 580.


\(^{96}\) Ibid., 478.

distinguishes art practices which are located in reality. What you see is what you get: 1:1 scale practices are fundamentally non-representative, non-referential and non-substitutive. Entwined with the sphere of reality outside the walls of art institutions, such practices might offer an escapist opportunity to the previously mentioned inherent blind spot of art. Yet, as Wright admits, 1:1 scale practices also have a pitfall: they are initially unrecognisable as art unless they combine what they are (the usual) with an additional layer of artistic proposition. In his lexicon, Wright proposes new concepts for tackling this indispensable layer of artistic proposition.

For the first concept, ‘allure’, Wright turns to the theory of philosopher Graham Harman (1948). Akin to the noun ‘allusion’ and the verb ‘alluding’, allure can be seen as a mental process, described by Harman as “an experience which plays out entirely in the realm of relations, not that of things themselves.” For Harman, allure has to be understood as “the separation of an object from its qualities”. It occurs as an interference between or a shift from the reality of a certain object to an invisible reality, or as Harman clarifies it, “a level or reality that we do not currently occupy and can never occupy.” Allure can be traced in countless types of experiences, but Harman primarily considers it as the basis of aesthetic experiences. As Wright himself acknowledges, this seems to make allure an unsuitable theoretical tool for usership; he stresses there can be no usership and use-value without the “deactivation of art’s aesthetic function”. Harman’s ideas about the autonomous reality of objects, as well as his interest in bringing Aesthetics closer together with Metaphysics and ultimately reinstating philosophy on the foreground of scientific research, are also incongruent with Wright’s conceptualisation of usership – underlying Wright’s theorisations is the aim to narrow the gap between art and reality, whereas Harman’s focus on Metaphysics seems to point to his interest in maintaining this gap.

To comprehend Wright’s borrowing of Harman’s concept of allure, people’s experience of a metal floor sculpture by Carl Andre may serve as a clarifying example. As with all of Andre’s metal plate floor sculptures, for example 144 Magnesium Square (1969) (fig. 8), people are able to walk on them to discover the feel and sound of the material(s) under their feet. It is possible that a museum visitor overlooks a work like 144 Magnesium Square, for instance because it is unmarked by a barrier and sign right next to the work. Even when stepping onto Andre’s sculpture, visitors could remain

99 Ibid., 469, 470.
101 Ibid., 153.
102 Ibid., 245.
105 Most of the visitors, also those who are not familiar with Andre’s body of work, will soon discover the sculpture on the floor, because they are visiting a museum (of modern art) and therefore they expect to see art.
unaware of their engagement with the piece. The moment they realise it is a work of art, as opposed to just functional metal plates on the floor that are part of the museum’s architecture, their thoughts about the plates change irreversibly. This often puzzling, yet exciting experience, described by both Harman and Wright as fundamentally “disintegrating” in a psychological sense, is at the core of an artwork’s allure. “A passage from one level of the world to the next”\(^n\)\(^{106}\), allure is further explained by Harman as a trapdoor or spiral staircase, lingering between the reality of the object and the reality invoked in our minds. This metaphor of the trapdoor or staircase, which turns an object “upside down” without actually changing its appearance, is useful, according to Wright, to grasp the twofold nature of usership art practices.\(^{107}\) Imaginably, by incorporating a trapdoor or staircase, usership art practices remain usual whilst also being “visible” as art.

Wright does not further elaborate on the workings of allure, or the possible requirements for the creation of a trapdoor or staircase. If the artistic layer is provided by and accessible through a trapdoor, which is by definition concealed, how can it be traced and then “opened” by people? Assuming something within the artwork has to trigger the awareness and opening of the trapdoor before an experience of allure takes place, the question arises what this could be or look like. And in case nobody finds the hidden trapdoor, meaning people never uncover their engagement with an artwork, are we then still dealing with usership art, or rather with a non-artwork that is completely dissolved with reality?

The usual and artistic dimensions of usership art practices are also explained by Wright with the concept of double ontology. The artistic dimension would, then, be the secondary ontology complementing the primary ontology that is at all times indivisible from the sphere of everyday life, for example a tree, supermarket, service, and so forth.\(^{108}\) However, deploying the concept of double ontology is, to Wright, problematic for two reasons. First of all, the term ontology will mainly be associated with the age-old aim of ‘art connoisseurs’ to define what (good and bad) art is, and as a result it could bring usership dangerously close to the artworld’s institutional clutches it seeks to evade. Secondly, and correspondingly, Wright believes that the secondary ontology (the artistic proposition on the usual) can only be identified in terms of performativity, a concept which is, as we have seen, central to the field of mainstream art practice and theory and entirely incompatible with usership.\(^{109}\) To set out on a new path, usership art practices might have to, according to Wright,

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\(^{108}\) Ibid., 474.

\(^{109}\) Ibid.
“disappear from the ontological landscape altogether to gain traction somewhere else.”

A more promising approach, in Wright’s eyes, to make usership art practices “visible” as art is the exploration of a “coefficient of art”. Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) was the first to use the notion “art coefficient” in his lecture ‘The Creative Act’ (1957) to pinpoint the disparity between an artist’s intention and the always partly unintentional outcome. In other words, the result of the artist’s creative act is never exactly what he or she had in mind before going into the process of making: in the end the spectator does as he or she pleases. By describing it as a “subjective mechanism”, Duchamp explains how the art coefficient is always a personal relationship between the spectator and the artwork – the artist holds no power over it. The subjectivity of many spectators does not make the art coefficient ambiguous in the sense that it can never be pinned down; it is a permanent aspect of every work of art, compared by Duchamp to an ‘arithmetical relation’ (i.e. addition, subtraction, multiplication, division).

Similar to the function of an arithmetical relation in a mathematical sum, like five times five is twenty-five, the end result – twenty-five in the mathematical equation – is determined by the art coefficient; that which stands between the intention of the artist and his or her projected ideas on the one hand, and on the other hand the imagination and interpretation of the viewer.

Wright’s ideas about an art coefficient, or coefficient of art as he calls it, seem slightly different from Duchamp’s. In the context of usership practices, coefficient of art is a form of artistic “self-understanding” about what it means to work as an artist, manifesting itself as a sort of energy that circumvents ‘ontological capture’, that is, the label of art. Here, self-understanding has nothing to do with the expertise of individuals; it is, rather, a result of “socialized competence.” By this Wright designates a process of “mutualising incompetence” which can be visualised as a horizontal field of countless competences where every competence is simultaneously an incompetence due to the existence of other competences. Take for example a beer brewer’s knowledge about handling hop and alcohol. A beer brewer can make beers, but he does not know how to make good wines, for example, like a wine maker does. The beer maker’s competences are utterly useless for the wine maker, and vice versa. However, the beer brewer’s competences would not be competences nor incompetences without the wine maker’s competences, and the barista’s competences, the cocktail maker’s competences, etc., etc. Socialised competence can, thus, be understood as akin to the law of comparison: just as concepts

112 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 472.
116 Ibid., 473.
like big or small are always relative, a competence is always dependent on the existence of at least one other competence. Gaining self-understanding, as a beer brewer for example, therefore also requires understanding one’s competence in relation to the competences of others. It can be argued that the same goes for both usership art practices and performative art. However, the process through which artists from both fields gain an understanding about their artistic competences, and a self-understanding about what it means to be a (co-)creator of artworks are different. Whereas in the realm of performative art, the artworld determines whom or what receives the status of artist and artwork, and certain artistic competences are ostensibly preferred over others, Wright believes that practitioners of usership practices, never perform an artistic competence because they do not have to as they operate outside the confines of the artworld.\(^{117}\) Their artistic competences are caught up in many different processes, such as the restoration of a neighbourhood (Assemble’s Granby Four Streets). Entangled in the vast ‘web’ of artistic and non-artistic competences, artistic competences become socialised. In other words, usership art practices are characterised by the intertwining of artistic and non-artistic competences, whereas the artistic competences of performative art are often merely developed against the background of the artworld’s mainstream notions and traditions.

Returning to the concept of a coefficient of art, defined by Wright as a form of self-understanding, the gaining of self-understanding stems from the socialisation of artistic competences produced by usership practices. As there is not one right way to arrive at self-understanding, and since self-understanding has to be considered unstable, Wright thinks it might be better to talk of coefficients of art.\(^{118}\) In short, coefficients of art might be, Wright claims, an useful tool for a strictly non-ontological examination of art, embodying the hope for a more democratic and less linear development of artistic competences to “break art open”. And ultimately usership could be, as Wright describes with a Marxist overtone, “breaking down the long standing opposition between consumption and production”.\(^{119}\) Very similarly to how Bruguera envisions Arte Útil’s value in relation to a better, more equal society, Wright alludes to usership’s power to democratise the system of production and consumption.

### 1.5 Useful Art in relation to Social Practice

This chapter has shown so far that Useful Art runs against Modernist notions such as authorship, spectatorship and objecthood. This is not groundbreaking in itself; ever since such notions became more widely established in Western countries, many artists have been attempting to subvert them. Emerging around the end of World War I, Dada was perhaps the first movement that obviously used subversion as a weapon, targeting not merely common notions belonging to the realm of art, but the


\(^{118}\) Ibid., 472.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 469.
established order in general. After the 1960s, as is apparent from the flourishing of Performance Art, Happenings, and Fluxus, more artists became interested in exploring or changing relationships between artists (as authors), spectators and artworks. Allowing the public to play an active role in bringing artworks or art events to life, sometimes without any assistance or interference of the artist(s), has become one of the strategies for artists to challenge authorship, spectatorship and objecthood (among other things). Some of these artworks purposely took place in the public domain, such as Day in the Street (1966) by the collective Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (‘GRAV’) (1960-1968), which turned passive commuters and passersby in Paris into active participants by means of playful ‘road obstructions’ (fig. 9). Other artworks impede the passivity of artworks and their beholders in the context of the museum, like the unique board games (fig. 10) of Fluxus artist Öyvind Fahlström (1928-1976) and the completely white chess boards (fig. 11) of his Fluxus colleague Yoko Ono (1933). By placing the public’s participation on the foreground, the agency of both artists and artworks diminishes. The change that took place in the twentieth century can be summarised as a shift from the understanding of what constitutes artworks to an understanding of art-engers and their relationships to artworks.

Characteristic of many participatory practices from the 1960s and 1970s is the aim to lay bare or investigate the reciprocal relationship between participants and artworks, thus blurring the well-known boundaries between on the one hand the artist, and the artwork as a medium and a fixed object, and on the other hand the public as a receiving “medium” of that object. Over the last twenty to thirty years, the boundaries of contemporary art have been pushed further by a broad range of bold participatory artistic practices. It can be argued that these new participatory practices take the shift from the emphasis on the artwork to audience a step further by increasing the focus on the public and the contingent social processes that are involved, as well as expanding the dematerialisation of art objects into often temporary and sometimes local art services instead.

In explaining the diverse participatory practices, art professionals have coined many different terms of which some appear to be more accepted within the discourse, like Suzanne Lacy’s “New genre public art” (1991) and Nicolas Bourriaud’s “Relational Aesthetics” (1998), compared to others, such as Lars Bang Larsen’s “Social Aesthetics” (1999), and Grant Kester’s “Dialogical art” (2005). Often taking place in the public domain beyond (art) institutions and the walls of the artist’s studio, social and participatory practices might also be gathered under the umbrella term “post-studio practices”. “Social Practice” is another seemingly more encompassing, generally-accepted collective name, which I will adopt. Concomitantly to introducing new terms, which point to the

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120 See for example Bishop, Claire, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, (London / New York: Verso), 2012, 90-93.
121 Claire Bishop sees post-studio practices and social practices as one and the same. Yet, social practice might also be considered a category of post-studio practices, because it can be argued that not all of these practices are concerned with social inclusion, collaboration and viewer-participation, see Bishop 2012, 1. For Shannon Jackson, the name social practice is insufficient for defining post-studio practices, see Jackson, Shannon, Social Works: Performing art, supporting publics, (New York / London: Routledge), 2011, 13.
dissemination of new movements, art scholars have come up with many different “turns”. Examples are the performative turn, ethical turn, experiential turn, collaborative turn, and practice turn – to name just a few. These turns denote the shift in attention in the field of contemporary art practice and theory from the creative expression of artists and the materiality of artworks to their effects and affects on the beholder. Where does this leave Useful Art? The question posed in this final subchapter is to what extent Useful Art, as postulated by both Tania Bruguera and Stephen Wright, departs or differs from Social Practice.

The use of the term Social Practice is problematic on several accounts. Firstly, as a collective name, Social Practice is only used by several art practitioners. Well-known theorist Claire Bishop, for example, adopts the term “Participatory Art”, whereas curator Nato Thompson has edited a volume on “Socially Engaged Art”. Secondly, and more importantly, Social Practice is an umbrella term for art practices which, on the one hand, predominantly criticise the institutionalisation of art and accompanying discourses (in order to provoke or stretch the boundaries of art), and, on the other hand, art practices which do not take the artworld as a point of departure, but instead focus on the “real world”. Contrary to Arte Útil and usership, Social Practice is not outlined by criteria or clearly defined by a set of theoretical concepts. It might be possible to consider Arte Útil / Useful Art as a movement, but it would be rather difficult to do the same for Social Practice. The diversity of Social Practice artworks and the lack of criteria and guidelines complicate a comparative analysis between Social Practice and Useful Art. As a partial solution, I will examine several established and less established examples of Social Practice, of which the works by Rirkrit Tiravanija seem to be directed especially towards the artworld compared to the two other examples.

Several early works of the Argentinian-born, Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija (1961) from the 1990s have become quintessential examples of Relational Aesthetics thanks to much-cited studies by Nicolas Bourriaud and Claire Bishop. Tiravanija is perhaps still best-known for converting gallery spaces into fully operating kitchens. In his first ‘kitchen installation’, Untitled (Free) (fig. 12), at the 303 Gallery in New York in 1992, Tiravanija cooked Thai curry for visitors during more or less the entire running time of his exhibition. Visitors could observe the artist at work and chat with him while waiting for the free food to be ready. By eating the curry, they became active participants, indispensable for bringing Tiravanija’s artwork to life. The roles were sometimes reversed: visitors were turned into cooks during his solo exhibition at the Kunstverein Ludwigsburg, Germany, in 1997. Aside from the control visitors were sometimes given when they could decide what to cook, it is important to understand Tiravanija’s intention to convey part of his cultural and personal heritage; Thai curry. By cooking Thai curry inside Western art institutions, Tiravanija aimed to criticise the

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123 In an interview from 2012, Tiravanija recalls the idea behind his first kitchen installation: “I was thinking about the situation – that this would be the first time my work would be exhibited in New York. It seemed like a lot of pressure to succeed, so I decided to take the opposite attitude, which was to relax. Then and there, I
role museums play in de-contextualising and aestheticising artefacts, more specifically the display of Eastern objects belonging to everyday life (such as Buddha statues) in Western museums. Tiravanija also renounced the dominant, Western dichotomy between (art) object and subject that is not-existent in many Eastern cultures, Thailand among them. In his kitchen installations, object and subject are not separated but instead formed one whole.

The artist’s intention, which seems informed by postcolonial theory, created tensions within his kitchen installations. On the one hand, the production of free curry seems entirely in the interest of viewer participation and sociality. While running against authorship, and the commodification and commercialisation of artworks, the ‘eat and meet’ works could shape unexpected, new human relationships. On the other hand, however, I would argue that viewer participation is secondary to the artist’s enactment of institutional critique. Crudely speaking, the artist “uses” his audience for a staged performance that criticises the Western institutionalisation of objects. A tension can also be found between the democratic nature of, for example, Untitled (Free) – highlighted by its title –, and the rather undemocratic atmosphere of galleries and museums that maintain admission prices. The fact that Tiravanija’s installations have made him wealthy, and that they are owned by art collectors, who of course hardly ever or never use them as Tiravanija initially intended, also contradict their democratic spirit. Thus, Tiravanija’s kitchen installations offered people a different experience of art as a free service. Additionally, his works have led to a rethinking of the conventional function and values of art, to stir the imagination of audiences by letting them reflect on the lives they are leading, or the lives led by others elsewhere in the world or in the past. However, the free curry becomes almost a gimmick as this service was not exclusively created out of generosity, because it was also pervaded by the artist’s beliefs and his cultural background.

Many of Tiravanija’s other installations (and sculptural pieces) also contain autobiographical elements and references to his Thai identity, for instance Thai massage, though some of his works are

124 Ibid.
125 In an interview from 2002, Tiravanija explains: “In the West, life is based on objects, but I’m trying to do the opposite.”, see McGee, John, “Life of the party, Rirkrit Tiravanija explores the art of dining”, The Japan Times, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2002/06/12/arts/life-of-the-party/ (last accessed on 26 October 2017).
126 Although people often have to pay for their admission to museums, it is also important, as artist Liam Gillick reminds us, to be aware of the fact that some museums in Europe offer free entrance to visitors. Contradicting Claire Bishop, Gillick stresses: “When Bishop asks of Tiravanija’s exhibition at the Köln Kunstverein, ‘Who is the ‘everyone’ here?’ (p. 68), it is quite obviously anyone who wants to walk through the open doors into the free exhibition. In a footnote where Saltz is quoted yet again—stating, ‘What would the Walker Art Center do if a certain homeless man scraped up the price of admission to the museum and chose to sleep on Tiravanija’s cot all day, every day?’—there is no attempt to remind the reader that museums and art centers in Europe are often free, therefore rendering Saltz’s anxiety about audience and admission somewhat provincial.” See Gillick, Liam, “Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop’s “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics””, October, Vol. 115 (Winter 2006), 105.
127 Regarding the paradoxes and challenges of selling Rirkrit Tiravanija’s participatory installations, see, for example, Horowitz, Noah, Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market, (Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press), 2011, 118-120.
more open-ended, offering more possibilities for a variety of uses. For an exhibition at De Appel in Amsterdam in 1996, Tiravanija left two electrical guitars, one bass guitar, and drums in one of the rooms, which were up for grabs for visitors to play with. In the same year, at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in Cologne, people could physically interact with *Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)* (1996) (fig. 13), a reconstruction of Tiravanija’s New York flat. Remarkably, this installation could be freely used twenty-four hours a day. As a result, the threshold for people to occupy one of the rooms like the kitchen or the bedroom was significantly minimised. In the same spirit, Tiravanija introduced everyday life in the Migros Museum in Zürich in 1998 by installing a supermarket and an auto repair shop. Perhaps more so than his kitchens installations, these installations raise awareness of the possible ‘serviceableness’ of art within the walls of museums.

While curators, critics and scholars have been praising Tiravanija’s work again and again for the ways in which they stimulate active participation, interaction, and a sense of ‘togetherness’ — the latter seems doubtful —, the artist himself has often spoken about his work in relation to use. In 1995, Tiravanija’s explained how the public’s use is the starting point for him:

> Basically I started to make things so that people would have to use them, (...). It is not meant to be put out with other sculpture or like another relic and looked at, but you have to use it.

Tiravanija’s useful installations emanate from his condemnation of the Western objectification and aestheticising of everyday objects and artworks. Specifically, Tiravanija criticises the role of museums and their accepted ‘ideology of display’ that precludes the physical use of objects. Reflecting on the future of contemporary art, during an interview from 2004, Tiravanija’s describes his aim by making a comparison with Marcel Duchamp’s famous urinal (fig. 14):

> What I am doing is to take Duchamp’s urinal, put it back on the wall and piss into it. I am not making the urinal. But we are now living in a world of readymades and I am simply using it. To me it is not about the object, it is about pissing in it. It is natural; it functions and comments on the future of art after the readymade and the future of Western art.

Thus, instead of relocating useful everyday objects to museums and removing their function, Tiravanija opts for the putting into function of everyday objects in museums. The free use of objects can be seen as the key to the artist’s institutional critique, for which the public takes on the role of

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primary mediator – perhaps without being aware of it. In negating the physical uselessness of the readymade, Tiravanija not only seems to comment on Duchamp, but also the avant-gardist struggle to dissolve the boundary between art and life.

Tania Bruguera also referred to Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), using it to explain the aim of her own practice, Arte Útil. For her eponymous solo-exhibition *Arte Útil* (2010) at the Queens Museum of Art, she copied Duchamp’s urinal, including the iconic signature ‘R. Mutt’, and installed in the museum’s men’s bathroom. Unlike *Fountain*, Bruguera’s symbolic successor *Urine Luck!* (2010) (fig. 15) could be used by men like any other urinal in the bathroom. Tiravanija and Bruguera are both in favour of repurposing and displacing Duchamp’s urinal to make it useful again (so to speak), but Bruguera went one step further than Tiravanija by radically withdrawing the urinal from the white cube. Whereas Tiravanija makes ready-made art objects purposeful in museums and galleries to criticise and transform art institutions, Bruguera is more interested in repurposing the ready-made art object by merging it with reality.

The different ways in which Rirkrit Tiravanija and Tania Bruguera break with Duchamp’s gesture to turn a ready-made object into an art object seem to underpin an important difference between Social Practice and Useful Art. Based on the involvement of people, Social Practice artists attempt to mediate unfixed relationships between publics, artworks, and art institutions. By contrast, Useful Art artists get involved with users and users are involved with Useful Art artists despite art institutions.

Other differences between Social Practice and Useful Art exist in the relationship between artists and publics. In Social Practice, the relationship between artists and participants is more hierarchical; the artist makes the decision to provide a certain service, in Tiravanija’s case in collaboration with curators, and the audience makes use of this service. In other words, though people are reasonably free to use Tiravanija’s works, this does not necessarily mean that they surpass their role as mere “consumers” of art. Julia Lossau and Quentin Stevens suggest that useful artworks allow for a circumvention of hierarchical relationships between the artworld and publics. I would argue, however, that this is often not the case: people’s role as users or participants is frequently ascribed to them without their awareness or consent. In the eyes of Lossau and Stevens, the investigation of uses automatically helps overturn traditional power relations:

Focusing on use involves a shift in power dynamics away from an artwork’s sponsors and makers, who intend specific ‘functions’, and manipulate audiences so that they will perform what the artwork prescribes.\(^{131}\)

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\(^{131}\) Lossau, Julia, and Stevens, Quentin, “Framing Art and Its Uses in Public Space”, in Lossau, Julia, and Stevens, Quentin (eds.), *The Uses of Art in Public Space*, (New York: Routledge), 2015, 5.
As is apparent from Tirvanija’s installations, users “perform what the artwork prescribes”\textsuperscript{132} (i.e. eating or cooking curry, playing musical instruments, and using facilities in the artist’s reconstructed apartment). Thus, users are not by definition different from “manipulated ordinary consumers”. Though to some degree, Tiravanija’s audiences, in particular those of the apartment-installation, are less manipulated, because they have some more options. Conversely, Useful Art is predicated on the implicit assumption of an equal and reciprocal relationship between artists and art-users, springing from shared ideas, values and hopes. With Social Practice, participation often takes place at the end of the artist’s preparatory, creative process, but with Useful Art it is the other way around, and people’s involvement remains a constant concern. Thus, Social Practice artists often create a more or less “pre-cooked” mode of use, and therefore results are partly predetermined. The ways in which Useful Art artists and users work together is a far less orchestrated process, because, as Bruguera has repeatedly emphasised, it depends on the specific needs of people. These needs may not always be obvious in the beginning, and the same is true for the uses that useful art can be put to.

Developing the range of Useful Art projects together with users, artists help generate opportunities for people to improve their circumstances by getting involved. And preferably, the results of their involvement are beneficial on the long term (‘pursue sustainability’, Arte Útil criterion seven). The beneficial outcomes of Social Practice artworks are usually secondary to the possibility for people to participate, and consequently the potential benefits are often indeterminate, superficial, or even superfluous. Take Tiravanija’s kitchen installations and his reconstructed New York apartment. Much as participants who ate the artist’s curry or used the kitchen that was built at the Kölnisher Kunstverein profited from a free meal and a kitchen, the artist did not create these works in response to a general shortage of food, kitchens, or electricity. Nor did he approach people from the city or the neighbourhood where he exhibited his works to investigate who may or may not profit from his works, how, and why.\textsuperscript{133} Accordingly, some museum visitors perhaps did not feel the urge to answer to Tiravanija’s call for use. And because of their temporality, the benefits of Tiravanija’s installations become rather negligible.

The kind of participation seen in Tiravanija’s works, in which participants use what the artist provides and end up being “used” by the artist himself, can also be traced in other Social Practice works. An example is Paul Ramirez Jonas’ \textit{The Commons} (2011) (fig. 16), a sculptural piece designed after the famous bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius that is preserved in the Capitoline museums in Rome. Exhibited at various public art institutions in the United States, the cork statue has

\textsuperscript{132} Lossau, Julia, and Stevens, Quentin, “Framing Art and Its Uses in Public Space”, in Lossau, Julia, and Stevens, Quentin (eds.), \textit{The Uses of Art in Public Space}, (New York: Routledge), 2015, 5.

\textsuperscript{133} This critical remark draws from Claire Bishop’s critique on Nicolas Bourriaud’s evaluation of Rirkrit Tiravanija’s work within the framework of relational aesthetics. Bishop rightly claims: “(…) what Tiravanija cooks, how and for whom, are less important to Bourriaud that the fact that he gives away the result of his cooking for free.” See Bishop, Claire, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics”, \textit{October}, Vol. 110 (Autumn 2004), 64.
invited visitors to pin down their messages, written or otherwise, onto the base of the work. Each time, The Commons was temporarily handed over to and used by the public, whose messages and voices dissapeared as soon as the sculpture was stripped and removed for reinstallation elsewhere.

The temporary contributions of participants was also apparent in Ai WeiWei’s Documenta 12-project Fairytale (2007) (fig. 17). The project revolved around the journey of 1001 Chinese people, the majority from lower social classes, who were selected by WeiWei (out of 3000 applications) to travel from China to Kassel in Germany. With several separate funds, WeiWei planned and provided all that was necessary for his fellow countrymen and women: he paid for their travel expenses and documents, stay in Kassel for the duration of Documenta 12 (in a revamped old factory), and meals. In return, the lucky 1001 travellers were photographed (in a neutral albeit performer-like manner), interviewed, and had to fill in long questionnaires about themselves, which WeiWei later used for the documentary Fairytale (2008). As with any vacation, everyone had to decide for themselves how to spent their time in Kassel. In many respects, Fairytale was a complex and unconventional artwork, as well as an unique and perhaps even life-changing experience for the participating Chinese people – a fairytale come true.

Discussing his approach for Fairytale in an interview, Ai WeiWei emphasised the lack of a clear format and objective, and his unusual role as an “observer” instead of a “producer”. According to WeiWei, Fairytale was different from other artworks that use audiences, because the work was solely about the individual experiences of people. However, I would suggest these experiences are rather overshadowed by the fact that WeiWei photographed and filmed every participant for his documentary. Furthermore, the Chinese participants are not regular tourists; they are the primary medium of an artwork that is part of a prestigious contemporary art exhibition. Perhaps WeiWei wanted the Chinese participants to represent the East during an overtly Western art exhibition, or maybe he aimed at exposing the disparity between the unprivileged (Chinese participants) and the privileged (those involved in Documenta 12, and visitors of the exhibition). Also, it is important to keep in mind that WeiWei favoured certain applicants over others, based, for example, on their inability to travel beyond China. Although WeiWei claims to be an observer as opposed to a producer, he was in fact as much an observer as producer who pulled the strings for his artwork.

In spite of obvious differences, similarities can be drawn in terms of participation between Ai WeiWei’s Fairytale, and the museum artworks by Paul Ramírez Jonas and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Firstly, enabling people to participate seems more important for these artists than making sure that participants

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136 Ibid.
138 Ibid., 407.
can significantly profit from their uses for a longer period of time. In the end, the focus is on how and which publics may become part of the artist’s process of creating art, instead of how art might become part of the lives of people with different ages and backgrounds. Secondly, and correspondingly, the artists did not deliberate with participants beforehand to determine to what extent the intended work was actually potentially useful for them. The participants therefore to some degree became participants by accident; it was a matter of who happened to be at the gallery or museum, or, in the case of *Fairytales*, (accidentally) came across the call for applications on WeiWei’s blog. This means that the social potential of these works, to shape meaningful bonds between people, could not be fully realised. Thirdly, the role of the three artists as co-producers seems secondary, but ultimately, they make important decisions about the conditions of participation, such as the locations and durations.

The often uneven relationship between artists and participants, and temporality can be considered as two pitfalls of Social Practice artworks. This was also pointed out by Bruguera in an interview:

> What you have then [Participatory Art] is a kind of client role where your services are rendered. After these services are rendered they leave, they do not have the potential to affect how a moment, project, even a whole institution might evolve.139

Similarly, British curator Charles Esche (director Van Abbemuseum) defined Relational Aesthetics as homeopathic. Like the unproven healing powers of homeopathic medicines, the concrete effects of Relational Aesthetics / Social Practice works, such as these of abovementioned artworks, are ultimately limited and unclear. It is possible to formulate the benefits of being a participant (a free diner, expressing your thoughts and beliefs, and going on vacation), but these benefits do not significantly change the participant’s prospects for a better life. As a “cure which is a very tiny addition of something”, Esche speculated whether Relational Aesthetics artworks may have been providing false cures.140 In trying to counterbalance lopsided relationships between artists, art institutions, and the public, at times to stimulate more inclusion, the efforts of Social Practice artists are in the end mostly pseudo-ameliorative. Paradoxically, counterbalancing seems to re-affirm the authority of art institutions and the hierarchical power structures within the artworld. Useful Art practices aim to move beyond these hierarchies by truly merging art with reality – putting the urinal back where it belongs – to investigate how artworks can be rendered as useful tools for political and social change within society. Bruguera argues that Arte Útil projects all foreground a political awareness about the world’s ubiquitous social, economic, and political inequality. According to

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140 “Director Charles Esche talking about Museum of Arte Útil”, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LR9j7MhPfU (last accessed on 30 October 2017).
Bruguera, “Arte Útil is not Relational Aesthetics; it is not “feel good” art: it is a political position. We had very intense battles.” Arte Útil is, thus, in a sense, more enmeshed with politics than with art.

To conclude, Useful Art can be considered an extended form of Social Practice, which arguably deserves the status of a different movement. As Museum of Arte Útil has shown, Useful Art can also be regarded as an underestimated, unofficial historical movement, whose origins could be traced back to beginning of the nineteenth century (the oldest example of Arte Útil from the archive, Cincinnati Time Store, dates from 1827-1830). It is of course important to realise that Bruguera has certain interests in drawing contrasts between Arte Útil and Social Practice to clarify and defend her artistic work. The comparison between Social Practice and Useful Art shows that use in relation to art can be misleading. It can seem relevant, as a strategy to deflate authorship and objecthood in order to refocus on relational aspects of art instead, but turn out to be only quasi-relevant and merely symbolic when it is partly or entirely orchestrated. It can be argued that really useful art projects therefore have to originate in social and political issues involving unbalanced power structures, requiring attention. In dealing with such issues, the artistic competences of artists inevitably intermingle with those of collaborators, who have other professions. Thus, perhaps the primary distinction between Social Practice and Useful Art comes down to two different approaches to involve people in the use and usefulness of a work of art; whether use is a more of less arbitrary ‘service’ that was thought out without first consulting with people, or whether use is determined by urgent issues, and founded on consensus with a group of people who are not part of the art sphere. Without some sort of pre-established consensus, art professionals arguably cannot commit to cementing meaningful, and hopefully sustainable relationships between people. Once there are no points of return, art becomes Useful Art. As a different political form of Social Practice, Useful Art can perhaps better contribute to making art less an occupation of the privileged and educated. Instead of critically distancing themselves from politics, I feel art professionals have to consider how they may actually intervene in the complexities of current and future sociopolitical issues that affect us all.

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143 A successful experiment that was created by the American Josiah Warren, Cincinnati Time Store introduced ‘labour notes’ as a new method of payment. As the name foretells, labour notes could be acquired by doing labour. This labour was exactly equal to the amount of labour necessary for producing products; people therefore paid a more fair price for products. Significantly, the Cincinnati Time Store was not designed as an art project. Considered an anarchist, Warren is known in the domain of American politics, and thanks to Bruguera the Cincinnati Time Store falls in the domain of art. See http://museumarteutil.net/projects/cincinnati-time-store/ (last accessed on 6 November 2017).
CHAPTER 2

Make friends, not art: the practice of ruangrupa

We are not saying that it is art, we are not the authority. We are just ourselves.  
— Ade Darmawan

Ruangrupa was founded in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2000 by young artists Ade Darmawan, Hafiz Rancaljale, Ronny Augustinus, Oky Arfie Hutabarat, Lilia Nursita, and Rithmi Widanarko. The group’s name is derived from the Indonesian words for space (“ruang”) and visualisation/form (“rupa”). Over the past sixteen years, ruangrupa developed many different kinds of collaborations and projects, apart from (recurring) exhibitions. From the outset, their work has been closely entwined with Jakarta, the crowded and chaotic capital of Indonesia with about ten million inhabitants. Ruangrupa’s locally embedded practice can be characterized as ‘alternative’, adhering to ideas and values that differ from those of often more market-driven, Western art organisations and institutions. It has to be taken into account that ruangrupa’s practice can be considered alternative within the Western art world; ruangrupa do not think of themselves as alternative, as they have never really aimed at developing alternative practices against the background of Western art discourses.

This chapter analyses ruangrupa’s alternativeness by zooming in on its origin, characteristics, organisational structure, and several of its projects made throughout the past fifteen years. The second part focusses on ruangrupa’s approach in Arnhem in the run-up to Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION. Throughout the analysis, ruangrupa’s practice is linked to characteristics of Useful Art, as described by Tania Bruguera and Stephen Wright. The aim of this chapter is not to frame ruangrupa’s practice as Useful Art, but rather to trace similarities, which could reveal insights about ruangrupa, and might lead to a deeper understanding of how they work. This will ultimately allow for a better understanding about Sonsbeek ’16 as an Useful Art exhibition.

2.1 Ruangrupa working in Jakarta, 2000-2015

145 Exhibition catalogue SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page number.
146 Ade Darmawan and Hafiz Rancaljale are the only founding members who are still involved with ruangrupa; Darmawan is the director, and Rancaljale is now responsible for the activist video project Forum Lenteng.
147 Exhibition catalogue SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page numbers.
148 I have chosen the time span of fifteen years, because in 2015 ruangrupa took on a new organisational structure.
2.1.1 The start of ruangrupa

The motivation to start an artist collective in Jakarta has to be sought primarily in the changing sociopolitical climate of Indonesia around the turn of the twenty-first century. The six founding members of ruangrupa grew up in the 1990s, the decade which marked the beginning of a young generation of activists and the end of president Soeharto’s authoritarian New Order regime (1966-1998). The growing anger of young people towards the regime was tangible on campuses in the mid-1990s, where the founding members first met each other when they were art students around 1994. Being confronted with fear and suppression, and art that was largely propagandistic and controlled by the state, the founding members worked together under the radar on music, publications, and art exhibitions.149 As Indonesia was struck by a financial crisis in the beginning of 1997, a series of student protests at universities and the occupation of the national parliament in Jakarta eventually led to Soeharto’s resignation in May 1998. During the following reformation movement (known as the ‘reformasi’), new political parties were erected in anticipation of the democratic election in June 1999.150 Ruangrupa’s formation one year later mainly followed from the political liberalisation of Indonesia and the reforms brought about by the new government. Despite guaranteed new freedoms, such as freedom of press, however, the liberalisation process was by no means an unequivocal transition; in the absence of a ‘trias politica’, the corrupt New Order elite and the military retained some power on both a local and national level.151 Perhaps a ‘low-quality democracy’, a qualification by Indonesian politics researcher Marcus Mietzner, it was nonetheless a democracy which improved the position of artists and in the end opened the doors to the international art world.

After 1998 various artist collectives and initiatives similar to ruangrupa established themselves across the archipelago of Indonesia, particularly in cities on the island Java such as Yogyakarta, Bandung and Jatiwangi.152 And just like ruangrupa, most of the artists worked in affordable houses. In the case of ruangrupa’s house, called the “ruru house” (fig. 18), now situated in the neighbourhood Tebet in South-Jakarta, the living room was transformed into a gallery, the garage became a shop, and the other rooms were turned into offices, studios, meeting places, a classroom, a concert space, and a library.153 Since it is open every day and night, the ruru house also occasionally functions as an actual house where people spend the night. All these different facilities and functions reflect ruangrupa’s self-supporting approach as a multifaceted arts organisation.

151 Ibid., 23.
152 Some initiatives lasted longer than others. Ruangrupa is certainly one of the few to survive for more than fifteen years, see 7th Freedom lecture by Ade Darmawan, 23 October 2014, see http://www.debalie.nl/agenda/programma/vrijheidslezing-%237-met-ade-darmawan,-kunstenaar-en-activist-uit-indonesia/e_9756207/p_11664072/ (last accessed on 10 January 2017).
153 Ibid.
Being self-organising has not just become rooted in the culture of Indonesia due to the past authoritarian regime. Finding creative solutions to be self-supportive was also a necessity because of the lack of art institutions and (financial) support for the arts.\footnote{Juliastuti, Nuraini, “Ruangrupa: A Conversation on Horizontal Organisation”, \textit{Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry}, Vol. 30 (Summer 2012), 2012, 121.} It comes as no surprise, then, that not all the artist collectives and initiatives celebrated their ten- or fifteen-year anniversary. Today Indonesia’s art infrastructure is still marginal compared that of Western countries, even though the art market has grown enormously in Indonesia and South-East Asia in general over the past ten to fifteen years.\footnote{See for example Schultheis, Franz, Single, Erwin, Köfeler, Raphaela, and Mazzurana, Thomas, \textit{Art Unlimited? Dynamics and Paradoxes of a Globalizing Art World}, (Bielefield: Verlag), 2016.}

The very different art infrastructure in Indonesia is important to consider with regard to the origin of ruangrupa’s alternativeness. It can be argued that especially in the beginning ruangrupa’s frame of reference was not the artworld, but instead the social reality of Jakarta. Social reality as a ‘territory’ is strongly urged by Stephen Wright in his lexicon of Usership. According to Wright, the social realm is a “space of collaboration”\footnote{Wright, Steven, “Toward a Lexicon of Usership”, in Aikens, Nick, et al. (eds.), \textit{What’s the Use? Constellations of Art, History, and Knowledge, A Critical Reader}, (Amsterdam: Valiz), 2016, 476.} that offers new possibilities for reciprocity, enabling usership practitioners to create 1:1 scale practices which reach out to people who are not associated with the artworld. He coins the term ‘extraterritorial reciprocity’ as a mode of usership that underpins art’s withdrawal from its conventional territory, the artworld. Although ruangrupa did not really choose to turn its back to the artworld, for one because the artworld’s presence could hardly be felt in Jakarta and Indonesia, their involvement in the social infrastructure of their hometown seems to correspond to Wright’s notion of extraterritorial reciprocity. It can be said that ruangrupa has almost naturally evolved as a usership practice, which is not rooted in Western art traditions and theories, but instead in the complex and dynamic social reality of Jakarta.

In summary, the establishment of ruangrupa with limited means during the politically uncertain post-New Order era was arguably a mixed blessing. By working closely together in one house, re-interpreting Jakarta’s urban realities with what is available, and gradually growing as an independent non-profit arts organisation beyond the gaze of the capitalist Western artworld, ruangrupa has succeeded in developing its own unique DNA, networks, and multidisciplinary practices. Independence and a non-profit mentality also apply to Useful Art practices, which are not concerned with (financial) interests of museums and galleries, but instead attuned to the common interests of people. Wright repeatedly describes usership in terms of self-regulation.

### 2.1.2 The spirit of ruangrupa

Analysing ruangrupa’s activities from 2000 onwards without ever having spent time in Jakarta and set foot in the ruru house feels a bit like watching people play a game without knowing all the rules. Yet,
those who have visited the ruru house to see ruangrupa in action, and analyse their activities, have – unfortunately – not written a comprehensive account of their complex and fluky organisational structure, and all of their different collaborations, activities, and events taking place between 2000 and 2015. Instead, these visitors focused on ruangrupa’s working methods. Although they work in one place, even members of ruangrupa themselves do not always have a clear overview of who is doing what or “who came up with what idea”. Ruangrupa’s working methods seem to embody Stephen Wright’s notion of socialised competence. Because they work closely together and put less value on authorship, the different competences of members of ruangrupa with different educations become intertwined as a result of social processes. A collective with a very loose structure and an open-door policy, where many people come and go without fulfilling a specific position, ruangrupa practically evolved on a daily basis. It seems best to identify key characteristics, ideas and values which have, to some extent coincidentally, come to define ruangrupa, before taking a closer look at a number of important long-lived collaborations and projects.

As hinted above, ruangrupa has always been shaped considerably by social, cultural, economic and political systems and values innate to Jakarta, but also to Indonesia in general. In the eyes of director Ade Darmawan, ruangrupa’s survival indeed depends on Jakarta. According to curator, critic and ruangrupa collaborator Agung Hujatnikajennong’s description of Jakarta, working in this city is certainly a constant challenge:

The city keeps growing in an untamed fashion, enduring ever-escalating numbers of migrants; the spread of slums and the simultaneous mushrooming of luxurious apartments; seas of banal advertisements occupying the shrinking public spaces; waste and pollution; lack of proper sanitation; poverty; annual floods during the rainy season; criminality; traffic jams; and many other problems. For decades, all these issues have kept recurring, but no solutions have been found. Jakarta is a locus of crisis, a labyrinth in which anyone who heroically attempts to alleviate a mess will inevitably end up in a bigger one.

Engaging with that which is already present in the context of Jakarta (e.g. public spaces, local communities, NGO’s), and finding alternatives for what is missing (e.g. governmentally funded, contemporary art spaces and institutions, art critics, art journals), is the basis of what ruangrupa is and what they do. This can be related to another mode of usership: “idleness”, a state of being lazy,
inactive, or idle. The word idleness is used by Wright to define a usership strategy which is based on expertises, services, systems, etc, that can be easily and creatively appropriated by users with a minimum of time, money, and effort.

Ruangrupa’s approach demands observing and working closely with the urban environment before sharing the results with the public, as opposed to contemplating ideas from a distance and then showing them. A hands-on work attitude and continuously doing research together are, thus, fundamental to all of ruangrupa’s undertakings. Many times there are also tendencies towards activism, or at least an urge to question and test current systems. One of the older ruangrupa members, Indra Ameng, explains that this attitude follows directly from the years before the downfall of the Suharto regime, when it was always a matter of the artists against the government. After Soeharto, there are still enough “battles” for ruangrupa, Darmawan argues:

We have been battling against corporations, our own neighbors and those who have different perspectives on how certain ideologies and beliefs should be articulated. As the battle zone has been narrowed to horizontal relations, a city becomes more important than a state.

In the wake of Suharto’s regime, Indonesia’s society became more “horizontally” structured as opposed to “vertically”. The building of regional, national, and international networks was therefore a prerequisite for ruangrupa in order to strengthen their position. Calculations in 2016 have shown that ruangrupa participates in no less than eighty-eight networks, ranging from regional to international. On a regional scale, ruangrupa’s has, for instance, worked with many students from different universities in Jakarta. As for examples of national and international networks, members of ruangrupa advise municipal and national governments and NGO’s, and Darmawan is a partner of the well-known British Art Council and the global platform RAIN Artists’ Initiatives Network (since 2000), among other organisations.

Ruangrupa’s participation in many different networks and organisations, in a sense, calls to mind “Piggybacking” (mode of usership). Characterised by Wright as “a negotiated form of symbiosis

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160 See http://www.dictionary.com/browse/idleness (last accessed on 27 February 2018).
161 Vanhoe, Reinaart, Also–Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 28.
162 Oorthuizen, Sanne (ed.), Karbon Arnhem Files #3: Radicale collectiviteit, 51, see http://www.sonsbeek.org/en/karbonarnhemfiles
164 Oorthuizen, Sanne (ed.), Karbon Arnhem Files #3: Radicale collectiviteit, 54, see http://www.sonsbeek.org/en/karbonarnhemfiles
with the host”. Piggybacking means legitimately taking advantage of free services and resources (e.g. YouTube, Twitter, and Getty Provenance Index Databases). Ruangrupa seems to “piggyback” on several networks and organisations for multiple purposes. By “piggybacking” on an NGO or platform like RAIN Artists, ruangrupa might for instance receive fundings, and learn how they could contribute to making certain plans or projects successful. In the process, they could possibly establish new friendships, and become more visible and influential as an arts collective.

Besides Jakarta and other places in Indonesia, ruangrupa as an artist collective has worked in many different places around the world, which unquestionably enabled them to expand their networks. Moreover, is that they invite people from other countries to come and work in Jakarta, for instance Charles Esche, who curated the Jakarta Biennial together with six young Indonesian curators in 2015. It can be argued that ruangrupa’s layered network guarantees useful exchanges on multiple societal issues, ensuring their goal to gain knowledge by making art meaningful for a specific context.

Returning to the ruru house, it is worth assessing common features of the research that is done in the house to understand how ruangrupa and its headquarters function. First of all, in its first stages, research is often conducted in an unstructured and unplanned manner, sometimes without having a clear goal in mind, whereas later on ideas can crystallise all of sudden. Accordingly, the research largely consists of experimentation and speculation; instead of adopting certain theories or strategies, concepts are constantly broadened and revised. Put differently, ruangrupa is not afraid to start from the position that misunderstanding might be considered more useful than understanding. In a sense, ruangrupa embraces an unprofessional attitude centered on pursuing the unknown, which is more or less in opposition with what most art practitioners (artists, curators, and critics) do, who put faith in expertise. Tania Bruguera likewise argues that Arte Útil has very little to do with professionalism, because artistic training and skills are often incompatible and useless when it comes to collaborative developments of art as tools for society. Secondly, informal conversations over coffee, about all kinds of topics related to, for example, the news or someone’s personal life, many times blend with the members’ projects. Spontaneously chatting without any specific reason, a typical Indonesian custom known as “nongkrong”, is in fact central to ruangrupa’s way of life. Comradery and mutual support are important underlying elements to this custom that characterises urban life in Indonesia – to some

167 As an artist-collective, ruangrupa has participated in several biennials and triennials worldwide, including Gwangju, South-Korea (2002), Istanbul, Turkey (2005), Singapore (2011), Brisbane, Australia (2012), Sao Paolo, Brasil (2014), and Nagoya, Japan (2016).
168 Vanhoe, Reinaart, Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 30-31.
169 Exhibition catalogues SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page number.
171 Vanhoe, Reinaart, Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 30.
extent due to decades of very little governmental support. As a result, doing research revolves around mixing and matching different ideas, experiences, memories (and so forth), and therefore projects are generally multidisciplinary. Thus, similar to how ruangrupa’s practices are always somehow connected to Jakarta, and the both professional and relaxed, everyday atmosphere of the ruuru house, people’s personal and professional life inevitably intermingle and overlap.

The ways in which members of ruangrupa work resonate with its loose structure. Before divisions and programs were reorganised, when the older members created “a kind of collective board” in 2015, there was no particular hierarchy to be found within ruangrupa. As it turns out, this was not just crucial for building ruangrupa in the beginning: maintaining a loose structure helped sustain it by enabling ruangrupa members to work outside the collective for pursuing (artistic) individual goals – and since ruangrupa is a non-profit organisation, most members need other jobs to earn enough money. Ruangrupa curator Leonhard “Barto” Bartolomeus, who leads the RURU Gallery (fig. 19), for example, teaches Art History at Jakarta Art Institute, and also works as a graphic designer for a NGO. Presumably, being both an insider and outsider allows for seeing things with a fresh eye from various perspectives, and may ultimately have a positive effect on ruangrupa’s self-reflexivity. However, as Ardi Yunanto (now one of the managers of the art school Institut ruangrupa) rightly pointed out, this also brings the risk of members getting overworked and letting projects slide. To work individually seems contradictory to being part of a team, but within ruangrupa, people simultaneously work on their own while serving the interests of the collective.

When reading Yunanto’s text on ruangrupa, in which he humorously introduces some of his colleagues by revealing their nick names, personalities, fetishisms and work pace, it becomes apparent that individuality, informality, and a good sense of humor are valued. Contrary to “vertical” Western arts organisations, where people carry out their work in line with the plans made by the director or the board, ruangrupa has neither a singular strategy nor fixed positions that open up when somebody leaves. This has made it into a very dynamic and multilayered, cross-disciplinary arts collective, with artists (street art, painting, performance, film, photography, etc.), curators, architects, historians,

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172 Vanhoe, Reinaart, Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 31.
174 Despite the ‘kind of collective board’, it seems that ruangrupa’s operation is only partially hierarchical in structure. The only “hierarchy” within ruangrupa is reflected in the relationship between seniors (older members who often lead projects) and juniors (younger members who follow the seniors). Although juniors always make decisions together with the seniors, they are viewed as equal and their arguments have the same weight. In an interview with curator Sanne Oorthuizen in April 2016, Irvin Domi of Rururadio explains that juniors can always adjust ideas to persuade seniors. He states: “But it is really flexible here. The relationship between juniors and seniors is ok.” And when Oorthuizen asks him about the hierarchy, he replies: “Yes, we are really equal.” See Oorthuizen, Sanne (ed.), Karbon Files Arnhem #4.2: Hoe ruangrupa (samen)werkt – Coulissen, 94, 95. See also http://www.sonsbeek.org/en/karbonarnhemfiles
175 5% of the members get paid monthly; most members receive money after executing a project. Ibid., 116.
176 Ibid., 98.
anthropologists, musicians, activists, designers and writers. Again, ruangrupa’s lack of fixed hierarchies, strategies and job positions attest to their waiver of professionalism. Needless to say, some members perform bigger, management-like tasks than others, like Ajeng Nurul Aini, who has become the eyes and ears of the group, leading the managerial team since 2015. However, to some extent everybody is always equally responsible for developing programs. Indonesian artist Tintin Wulia explains that leadership is distributed at all times:

It is not that there are no “leaders”; there are several, of different kinds, at different scales and on different layers, at any given time; and in principle anyone can occupy this position. That is, they are not leaderless but, if the poor wordplay can be forgiven, leaderful.178

Ruangrupa compares its unfixed structure to a laboratory179, a musical ensemble,180 and a football team playing ‘total football’;181 everybody is indispensable thanks to specific talents, which then automatically strengthen the group as a whole. In other words, ruangrupa has grown into the collective it is today because of what members bring into the group (personalities, talents, interests, etc.), instead of the other way around.

In the course of fifteen years, several recurring or ongoing platforms centered on different media have demonstrated ruangrupa’s importance for filling the gaps in Jakarta’s art infrastructure. Originally created to share ruangrupa’s research results, the Karbon Journal (fig. 20) is one of the longest-lasting platforms, published in print between 2000 and 2007 and distributed freely, after which it became available online.182 Karbon offers space for critical reflections on a broad spectrum of issues related to Indonesia’s urban environments, socio-cultural phenomena, and contemporary art practices. The video festival OK. Video has been a recurring project since 2003, concentrating on different themes such as “Sub/Version” in 2005, “Militia” in 2007 (fig. 21), and “Comedy” in 2009. Rather than experimenting with technical possibilities of video as a digital medium, OK. Video addresses its social dimensions, exploring effects of its omnipresence in daily life (e.g. advertisements in public space and social media).183 Since 2004, ruangrupa has been co-organising another “biennial”, together with Jakarta art students: Jakarta 32°C. Apart from the fact that it takes place once every two years, Jakarta 32°C has very little in common with well-known biennials, or with many other exhibitions for that matter. A two-week event comprising a series of multidisciplinary (public) workshops, presentations,

181 Vanhoe, Reinaart, *Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking*, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 16.
182 See karbonjournal.org (last accessed on 22 January 2017).
183 Vanhoe, Reinaart, *Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking*, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 57.
discussions, and exhibitions, *Jakarta 32°C* functions as a platform that offers students – not just art students – new perspectives on Jakarta through research, networking, and collaborations. As with many other initiatives of ruangrupa like the *OK Video* festival, the finished products are in the end secondary to the social transactions taking place during the work process. Thus, authorship is often unimportant, because artworks belong to several makers, and artists therefore assume, as Ade Darmawan remarked, the role of collaborator or mediator. Darmawan’s characterisation of members and partners of ruangrupa is similar to Bruguera’s characterisation of Arte Útil artists as “teachers, negotiators, behavior builders, or social structures”. They both envisage artists as social intermediaries, positioning themselves somewhere in-between the center and the margins of society.

The final ongoing platform to be discussed here briefly is *Artlab* (short for Arts Laboratory) (fig. 22), which was set up in 2008. Managed by a curator, a designer, and Cut and Rescue (a group of five young artists) since 2015, *Artlab* is a more general division within ruangrupa that arose out of the need to further anchor the aim to strengthen networks between art professionals and audiences in Indonesia. Specifically, the members of *Artlab* want to make sure that art networks involved in social issues become more meaningful and sustainable on a larger scale. Again, providing the means for research, discussions, presentations, teamwork, and the production of art works and publications is central.

These four successful platforms, *Karbon Journal, OK Video, Jakarta 32°C*, and *Artlab*, seem to have triggered the development of new ones, like the annual Ruangrupa Music Festival (since 2010), better known as the RRREC Fest, RURU Kids (since 2015), which organises “education-based art programs for children and teens” and the new art school Institut ruangrupa (also since 2015). With regard to art education, it is also interesting that ruangrupa has created many artist-in-residence programs since 2001. All in all, the above mentioned platforms have a similar approach and impact. Since they are accessible in that both artists and non-artists are invited to freely partake in all kinds of activities, the platforms all reach out to young and relatively inexperienced people who lack opportunities for publishing their research. These people are able to engage in multidisciplinary research, and experimenting with different mediums – most commercial art institutions such as galleries are limited to merely presenting artworks, offering space to more renowned artists.

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190 Hujatnikajenong, Agung, “Voor diegene die (stapel-)verliefd zijn op de stad (Jakarta) – Een curatorieel essay van een vriend”, Oorthuizen, Sanne (ed.), *Karbon Arnhem Files #4.1: Hoe ruangrupa werkt – Podium*, 86, translation by Oorthuizen, Sanne, and Veltkamp, Eef. Original “For those who are (so much) in Love with the City (of Jakarta) – a curatorial essay (from a friend)”. See also http://www.sonsbeek.org/en/karbonarnhemfiles
Ruangrupa’s generosity towards relatively inexperienced people, such as students, which reflects their educational aspirations, also corresponds to Tania Bruguera’s description of the open-minded, ‘de-professionalised’ Arte Util artist who “gives people the feeling that they can intervene”.\(^{191}\) Ruangrupa’s generosity is also reminiscent of IUT (‘use it together’), one of Wright’s modes of usership that conveys the social dimension of usership.\(^{192}\)

Increasing ambitions, workload, and expansion prompted ruangrupa to delineate a more efficient structure in 2015, altering various divisions whilst also establishing new ones. Aside from the “board”, managerial team, and finance, new divisions include OK Video, Jakarta 32°C, the Archive and Documentation Division (focused on managing ruangrupa’s library and website), and RURU Gallery (“an experimentation space for young, talented, and dangerous artists”\(^{193}\)). Additionally, the Educational Division now organises writing and curating workshops, and it expanded with Institut ruangrupa, “founded to generate artists, curators, managers, producers, writers – or anything in between.”\(^{194}\) And since 2015, the Business Unit comprises RURU Corps (commercial activities), Ruru Shop (“eccentric products made by artists and cultural workers”\(^{195}\)), and the newly independent unit RURUradio (online radio). Other significant changes are the permanent security and registration of every visitor in a log in the ruru house as a result of stealing,\(^ {196}\) and the relocation of RURU Corps in May 2016, from the house to Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem (fig. 23), an old six-thousand-square-meter warehouse with an exterior space of two-thousand-square-meters in Pancoran, South-Jakarta. A two-year investment by ruangrupa, the Gudang center brings together the RURU Corps, Forum Lenteng, Serrum, Grafis Huru-Hara, OK. Video, and Jakarta 32°C, paving the way for new cross-disciplinary collaborations, large-scale art events, and attracting audiences.\(^ {197}\)

Artist and occasional partner Reinaart Vanhoe writes that after reorganisations in 2015-2016 ruangrupa now stands at a new crossroad as many younger members took over tasks from older members.\(^ {198}\) Moreover, ruangrupa is more and more influential on a cultural and socio-political level both nationally and internationally. In the eyes of Vanhoe, they are gradually becoming more institutional. On the one hand, this is advantageous, but on the other hand challenging for the ruru

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\(^{194}\) Ibid.

\(^{195}\) Ibid.

\(^{196}\) Hujatnikajennong, Agung, “Voor diegene die (stapel-)verliefd zijn op de stad (Jakarta) – Een curatorieel essay van een vriend”, Oorthuizen, Sanne (ed.), Karbon Arnhem Files #4.1: Hoe ruangrupa werkt – Podium, 110.


\(^{198}\) Vanhoe, Reinaart, Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 54.
house as an alternative space and locus for creating innovative approaches. From an internal perspective, ruangrupa now has a more rigid organisation due to its new structure, and it is important to acknowledge that, because of their growth, the ruru house is increasingly less of an open space where members work and sleep, and a space where an increasing number of visitors come and go.\textsuperscript{199}

From an external perspective, ruangrupa is more institutional in the sense that they receive more recognition from the (international) art world, which is for example apparent from their role as curators of Sonsbeek ’16. Also, several individuals of ruangrupa have exhibited their work in prominent institutions worldwide like Palais de Tokyo in Paris, linking them to the more mainstream artworld. In the future, ruangrupa will not only have to keep positioning itself in a further globalised artworld, but also in Jakarta, where more commercial galleries are now reaching out to young and experimental artists.\textsuperscript{200}

\textbf{2.2 Ruangrupa working in Arnhem, 2015-2016}

In October 2014, the short list of candidates for curating Sonsbeek ’16 was made public. Besides Ade Darmawan, the names on this list included curator Joanna Warsza (1976, Poland), curator Moritz Küng (1961, Switzerland), and the artist-curator duo Apolonija Šušteršič (1965, Slovenia) and Maria Lind (1966, Sweden), who all visited Arnhem in October.\textsuperscript{201} A committee of nine national and international art professionals was tasked with selecting a curator: Ute Meta Bauer (curator and writer, director CCA in Singapore); Jurgen Bey (designer, director Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam); Jan Boelen (critic and curator, Belgium / The Netherlands); Fulya Erdemci (curator and writer, Turkey); Hicham Khalidi (curator, Belgium / The Netherlands); Kasper König (curator and writer, artistic director Skulptur Projekte in Münster); Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (art critic and curator, France); Gabriëlle Schleijpen (director DAI in Arnhem); and Barbara Visser (visual artists and filmmaker, The Netherlands).\textsuperscript{202} In the beginning of February 2015, after the candidates sent in their proposals, Foundation Sonsbeek International announced that ruangrupa was appointed as curator – allegedly the choice for ruangrupa was unanimous.

\textsuperscript{199} Vanhoe, Reinaart, \textit{Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking}, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 67.

\textsuperscript{200} In an interview with Sanne Oorthuizen in April 2016, Leonhard “Barto” Bartolomeus elaborated on the position of the RURU gallery: “The first time the gallery took place, in 2008, its position was important, because at that time for most young artists and, let us say, experimental artists there were few places where they could show their work. In the years 2008-2011, this place [RURU gallery] was very important for, how shall I put it, that situation and those artists. But then the situation changed; many new galleries occurred in Jakarta, which are commercial. Now they start opening their eyes and minds to give these young, experimental artists more opportunities. For me, the biggest challenge is how we can position ourselves. Because I mean now there is no difference anymore. (...) It will be my first priority to make sure that young people keep coming, and that more people come and see how an alternative art space works.” See Oorthuizen, Sanne (ed.), \textit{Karbon Arnhem Files} #4.2: \textit{Hoe ruangrupa (samen)werkt – Coulissen}, 98, 99.


\textsuperscript{202} I received this information from Foundation Sonsbeek International.
Since they had to combine working in Arnhem and Jakarta, ruangrupa did doubt whether it would be possible to handle the extra workload. However, from the beginning they envisioned Sonsbeek ’16 as “a natural next step”, transferring their approaches to a Western context “as a way to speculate into the future”. By transferring their approach to Arnhem, ruangrupa had to consider the fact that The Netherlands was the colonial power in Indonesia for over a century, until Indonesia became independent after a bloody war that ended in 1949. Witnesses of the decolonialization of Indonesia are still alive, which added another layer to the ‘transaction’ between ruangrupa and people from Arnhem. The colonial past was acknowledged by ruangrupa by including Museum Bronbeek in Arnhem, the most important museum about Dutch colonial history and the Royal Dutch Indonesian Army (‘KNIL’), as an exhibition venue for Sonsbeek ’16. Ruangrupa invited artist Juul Sadée to make a work for the context of Museum Bronbeek. Together with thirty member of the Mollucan community in and around Arnhem, Sadée created the installation So, which shed light on the colonial era and the migration of Mollucan people to The Netherlands. With the theme ‘transaction’, ruangrupa stuck very close to its artistic identity as this word captures the essence of their democratic, process-oriented and collaborative approaches over the past sixteen years. Accordingly, transaction conveys ruangrupa’s vision on art as a continuous exchange process; art as a social practice that is not focused on end products but, as Vanhoe puts it, directed towards “the collection of ‘notes’ or ‘moments’”.

Ruangrupa’s role as curator of Sonsbeek ’16 was a trajectory of about two years in which seven of the core members – Ade Darmawan, Hafiz Rancaljale, Farid Rakun, Mirwan Andan, Indra Ameng, Ajeng Nurul Aini and Reza Afisina – not only developed the exhibition, but were also involved in “running” it, as they helped supervise the content of various sub-events during the exhibition, like symposia, fringe activities, and proposals for the Open Call program. Throughout this long process, transactions formed the central point of departure. As ruangrupa clarifies in the exhibition catalogue, a transaction is “any exchange that happens between two [or more] people”. Already at the end of 2014, the seven “ruru’s” started by meeting people and (cultural) organisations in Arnhem and listening to their ideas and stories. One of the first important encounters was with Sonsbeek park ranger Jeroen Glissenaar, who gave ruangrupa a tour in Sonsbeek park in the winter of the end of 2014, giving them extensive information about the history, vegetation, and visitors of the park.

The opening of the ruru huis (fig. 24 and 25) half a year later (in the first weekend of July)

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204 Exhibition catalogue SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page numbers.

205 Exhibition catalogue SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page numbers.

206 Vanhoe, Reinaart, Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented Networking, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 49.

207 Ibid.
was the official kick-off for making Sonsbeek ’16, and as such it can be seen as the preliminary start of the exhibition. The ruru huis was first located in the Looierstraat that is just one street away from Arnhem’s main shopping street. On 23 June 2016, the ruru huis moved from the Looierstraat to the Bezoekerscentrum (‘visitor center’) at Sonsbeek park so that it became more closely connected to activities taking place in the park. The ruru huis had much in common with its big brother in Jakarta. As an integral part of Sonsbeek ’16 until the end of the exhibition in September 2016, the ruru huis was intended as a multifunctional space where everybody could walk in any time during the day to meet and greet members of ruangrupa (and the editorial team) in order to exchange ideas, stories or objects, or to simply read a book, work in silence or hang out, as members of ruangrupa and the staff of the ruru huis often did. Following the spirit of ruangrupa’s research- and network-based approach at the ruru house in Jakarta, an editorial team led by curator Sanne Oorthuizen examined visible and invisible socio-political, cultural, and spatial phenomena in Arnhem. Most of the research was carried out by the ruru buitendienst, a group of seven artists and researchers who extrapolated the notion of public space in Arnhem. In addition, Reinaart Vanhoe was an important partner for ruangrupa, overseeing the multitude of activities in the ruru huis for the public, such as workshops, presentations, and performances (fig. 26). Not only did Vanhoe assist with conceptualising these activities, he also created installations using remains from the ruru huis, for example objects that people left behind, referring to the transactions that took place at the ruru huis. One of the installations was integrated in the ruru huis at the visitor center of Sonsbeek park; the other piece was incorporated in the exhibition TransHistory at Museum Arnhem.

Besides tables, sofa’s, book shelves, showcases (containing all sorts of objects left behind by visitors), and a small kitchen, the ruru huis had a blank, meters-long map of Arnhem, which people were invited to fill with, for instance, words, drawings, or stickers to visualise experiences and ideas, or certain places or neighbourhoods in Arnhem (fig. 27). As for the map and the ruru huis in general, visitors, the editorial team, and ruangrupa could use them as tools to get to know each other and grasp urban issues in the city. Ruangrupa and Sonsbeek ’16 were also introduced outside the ruru huis: members of ruangrupa occasionally had a stand on markets to meet inhabitants of Arnhem, and stickers and post cards were distributed in public spaces such as cafés throughout Arnhem, allowing people to send in thoughts about Arnhem and its inhabitants. All the gathered verbal and non-verbal information was first of all used by ruangrupa for selecting the artists for Sonsbeek ’16. At a later stage the artists in turn had the option to use the information as a source of inspiration from which to create their works. Thus, in accordance with the ways in which ruangrupa connects with urban spaces and

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208 Two core activities of the ruru buitendienst were public reading sessions at the ruru huis, in which the group discussed the legislative document of Arnhem’s public space regulation (“Algemene Plaatselijke Verordening”), and two-weekly, freely accessible walks in Arnhem. The editorial team also initiated the ruru radio program and the self-made journal Karbon Arnhem Files, inspired by ruangrupa’s eponymous platforms. See http://www.rurubuitendienst.nl (accessed on 30 January 2017).
their users in Jakarta, they first made efforts to get acquainted with Arnhem’s history, collective memory, communities, organisations, and so forth, before asking artists to participate. As such, the transactions between people from Arnhem and ruangrupa were intrinsic to their methodology. In short, Ruangrupa’s approach is above all shaped by what Wright calls “narratorship”. This mode of usership has to be understood as an alternative way to make works of art, to bring them into the world by simply talking about them. Diametrically opposed to art’s traditional aesthetic function, “narratorship (talking art)” shifts the focus from the artist’s work process to people’s relationship to art.

Narratorship can be related to ruangrupa’s aim behind the *ruru huis*, to invite people to share their ideas and stories with the curators. Although the *ruru huis* was located in the city center of Arnhem, and presented as a free space where people could hang out or work, people in general turned out to be reluctant to step inside, especially in the beginning when Sonsbeek ’16 was still a long time in coming. Aside from the fact that ruangrupa and the *ruru huis* were relatively unknown in Arnhem in the beginning, this can perhaps be explained by cultural differences between the Dutch and Indonesians, and in particular the different ways in which people live in Arnhem and Jakarta. In a way, it seems almost impossible to compare the lives of people in Arnhem to those in Jakarta; not only does Jakarta have over sixty-five times more inhabitants, the majority of the people deal with many problems on a daily basis as a result of, for instance, poverty, pollution, poor infrastructure, and overpopulation. As mentioned before, people are more used to organising themselves, as they rely more on each other than on the government to take action. Instead of keeping things more to themselves by living and working in (semi-)private spheres, it seems that people from Jakarta spend a lot of time in public as they, for example, travel from one section of the city to another, or try to sell products in the street.

Other, more obvious, differences can be found by comparing ruangrupa’s events in Jakarta to Sonsbeek ’16. First of all, the scale and duration of Sonsbeek ’16 are different to most of ruangrupa’s activities in Jakarta, which generally take place in one or several small spaces, for one or several days, or a few weeks. Secondly, ruangrupa’s activities in Jakarta are generally organised by young people who attract young audiences, whereas the crowd in Arnhem arguably consists of people of all ages. And where ruangrupa’s name is more widely known among youngsters in Jakarta, the word ‘Sonsbeek-exhibition’ mostly rings a bell for people of, say, thirty or forty years and older, some of whom may have vivid memories of previous editions eight, fifteen, or twenty-four years ago (and

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sometimes even earlier ones). In short, transferring their practice from Jakarta to Arnhem brought new challenges to the fore, some seemingly related to different ways in which people live in these cities, along with unspoken customs and things that are taken for granted. Yet ruangrupa’s call for transaction – and, perhaps mainly, ‘action’, as is implied by the capitals in the title Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION – was answered by people during the exhibition, when eighty activities (out of ninety-seven proposals) took place in and around the artworks at Sonsbeek park. 213

2.3 Alternative how?
To analyse ruangrupa’s practice of the past sixteen years means analogously analysing aspects of daily life in Jakarta and all the changes taking place there, and to some extent also in Indonesia, after the reformasi in 1998. However, understanding what ruangrupa is and how it exactly operates is, as we have seen, prone to fail because they never had a clear structure until 2015, nor did the members share a common strategy. What is evident is that ruangrupa is an organisation that has always welcomed people with different backgrounds, professions, personalities, and viewpoints. In doing so, they evolved into an open-minded arts organisation that thrives above all on values like friendship, mutual support, generosity, and determination, which ensure the means for collective experimentation and expanding networks. It is in the minimal number of fixed, preconceived job positions, rules, and outcomes that we can locate ruangrupa’s strength and alternativeness.

In defining ruangrupa’s practice, several art professionals have come up with different labels. Artist and curator Marion von Osten categorises ruangrupa as a translocal organisation to indicate that they not only work locally, but also internationally. 214 Art historian Thomas Berghuis seems to go in the same direction by connecting ruangrupa to the ‘global’. In what might be “art to come”, he defines the global as an “'artistic procedure’ that commences by the way of an event that is both in and of the world, thereby constituting the making of art out of the world.” 215 In an essay from 2012, curator and writer David Teh, on the other hand, discusses how many members of ruangrupa assume the double role of artist and curator without having been educated as curators. Speculating that ruangrupa’s success might stem from this double role, Teh suggests that the group moves beyond traditional notions of curatorship by making sure that not the work of art, but rather the audience is “the ultimate object of curatorial care”. 216

In his study of Indonesian art collectives, Reinaart Vanhoe places ruangrupa’s practice in

213 Information retrieved from the report of Marloes Verhoeven, one of the coordinators of the Open Call. See also Appendix.
opposition to Western contemporary practices, and more broadly Western capitalist-neo-liberal
countries like The Netherlands.\textsuperscript{217} Whereas Western artists often work from an individualistic,
outsider’s perspective, producing works that critically reflect on certain issues or contexts from a
distance in their studios, Vanhoe argues that ruangrupa immerses itself in a context, working as a
network in a “contextually logical way that is always open to others”\textsuperscript{218} For this type of practice,
Vanhoe coined the term (g)LEAP, short for (g)Locally Embedded Art Practice.\textsuperscript{219} Similarly,
Darmawan asserted that ruangrupa produces a system that is alternative from the modernist model in
the Western world:

We are in the middle of a failed modernism, illusive nationalism, and national identity, and the
products of corrupted power. (...) We are left with only one position, to become greedy
consumers. What I am trying to say is that through our works we are developing an alternative
system. As the consumers of the products of social and cultural history, we are capable of
developing a mixture of collaging, mix-and-matching activities and destruction and
reconstruction of practices so as to accord with local needs.\textsuperscript{220}

The social dimension of ruangrupa’s artistic and curatorial approach, to create possibilities for
meaningful transactions between people, can be considered as the key to establishing an alternative
framework by enabling and encouraging people to transcend their role as consumers. In the case of
\textit{Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION}, these transactions might, then, offer “a particular and timely discourse
about the city”\textsuperscript{221}; an alternative discourse that “can lead to a different understanding of Arnhem’s
layered urban realities”.\textsuperscript{222} Ruangrupa’s goal was cleverly conveyed by their \textit{Sonsbeek ’16}-slogan
‘make friends, not art’.\textsuperscript{223}

In drawing a conclusion about ruangrupa’s work during \textit{Sonsbeek ’16}, the slogan ‘make
friends, not art’ seems telling. Typically, this slogan allegedly started out as a joke, revealing
ruangrupa’s unpretentious and speculative approach towards art. By proposing to not make art,
ruangrupa contended that art could be much more than merely conceiving and executing physical
works of art. It seems pretty close to Stephen Wright’s conceptualisation of art without artworks,
posited in his concept ‘coefficient of art’. At any rate, knowledge about art history and theories, and

\textsuperscript{217} Vanhoe, Reinaart, \textit{Also-Space, From Hot to Something Else: How Indonesian Art Initiatives Have Reinvented
Networking}, (Breda: NPN Drukkers), 2016, 7-11.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{220} Juliastuti, Nuraini, “Ruangrupa: A Conversation on Horizontal Organisation”, \textit{Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context,
and Enquiry}, Vol. 30 (Summer 2012), 122.
\textsuperscript{221} Exhibition catalogues \textit{Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION} (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page number.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{223} Presentation Mirwan Andan in \textit{ruru huis}, 29 May 2016. See also Peters, Maike, “Make friends not art” – in
gesprek met de curatoren van \textit{SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION}, http://dbkvblog.artez.nl/evenement/make-
friends-not-art-in-gesprek-met-de-curatoren-van-sonsbeek-16-transaction/ (last accessed on 11 April 2017).
the ever-returning question ‘what is art?’ ultimately seem of secondary importance to ruangrupa.

Ruangrupa’s context-driven approach, which is strongly grounded in the input and needs of other people, as explained by Darmawan in the above-mentioned statement, seems reminiscent of both Tania Bruguera’s understanding of the ameliorative and political potential of Arte Útil, and Stephan Wright’s vision on usership as a process of deontologising art. Stressing the necessity to deontologise art, to break away from the artworld’s dominant theories and ways of presenting art, Wright’s description may just as well have been about ruangrupa.

(...) it [“art”] emerges as a context-dependent set of tools, energies, competences. Such that you never really know when, or to what extent, it’s taking place. Art’s way of becoming deontological.\textsuperscript{224}

With regard to the artworks of Sonsbeek ’16, the exhibition, as a framework and a time-based art event, seemingly precluded the works from becoming wholly deontological. Yet, by ruangrupa’s inclusion of citizens of Arnhem (epitomised by the ruru huis), and by allowing everyone to freely use the Sonsbeek ’16 artworks, the exhibition continued to be a collective work in progress in the here and now. It should be remarked that Sonsbeek ’16 included a number of aesthetically appealing artworks. Yet, to some extent, Sonsbeek ’16 undermined the aesthetic function of art, when “form is experienced for itself”,\textsuperscript{225} to borrow Rancière, and the ‘ontological capture’ as a contemporary art exhibition.

\textsuperscript{224} Wright, Stephen, “Becoming deontological – a politics of deontologizing art / an art of deontologizing politics”, northeasternwestsouthwest, 1 August 2014, see http://northeastwestsouth.net/becoming-deontological-politics-deontologizing-art-art-deontologizing-politics (last accessed on 12 November 2017).

CHAPTER 3

Repurposing artworks: on the uses of six artworks of Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION

What I am trying to do is to remind people to forget that it is art and think about it as life.226
–Christian Boltanski

Children challenging their parents for a game of ping pong, a couple sitting together in silence on a tree trunk, and amateur bakers in anticipation, keeping a close eye on their loaves of bread and cakes as they quickly transform in a huge oven; during Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION the artworks in park Sonsbeek certainly inspired many different kinds of uses. The use of some of the artworks was fairly self-evident, for example in the case of the colorful ping pong tables (fig. 28) made by Louie Cordero. The ways to use some of the other works were not as clear and much more open-ended, like Slavs and Tatars’ “church” (fig. 29 and 30). The level of freedom in use was also different: some artworks were meant to be used freely without interference from the artists, whereas the use of other works was to some degree controlled. In the case of Alphons ter Avest’s self-made bakery and oven (fig. 31), for example, use was limited to one day in the weekend and supervised for safety reasons. As a result, the uses of the different artworks were either primarily active and physical (the ping pong tables), more or less passive (the church), or sometimes active and at other times passive (the bakery). And as some artworks were mostly used by children, by both children and adults, and yet others predominantly by adults, each had a slightly different group of users. Significantly, several artworks kept people at a distance and hence could not be repurposed. The original map of park Sonsbeek by Jan Rothuizen (fig. 32), drawn on a wooden panel and altered by the artist himself in the course of the exhibition, turned people into spectators. The same traditional viewer-artwork relationship was established by Folkert de Jong’s sculpture, for which the artist used hydrospan and his own body (fig. 33).

In singling out artworks for analysis, I have made distinctions based on different kinds of more or less artist intended uses. This has resulted in three pairs of comparable works: the works of Louie Cordero and Maze de Boer were both meant for playing; Eko Prawoto and Slavs and Tatars both deliberately left the purpose of their works open to publics; and KUNStRePUBLIK and Rob Voerman created artworks as platforms for stirring awareness on sociopolitical issues.

3.1 Play: Pong, The Happy Camper, and Common Ground

Pilipino artist Louie Cordero (Manila, 1978) created two artworks for Sonsbeek ’16, designed specifically for playful use. Both works were made with the same materials: a combination of foam and fiberglass. However, the similarities stop here, as Pong and The Happy Camper (fig. 34 and 35) did not look anything alike, and invited very different kinds of playful uses.

3.1.1 Pong

Pong consisted of three unusual, asymmetrically shaped ping pong tables, appropriately decorated with colorful motifs. Inspired by the originally hand-painted Jeepney’s (city busses) from his hometown Manila, Cordero coated the tables with the same type of paint that is used for embellishing the Jeepney’s. The inventive decorations on the tables, which seem to contain very few recognisable elements such as flowers and parts of animals, are reminiscent of some of Cordero’s phantasmagoric paintings, like Gamera (2014) (fig. 36). Because of their irregular contours and the missing white lines, people could discover new ways to play ping pong. In addition, the different bulblike protrusions and openings seemed to offer an equal number of advantageous and disadvantageous options for getting the ball across the net. Besides their 1:1 scale, it is possible to relate Cordero’s Pong to Stephen Wright’s other main characteristics of Useful art: their ‘usualness’ and additional artistic layer. The ping pong tables belong to the ‘usual’ in the sense that they are ping pong tables. They arguably also have the additional artistic layer, which Wright deems necessary for identifying them as art as opposed to mere ping pong tables. The artistic layer of Cordero’s ping pong tables consists of all the aspects that differentiate them from regular ping pong tables (the foam and fiberglass, unusual shapes, colors, and decorations).

Two of the terms Wright proposes for defining the artistic layer of usership art, allure and double ontology, seem to be applicable to Pong. As described, allure is an experience that is provoked by the materiality of an object and takes place in the human mind. The allure of Cordero’s ping pong tables can be said to arise from their ‘usualness’ and unique shapes and decorations. At first sight, watching people play ping pong, someone may have identified Cordero’s works as regular ping pong tables, especially if they did not know about the fact that Sonsbeek ’16 was taking place at the park. By taking a closer and longer look at the shapes of the tables and their almost entirely abstract, colorful decorations, people may have questioned if they were ping pong tables or in fact artworks. The moment that people realised they were looking at or using artworks is the moment an experience of allure took place; people’s perceptions of the ping pong tables changed – the ping pong tables are not just ping pong tables –, even though the objects themselves remained the same. It is likely that few visitors have experienced allure. Because of the unusual shapes and decorations, and the fact that Cordero’s works were surrounded by other art installations, the ping pong tables may have been

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227 Exhibition catalogues SONSBEEK’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page number.
recognised as artworks most of the time.

The primary and secondary ontology of the ping pong tables, which constitute their double ontology, can be distinguished, on the one hand, in their function as ping pong tables and, on the other hand, the abovementioned characteristics that single them out from normal ping pong tables.

3.1.2 The Happy Camper

A two-meter-high sculpture of a head situated on a wooden podium near one of the entrances of park Sonsbeek, *The Happy Camper* (2016) could not be missed. Apart from its size, the work drew attention to itself because of a peculiar combination of young and old facial features. Symbolising the aging population in the Netherlands and other Western European countries, the artwork represented a child suffering from the early-aging disease progeria. Cordero left out the skin on the left side of the head for people to cover with chewed chewing gum. By sticking their gum onto the head, and leaving a trace behind, Codero wanted people to – perhaps unconsciously – “colonise” the chewing gum head, as it was popularly called. As finishing the work was expected of them, visitors may not have reflected upon their chewing gum marks. Towards the end of the exhibition, when the entire surface of the head was speckled with gum (fig. 35), the question arose for me if the work had been co-created by the public or whether it had in fact been legally vandalised. Either way, *The Happy Camper* was used by the public. It is difficult to analyse this artwork with Stephen Wright’s theoretical concepts, because as a sculptural object it seems to lack usualness. Although sticking chewed gum onto something is not uncommon, it is uncommon and out of the ordinary to use gum for a work of art. Unlike the ping pong tables, people generally stopped with surprise whenever someone climbed up the stairs to stick his or her gum onto the head. Consequently, it can be argued that the artwork appears to be closer to a spectacle or an event, concepts that are explained by Wright as contradictory to usership driven art practices. The fact that the public was tasked with co-creating the chewing gum head would likely not, in Wright’s opinion, qualify it as an example of Useful art.

It is striking that all the *Open Call* events around *Pong* and *The Happy Camper* could be characterised as recreational outings, and that four out of five events were private. The area was chosen as a location for three private parties, a public picknick and a private staff outing for teachers. Though it was to be half-expected, it is important to acknowledge that during these *Open Call* events the ping pong tables were used only as ping pong tables. It can therefore be argued that the use of Cordero’s work was already predetermined, leaving little possibility for the public’s self-invented uses. The similarities between the *Open Call* activities also seem to indicate the fixed playful use of *Pong*.

228 Exhibition catalogues SONSBEEK’16: *transACTION* (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page number.
229 Ibid.
3.1.3 Common Ground

A third artwork that was supposed to be used for play is Common Ground (2016) (fig. 37), a playground by Dutch artist Maze de Boer (Amsterdam, 1976). Temporarily removed from a neighbourhood in Jakarta, the playground was shipped to the Netherlands and reinstalled in park Sonsbeek while maintaining the tight composition of the three play sets (a swing, slide, and carousel). During the exhibition, de Boer in return provided the vacant area in Jakarta with Dutch play sets. This trade of playgrounds, a reference to the trading between the Netherlands and Indonesia that commenced in 1595, was the result of the nationality of the curators of Sonsbeek ’16, which prompted de Boer to visit Jakarta. According to the artist, Dutch children would use the Indonesian playground like any other as playing is a universal phenomenon. His artwork, however, subtly demonstrated that playgrounds themselves are far from universal. A first striking difference between Common Ground and Dutch playgrounds was the stone pavement, which is constructed to resemble the original ground underneath the playground in Jakarta. In the Netherlands, playgrounds generally have either a grass or sand ground in case children should fall down. While exploring Common Ground, children must also have noticed that the play sets were painted in many colors (green, white, red, and yellow), and contained curly ornaments. For some adults, the colors and ornaments of the play sets had a nostalgic edge, reminding them of play sets from their childhood. In addition, the play sets were a little smaller and cramped closer together than most Dutch play sets. Because of all these small differences, both children and adults could playfully learn about the different ways in which playgrounds are made and used in the Netherlands and Indonesia. However, many people were probably ignorant of the origin of the play sets, which means they were also oblivious to the differences between Dutch and Indonesian playgrounds, even if they must have noticed the difference between this and other playgrounds in the Netherlands.

Maze de Boer’s playground invites a free and playful use that is similar to Louie Cordero’s ping pong tables. Accordingly, Common Ground can be analysed as a useful work of art in the same way as Pong to some degree. Experiences of the work in terms of allure may well have occurred many times: as expected, a number of people first mistook Common Ground for a regular playground as opposed to an artwork. This misunderstanding (in Wright’s eyes a welcome misunderstanding) probably took place more often here compared to the ping pong tables, because the installment of a playground is very common in a park, and Sonsbeek did not yet have a playground. Espousing Graham Harman’s theorisation of the term allure, Stephen Wright envisages allure as a hidden trapdoor or staircase by which people could unmask an usual object as a work of art. With regard to

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230 Exhibition catalogues SONSBEEK ’16: transACTION (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page number.
231 Ibid.
232 The author in conversation with participants from guided tours.
233 Ibid.
*Common Ground*, the stone ground could be distinguished as the trapdoor / staircase. One of the main features that differentiates it from Dutch playgrounds, the stone ground, when interpreted as an artistic addition, may have revealed the “true identity” of the playground. Though the Indonesian play sets also made it possible to make a distinction between the playground and common Dutch playgrounds, they are arguably too similar to Dutch play sets to function as ‘trapdoors / staircases’. In other words, if it had not been for the stone ground beneath the playground, experiences of allure would perhaps rarely have taken place. Some people may have identified *Common Ground* as a work of art, because of the protective fences, which were placed every evening and removed again the morning after, or the small ‘play at your own risk’ sign. Presumably, (young) children were less likely to become aware of the fact that they were playing with art instead of a playground. This was perhaps a good thing, because otherwise *Common Ground* may have been used less often or with more reserve than is usual for a playground. It is not unlikely that many people may have never found out that the playground was a work of art and part of an exhibition.

Like the ping pong tables, the playground seems to have had a double ontology; as an usual object it was embedded in reality, but the same time it was an artwork as a result of the accompanying artistic layer. The added stone ground beneath the playground could be seen as a component of the artistic layer. Additionally, the relocation of the Indonesian playground counted as part of the artistic layer, because this artistic intervention also determined its status as a work of art. Its relocation, moreover, invited users to contemplate the differences between Indonesia and The Netherlands, and Arnhem and Jakarta, for example the differences between growing up in Arnhem and Jakarta, and playing in park Sonsbeek as opposed playing in the street. The artistic layer was, nevertheless, not integrated with the usual layer. Whereas the artistic layer of the ping pong tables was inherent to the objects – their shapes, colors and patterns cannot be detached from the tables –, the playground had a separate artistic layer (the new context, and the stone underground) that was harder to notice, because it was less distinctive from the usual layer (the play sets).

Similar to *Pong*, the function of *Common Ground* was to a large degree predetermined. This might be one of the reasons why only three *Open Call* events were organised at *Common Ground*. However, contrary to *Pong*, these events were diverse and they were all public. The first of three ‘ArnhemLife Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION picnics’, the English platform *ArnhemLife*, which “provides information about Arnhem on culture, food, social and living”, arranged a picnic at *Common Ground* on 11 June. Like the second picnic at *Pong* in July, and the third picnic at Rob Voerman’s *The Exchange*, this picnic was set up as an open meet-up for anyone interested, corresponding to the *Sonsbeek ’16-theme ‘transACTION’, and ruangrupa’s aim to bring people

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235 At some point during the exhibition this sign was lost.
together through art. For Max Lodewijks’ *Open Call* activity, the playground was a good spot to find the appropriate audience. Using the work as a stage, he performed magic tricks for other children and adults. After their introduction at the ruru huis at the Bezoekerscentrum, the organisation *Parelmoer* invited interested people to participate in roleplay at *Common Ground*. While acting a self-chosen role, people could interact with the different play sets from the playground. The choice for a roleplay activity at *Common Ground* was perhaps partly due to the possibility to play and physically interact with the different playsets. In comparison to most of the other artworks (which functioned, broadly speaking, as meeting places), it can be said that *Common Ground* provided actors with the best props, and hence multiple opportunities for improvisations. The role players needed a “playground”, and they found one.

In summary, the meetings and (unforeseen) interactions between users of the playground, and performers and those that happened to be their audiences, were central to the three *Open Call* activities at *Common Ground*. The democratic nature of the free, public activities not only echoed the theme of *Sonsbeek ’16*, but also the title of the playground, which seemed to allude to the basic, universal status of playgrounds in general. However, the deeper meaning of *Common Ground*, that is the relocation of the playground as a reference to the long trading relationship between The Netherlands and Indonesia, did not transpire in the *Open Call* activities. Thus, it may be concluded that the *Open Call* activities all matched with the playground, but at the same time, these activities were unrelated to the preceding creative and mental process of the artist, who was inspired by ‘transactions’ between The Netherlands and Indonesia (i.e. Indonesian curators working in The Netherlands, trading history).

3.2 Open-endedness: *Bamburst*, and *The The Servant Servant of of the the All-All-Forgiving Forgiving*

While the aforementioned artworks were all about playful use, *Sonsbeek ’16* also included far more open-ended artworks, which accordingly inspired various uses and *Open Call* activities. Like Louie Cordero and Maze de Boer, the artists made these more open-ended artworks for the public’s uses, but unlike the more or less straightforward functions of the ping pong tables, the chewing gum head, and the playground, the ways to use these open-ended works was less apparent. Their potential usefulness was, in other words, left more in the hands of the public, which was therefore stimulated to become creative. Two artworks are used as case studies to examine the outcomes of a more open-ended invitation to the public to use art: Eko Prawoto’s *Bamburst* (2016) (fig. 38), and Slavs and Tatars’ *The The Servant Servant of of the the All-All-Forgiving Forgiving* (2016) (fig. 29 and 30).

On first encounter, these artworks seem to have little in common. An installation made out of bamboo standing next to Sonsbeek’s famous white villa, Prawoto’s *Bamburst* was one of the eye

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catchers of the exhibition. By contrast, Slavs and Tatars’ work (a cross between installation and land art) is situated in a remote area in the forest, marked by the artists with rows of tree logs and several wooden hands hanging in trees. Prawoto’s Bamburst was broken down after the end of the exhibition, whereas Slavs and Tatars’ work has sort of become a permanent, yet unmaintained piece in park Sonsbeek. What unified these two works was the fact that they could be entered, and incorporated benches or places for people to sit. Consequently, people were in general less physically active and more contemplative in and around them in comparison to the three works previously discussed. Since these open-ended artworks were used in diverse and not always clearly visible ways, it is to some degree more challenging to form a coherent understanding of how people profited from the works.

3.2.1 Bamburst

The bamboo work Bamburst by Yogyakarta-based architect and lecturer Eko Prawoto (Purworejo, 1958) was an impressive piece of Indonesian architectural craftsmanship. The building of the roofless installation, its tunnel-like “entrance”, and the surrounding shelter constructions not only required hundreds of long bamboo poles from Indonesia, but also a team of Indonesian bamboo carpenters who worked alongside Prawoto for about five days. Apart from the foundation below ground level, the approximately eight-meters-tall poles were skillfully kept in place with many short, horizontally intersected bamboo pins. For people who had seen similar bamboo poles before, the work may have brought up associations of a certain place or point of time; other visitors talked about the thickness and the sheer length of the poles, wondering how long it took for the fast-growing bamboo to reach this size and what size they would have grown into if they had not been cut down. The unprocessed bamboo may have changed people’s perception of bamboo, for instance regarding its beauty, strength, or potential as a building material. Since Bamburst was entirely made out of bamboo, it contrasted starkly with the nearby tree species and the white, neo-classicist Sonsbeek villa. In spite of their different aesthetics, there were also striking similarities between the two buildings. Like the Sonsbeek villa, the bamboo structure was symmetrical, and the measurements of the windows were exactly the same. Additionally, if you mentally eliminated the roof of the villa, the two buildings also had about the same height. What can be seen as an invisible and accidental similarity is their Indonesian origin; Adriana van Bayen, a wealthy heiress from Dutch India (what is now Indonesia) ordered the building of the villa in 1744.²₃⁸ At the time that Prawoto choose the location next to the villa, he was unaware of its history. The close proximity between the villa and the work of art produced a kind of dialogue between the historical building with neo-classical characteristics, which primarily functions as a grand café, and the temporary building without glass windows, doors, and a roof, and without a predefined function other than that of artwork.

For Prawoto, the relationship between a building and its surroundings is one of the most

important aspects of architecture. Throughout his career, he has often worked on private house building projects in rural areas, using local, already available materials. Following or developing a certain (personal) architectural style is of little interest to him. “Too many architects are obsessed with showing themselves whereas I want to show who and what is living there.”

Prawoto values the close collaboration with clients, whose knowledge, ideas, and priorities are combined with his skills as an architect, and eventually end up being translated into a building.

Prawoto’s emphasis on the ‘respectful integration’ of architecture in the already existing context, and his descriptions of architecture as medium for sharing values, and the architect as a discussion partner call to mind some of Tania Bruguera’s ideas on Arte Útil regarding the merging of art and daily life, the Arte Útil artist’s responsibility to extrapolate what may or may not be beneficial for people, and her characterisation of this type of artist as a negotiator. Architecture is not included in Bruguera’s conceptualisation of Arte Útil, presumably because architecture and art are fields with different traditions, expertises, and methods. Yet, as architecture is by definition useful, it might be fruitful to explore the common ground between architects and artists – this came to light after the Turner Prize 2015. Or, as ruangrupa arguably did by inviting Prawoto to participate in Sonsbeek ’16, to use art exhibitions for allowing architecture to enter into dialogue with contemporary art, and vice versa.

For Sonsbeek ’16, Prawoto wanted to create an artwork without a predetermined purpose to make sure everybody was given the opportunity to use it for their own needs. In a sense, the effect of the lack of a predetermined function was that Bamburst was closer to a work of art instead of a building. It was also Prawoto’s intention to make an open structure so that the public would inevitably experience the Sonsbeek villa and the park whilst being inside the artwork. The openness of Bamburst, which could be entered from two sides, may have triggered people’s curiosity to take a look inside. Its open-endedness also appears to have contributed to its accessibility and flexibility as an artwork, because it was used in relatively many different ways for different purposes.

Before discussing the Open Call- and Fringe activities in Bamburst, the usualness and accompanying artistic layer, as well as its allure, double ontology, and coefficient, are first analysed. The usualness of Bamburst, to begin with, was not that self-evident. Unlike the previously explained ping pong tables, the chewing gum head, and the playground, the identity and function of the bamboo installation was not fixed, making it difficult to ascertain its ordinary quality. To put it differently, the

239 Powell, Robert, The New Indonesian House, (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing), 2012, see https://books.google.nl/books?id=VpbTAqAAQBAJ&pg=PT166&dq=%E2%80%9CToo+many+architects+are+obsessed+with+showing+themselves+whereas+I+want+to+show+who+and+what+is+living+there&hl=nl&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjP0K_cu_PYAhXJLcAKHYduAWQ6AEIKzAA#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%9CToo%20many%20architects%20are%20obsessed%20with%20showing%20themselves%20whereas%20I%20want%20to%20show%20who%20and%20what%20is%20living%20there&f=false (last accessed on 24 January 2018).

240 See https://xemhbo.com/xem-architecture-exploring-together-1_xpVr2LP3C6A.html (last accessed on 24 May 2017).

ping pong tables and the playground could only be identified as ping pong tables, a playground, and as artworks, whereas the bamboo installation floated between art and architecture. In addition to an artwork, people might have referred to it as a villa, a pavilion, a place for contemplation, etc. A building where people knowingly and unknowingly gathered, it could also simply be described as a meeting place. Since bringing people together seemed to be its most basic function, and given its central location in the park, ruangrupa suggested the artwork could be associated as a station. Though Bamburst definitely had ordinary features by which people recognised it as some sort of building, its usualness was subjective and thus hard to pin down. The bamboo pavilion was to some extent comparable to common places where people come together (e.g. a community centre, a place of worship, an arena), but the work eschewed a direct association with a specific type of building.

The artistic layer of Bamburst was the sum of characteristics that made up its identity as an ‘architectural artwork’, and consequently separated it from other buildings. Important elements included the glassless windows, the grass floor (i.e. the lack of a floor), the freestanding tunnel-like “entrance”, the missing doors (preventing the building from being locked), and the open roof (with the few crossing bamboo poles that together formed a grid). A product that is rarely used as a building material in the Netherlands despite its strength and sustainability, it can be argued that the bamboo also constituted the artistic layer.

As the function of Bamburst, and therefore its usual quality, were ambiguous, Wright’s term allure seems to be inapplicable. Given the abovementioned artistic characteristics, it is unlikely that people would have classified Bamburst as an ordinary building, especially considering the dissimilar nearby Sonsbeek villa, and the bamboo shelter constructions. An experience of allure, when someone suddenly sees through the usualness of an object and comes to think of it as art, presumably hardly took place in or around Bamburst.

Considering Stephen Wright’s concept of double ontology, the primary ontology of Bamburst equalled its status as a building, and the secondary ontology its status as an artwork. If people recognised it as an artwork, this becomes the primary ontology as opposed to the secondary ontology. However, as we have seen, the usualness of the bamboo construction was somewhat difficult to define; designating the work as a building and an artwork seemed to be too simplistic, because the work could not be identified as a specific type of building. Perhaps this would have been different if Bamburst had been built in, say, Indonesia, where it is far more common to use bamboo as a building material.

Finally, the uses of Bamburst will be analysed by means of the Open Call- and Fringe activities that were organised inside the work. Thanks to sixteen events, Bamburst was one of the most frequently ‘rented’ artworks of Sonsbeek ’16. Aside from the practical advantages it offered, like space

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(unlike most of the other installations, Bamburst could offer space to about forty people), its aesthetic appeal undoubtedly played a role. The question if the activities corresponded to the intention of the artist and the meaning of the artwork – insofar as the artist has explained it –, is to some degree problematic given the artist’s wish to leave the use of his work up to the public’s imagination. Yet, many of the activities were based on its basic facility to bring people together in one space. Bamburst was used twice for a birthday party, once for a farewell party, a private dinner, a wedding (fig. 39), and a photoshoot of a just married couple. Other less festive but noteworthy activities were the yoga classes of Lidy Rijntjes, the concert by Gonda van der Zwaag, and Silent Sky Project #72 (fig. 40) by artist Rob Sweere. Although some Open Call participants could also have chosen to organise their activities in other artworks, for instance in Rob Voerman’s installation, Richard Bell’s tent, KUNSTrePUBLIK’s tent, or Alphons ter Avest’s bakery, it can be argued, that Prawoto’s non-political, more neutral work was more suitable for such activities, both due to its practical opportunities, and its openness as an artwork. Its central location in park Sonsbeek, next to two restaurants, probably also contributed to its appeal.

All in all, both the relatively large number and the diversity of the events inside Bamburst seemed to be evidence of its relatively high use-value as a work of art. In a literal and figurative sense, Bamburst was an open space. Accordingly, its usefulness stemmed from its versatility as a platform, through which people with different backgrounds and different intentions were able to express themselves in an unusual setting, by throwing a party, a dinner or a wedding, or by promoting their skills and professions like Lidy Rijntjes, Gonda van der Zwaag, and Rob Sweere. For the majority of the events, the artwork’s aesthetic appeal was possibly decisive, perhaps not just for the couple that got married, and the people that did the wedding photoshoot, but also for yoga teacher Lidy Rijntjes, singer Gonda van der Zwaag, and artist Rob Sweere.

Thus, the usefulness of Bamburst seemed, first of all, the result of its unique aesthetic cachet, which evidently befitted and contributed to the unique character of some of the events (the farewell party, the wedding, and the wedding photoshoot in particular come to mind). Perhaps the majority of the Open Call activities not only proved the artwork’s immanent aesthetic appeal, but also exposed its user-generated function as being primarily aesthetic. Can it therefore be concluded that Bamburst was to a large degree useful precisely because it was beautiful? This would undeniably be at odds with Stephen Wright’s assertion that art’s aesthetic function needs to be eradicated before usership is possible, and more broadly his rejection of the Modernist paradigm, imbued by Immanuel Kant’s

243 Rob Sweere’s Silent Sky Project is an ongoing series of performance-like events that has so far taken place in twenty-eight different countries worldwide since 2004. Each time Sweere asks people to participate by laying down on the ground to look at the sky together. The locations have been diverse: from the countryside in Haarlemmermeer in the Netherlands, to the snow of Greenland and the public square in front of the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Additionally, the number of participants varied from two people in Melbourne in Australia to two thousand on the island Terschelling in the Netherlands. Sweere’s first Silent Sky Project was Arnhem, and for the seventy-first one, organised in Eko Prawoto’s Bamburst, he returned to Arnhem. See http://robsweere.com/category/silentskyproject/ (last accessed on 18 January 2018).
notion of art’s purposeless purpose. Assuming the work’s primary function is aesthetic, is, however, not inconsistent with Prawoto’s intention: to leave the function up to the users. Making an installation without any clear meaning or function, Prawoto was perhaps, as an ‘architect-turned-artist’, the most generous in anticipating the public’s freedom to repurpose artworks.

3.2.2 *The-the Servant-servant of-of the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving*

Slavs and Tatars has created a different, but no less intentionally open-ended artwork for *Sonsbeek ’16*. A collective of artists and researchers whose members come and go, Berlin-based Slavs and Tatars investigates cultural-historical phenomena from the area roughly in between the east of Berlin and the West of the Great wall of China. This is a complex area due to the immense diversity of cultures of which many are neither European, Russian or Asian. Slavs and Tatars’ research projects usually take several years, after which they present the outcomes in the form of artworks, publications and lecture/performances. At the time of *Sonsbeek ’16*, Slavs and Tatars engaged in researching the concept of Orientalism, but their work for the exhibition seems unrelated to this theme.

In a quiet location in park Sonsbeek, Slavs and Tatars presented a hidden church, inspired on hidden churches in forests in Poland and the Czech Republic and Slovakia that were built of out need by Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth century after their religion was compromised by the contra-reformation. Similar to hidden churches from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the benches of the hidden church in Sonsbeek are made out of tree logs. The church in Sonsbeek is, however, missing the usual altar. Instead of the altar, the crossed, wooden hands in the above trees, which represent bookstand holders, are showing people the way to the east (fig. 30). While Slavs and Tatars initially planned to include an altar on the east side, they decided not to do so to stimulate visitors to sit in any direction they like. In effect, they have left visitors without a clear reference to a church so that they were able to freely use and experience the work in their own ways. The long title of the artwork, *The-the Servant-servant of-of the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving*, seems to point to its function as a church space, but the doubling of the words makes it elusive. Instead of referring to faithful people in general, the title is the English translation of the Muslim name Abd-el-Ghaffer, which was adopted by the famous Dutch arabist and islamologist Christian Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936) when he converted to Islam.

Everything considered, Slavs and Tatars created an open-ended and ambivalent artwork. In its most basic sense, the work marks a secluded area in the forest with tree logs which people can walk past or sit on. If one takes Slavs and Tatars’ inspiration for the work and its title into account, the space becomes fraught with the notions of resisting and choosing religious conversion, and freedom of religion – themes that are very topical these days due to threats posed by extremist forms of religions.

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244 Exhibition catalogue *SONSBEEK ‘16: transACTION* (also known as the ‘Action book’), no page number.
246 Ibid.
Whether *The-the Servant-servant of-of the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving* has to be understood as an open-ended place, or in fact a hidden church or some sort of (religious) sanctuary, seems entirely a matter of the imagination, or perhaps the needs, of the public. The ambivalence of the artwork resounds in Slavs and Tatars’ aim to “make art that does not look like art, but invites people to contemplate”. This can be extended to Stephen Wright’s ideas on the concept allure.

At first glance from a distance, *The-the Servant-servant of-of the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving* indeed does not strike the visitor as a work of art, perhaps mainly because of the unexpected location. However, upon discovering the crafted hands and the neat rows of tree trunks, it seems likely that most people eventually came to think of the work as art, or at least as an artistic gesture. This was perhaps not the case when visitors did not spot the hands, or when they thought the hands and logs did not belong together. Since *The-the Servant-servant* is not directly identifiable as anything but art, it is not only problematic to distinguish an usual and artistic layer, but also to relate it to Wright’s terms allure, double ontology, and coefficient of art. When comparing Slavs and Tatars’ hidden church to Eko Prawoto’s bamboo installation, for example, the latter has more ordinary characteristics. Thanks to familiar aspects such as walls, windows, and doors, *Bamburst* can be interpreted as both a building (or more broadly speaking as architecture) and a work of art. It can be argued that tree trunks are the only conceivable ordinary aspect of *The-the Servant-servant* in that they can be interpreted as benches. On the whole, Slavs and Tatars’ work is not ordinary, because of the ambiguous crossed hands high up in the trees which are unrecognisable as bookstand holders. It therefore also seems difficult to define this artwork in terms of allure; when people experience the space, the work reveals itself to most of them as an artwork – that is, if people realised the hands and the logs were complementing elements. Though the hidden church is less everyday than the bamboo installation, it might be, paradoxically, closer to possessing allure precisely because of its ambiguity, but also as a result of its partial concealment by trees. Without looking up in the trees and noticing the wooden hands, some people will probably not identify *The-the Servant-servant* as a work of art. Thus, it can be argued that the allure of a useful artwork is not necessarily the result of its usual quality. Wright’s term double ontology seems inapplicable to the hidden church. As shown above, I would argue the work lacks usualness, and as it is, visually speaking, an open-ended space rather than a hidden church, designating a primary and secondary ontology seems impossible.

By analysing the *Open Call* activities that took place in and around *The-the Servant-servant of-of the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving*, further insights can be gained regarding the correlation between an artwork’s open-endedness and people’s uses of it. Remarkably, only two activities are known to have taken place at the site of the artwork, of which the first one was co-executed by the education team of Foundation Sonsbeek, and the second was part of the *Open Call* program. On 30 June, the “church” was used by a class of children from the primary school Pieter de Jongeling from

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Arnhem for a get-to-know-one-another meeting with refugees from the former Dome Prison in Arnhem (fig. 41). With self-made picknick rugs depicting images and words in three languages, the children and the refugees tried to communicate with each other whilst eating and playing games. One of the reactions afterwards of a refugee was: “can we do this again soon?” On 24 July, The-the Servant-servant of-the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving served as a temporary stage for the concert of singer Edima. Her performance was part of the free Festival Waterdruppels (‘Festival Raindrops’), which also presented a performance by musicians of Arnhemland at Rob Voerman’s installation The Exchange.

These two very different activities seem to corroborate the open-endedness of Slavs and Tatars’ installation. Neither of the activities are directly relatable to the work’s possible function as a hidden church. The choice for The-the Servant-servant may have been largely determined by the location of the work, albeit for seemingly different reasons. For the get-to-know-one-another meeting between children and refugees, the work’s silence and spaciousness was presumably determinative, and perhaps also the opportunity to play among the trees. As it was a private activity, both the children and the refugees must have benefitted from not being distracted by too many curious passersby. The location of The-the Servant-servant could have had a slightly different allure for singer Edima, who gave a public concert. The natural beauty of the many surrounding trees and the tree logs, which could be used as seats by the audience, perhaps made her decide upon this artwork. The fact that only two activities took place at Slavs and Tatars’ The-the Servant-servant seemed to point to its limited use-value as an artwork. In the end, the work was maybe too minimalistic and ambiguous to inspire more uses. The lack of electricity was, in any way, an important practical drawback.

3.3 Sociopolitical: Vvestlife, and The Exchange

Some artwork in Sonsbeek ‘16 did not incite playful or unparticular uses. They aimed to raise more awareness about some of the biggest challenges people are facing today, not just in Arnhem and The Netherlands, but worldwide. In doing so, they aspired to open up discussions on contested issues, and ultimately to give impetus to social and political changes. Three of the most overtly political artworks were Vvestlife (2016) (fig. 42) by the German collective KUNSTrePUBLIK, which addressed the European refugee crisis, Rob Voerman’s The Exchange (2016) (fig. 43 and 44), which focused on worldwide pollution and the concommittant climate change, and Richard Bell’s Aboriginal Embassy (2013) (fig. 45), a protest against the inequality between Aboriginals and Australians. Aside from Slavs and Tatar’s installation, another less explicitly political work was Alphons ter Avest’s Bakehouse, which touched upon the increased polarisation of societies. Regardless of the ways in which their artworks were appropriated for use, people’s activities were inevitably weighed in relation

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248 Information received from Neelke Jacobs, who worked for the education team of Foundation Sonsbeek.
249 Information received from Sonsbeek production team.
to the sociopolitical messages of the artworks. It would therefore seem plausible that, in comparison with the previously analysed playful and open-ended artworks, these installations of KUNSTrePUBLIK, Rob Voerman, Richard Bell, and perhaps also Alphons ter Avest’s work, were more capable of eliciting specific sociopolitically critical and personal reactions and uses. This will be investigated through analysing Vvestlife and The Exchange, which entertained the most Open Call activities. The degree to which these works successfully steered toward sociopolitical, artwork-related uses and changes is, as stipulated before, of importance for assessing their potential usefulness as artworks.

Another distinction between the three abovementioned sociopolitical works and the five previously discussed works is their lack of a double ontology. In terms of their materiality, the sociopolitical artworks did not possess any usual qualities, and consequently visitors knew right away that they were encountering works of art. This makes it impossible to relate Vvestlife and The Exchange to Stephen Wright’s concepts allure and double ontology.

3.3.1 Vvestlife

Berlin-based artists Matthias Einhoff (Hildesheim, 1972), Philip Horst (Hamburg, 1972), and Harry Sachs (Stuttgart, 1974) from the non-profit collective KUNSTrePUBLIK, which was founded in 2006, created a prominent five-meters-high tent that they titled Vvestlife. Close to the well-known large pond, and visible from the motor road next to park Sonsbeek, the work drew attention because of its bright orange roof, which consisted of about five hundred life vests. Collected from beaches on the island Lesbos in Greece, all these life vests were supposedly worn by refugees on their risky journey to Europe across the Aegean sea. When the artists opened the vests, they turned out to be fake: the material inside was insufficient for saving a person from drowning. This not only makes the choice of refugees to leave everything behind far more poignant, but it also provoked a feeling of discomfort in viewers of the artwork.

By confronting park goers with the refugee crisis, of which most of them are only informed by the media, KUNSTrePUBLIK envisioned their artwork as a disruption from the main uses of the park to relax, socialise, and work out. And what better way to do so than by displaying hundreds of life vests, one of the most tangible and symbolic remnants of a continuing crisis. Besides the life vests, the symbolic power of Vvestlife resulted from its star shape, referring to the European Union whose flag is a circle of stars (a replica of this flag could be spotted on top of the tent). Vvestlife was designed to function as a parliament. Inside were rows of chairs covered with life vests in all four corners, and a sound scape with critical songs about the handling of the refugee crisis. Peculiarly, several songs were based on well-known Dutch football songs – for example, “hup Holland hup, laat de leeuw niet in zijn hempie staan”, was turned into “hup EU hup, laat de mens niet in zijn hempie staan” – that were

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250 The author in conversation with Philip Horst.
interspersed with sounds of cheering people. By playing these songs and the sounds of cheers, KUNSTrePUBLIK wanted to intertwine the European football championship of 2016, which excluded the Dutch team, to the concomitant humanitarian crisis in Europe. As a result, visitors could contemplate the meaning behind the contrast between, on the one hand, the artwork’s function as a parliament for everybody, where people gather to voice their ideas, and its reference to a football stadium on the other hand, where people gather to encourage their team. In addition to the possibility to sit down and spontaneously exchange thoughts inside Vvestlife, there was the opportunity to send in comments on the refugee crisis on the special website www.vvestlife.eu. A selection of the comments was eventually transformed into songs by a choir, and played inside the artwork in the remaining weeks of the exhibition. With regard to the uses of Vvestlife as an alternative parliament for the discussion of the refugee crisis or otherwise, three different levels could be distinguished. Firstly, the artwork could be freely and spontaneously used by everybody during the day, for instance as a platform to exchange thoughts about the refugee crisis. Secondly, through the aforementioned website, people were able to use the artwork as a mouthpiece to spread their ideas and sentiments. Thirdly, Vvestlife was available for use within the frame of the Open Call program.

Bringing the theme of migration and its seemingly critical momentum to the attention, as well as exploring public spaces and empowering publics, are exemplary characteristics of KUNSTrePUBLIK’s practice in and outside Berlin. Since 2012, their activities have been concentrated in Berlin at the self-founded Center for Art and Urbanistics (Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik) (ZK/U). Based in a former railway depot, the ZK/U offers residencies for artists, academics, and other practitioners (for instance architects and urban developers) who want to contribute to one or more of the four defined research directions. Migration is central to the fourth research direction, for which the satellite project ZUsammenKUNFT was set up in 2015. Through various sub-projects and initiatives, focused for example on art and culture (Mind Lab) (nomadicART), dance (Mobile Dance), education (Refugee Academy), and journalism (Deutsch-Arabischer Pressclub), ZUsammenKUNFT aims to bring refugees and Berliners into closer contact with each other. Whilst opportunities are created for the integration of refugees, artists are able to explore art’s usefulness as a tool for social inclusion and cultural exchange.

Before I will return to Vvestlife, the abovementioned sub-projects and initiatives of ZUsammenKUNFT are related to the Arte Útil criteria to create more insight in KUNSTrePUBLIK’s identity as an art collective. At least six of the eight Arte Útil criteria are applicable to ZUsammenKUNFT: art is used in innovative ways in society, in this case to bridge gaps between Berliners and refugees (criterion 1); artists respond to a current urgency, to improve the integration of refugees (criterion 3); artists operate on a 1:1 scale (criterion 4); artists have become initiators as

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opposed to authors, and their audiences (old and new Berliners) are not spectators but users (criterion 5); practical and beneficial outcomes are achieved for users, such as learning to speak German (criterion 6); outcomes are sustainable, for instance speaking a new language (criterion 7). One of the leading questions (i.e. goals) that ZK/U has formulated in relation to migration, ‘How can art, culture and craft offer a way out of social displacement and generate a sense of belonging?’ is clearly akin to the Arte Útil philosophy that emphasises art’s socially ameliorative potential. In short, through their multifunctional platform ZK/U, KUNSTRePUBLIK attempts to bring people from different backgrounds and disciplines together to collectively engage with and speculate about global and local issues, communities, and, in a broader sense, the city.

All of the Open Call activities in and around Vvestlife were public, and interestingly most of them were informed by the political content of the work. With four appearances, the installation just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt. (2015) (fig. 46) was the most recurring Open Call activities at Vvestlife. This installation was created by artist Adam Uriel Ruff as an ice cream truck, made to look like the yellow water reservoirs that are transported for water supply purposes through Palestinian villages. The ice cream cones, which were sold by donations, also referred to Palestine: olive oil is one of the ingredients of the ice cream. The ice cream installation initially aimed to raise awareness about the hardships of Palestinians in Israël. As part of the Open Call, analogously to the function of Vvestlife to confront people with the European refugee crisis, just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt. seemed to make people aware of the consequences of conflicts in the Middle East. Thanks to refugees from Arnhem, who sometimes helped by making ice creams, Uriel Ruff’s work was arguably more powerful in terms of eliciting verbal transactions. And because of the participating refugees, its relation to Vvestlife became more apparent. The similar political messages of both artworks, to raise awareness about those in need in the Middle East, who do not have a voice in Europe, had a light-hearted element to them. Vvestlife drew a somewhat humourous reference to the European football Championships, whereas just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt. offered a light diversion due to the, for The Netherlands, peculiar ice cream. Because of the close proximity of these artworks, and their thematic connection, it can be said that the artists reciprocally supported each other’s causes, resulting perhaps in sending off more powerful messages, or opening up new questions and transactions.

For the course of one day, Radio Beumer, an ongoing interview project of interview studio Studio Beumer (StuBe), unmistakably added another layer of meaning to the theme of Vvestlife, as well as that of Sonsbeek ’16. Conducting three-to-five-minute interviews – transactions – with random visitors of park Sonsbeek in her distinct red Toyota Corolla, Sara Beumer asked passersby the question ‘When were you a newcomer?’ (fig. 47). The link with (Syrian) refugees, the newcomers of Europe whose journeys were epitomised by the life vests, was easily made. As the question was also written

252 See http://www.zku-berlin.org/concept/ (last accessed on 8 June 2017).
253 See https://www.haagsekunstenaars.nl/cv/79458/Adam+Uriel+Ruff (last accessed 17 January 2018).
on a sign in front of the car, which was in turn parked in front of Vvestlife, Beumer’s concept came across as fairly simple and accessible. All the interviews are available on YouTube, as an online archive of diverse personal stories with different takes on the subject of feeling like a newcomer. Among them is an interview with a former Syrian refugee, who came to The Netherlands eighteen years ago.254 In a similar fashion to KUNSTrePUBLIK, which invited people to leave comments on the website www.vvestlife.eu, Sara Beumer gave people a platform to ventilate their thoughts and feelings. Yet Beumer’s approach and her invitation appear to be less overtly political and more personal as she was present on the spot, asking people about their personal experiences. This may have lowered the barrier to people.

A third event that is worth discussing in some detail, as it was also connected to the refugee crisis is Krijgers van Arnhem (‘Warriors of Arnhem’) (fig. 48), organised by the travelling ‘writers café’ OSCAR inside Vvestlife on 16 September. This one-day event was the grand finale of the eponymous radio interview series with inhabitants of Arnhem, which OSCAR created on invitation of RURU Radio. One of the interviews, with a male Syrian refugee, was the point of departure for several creative minds who were asked by OSCAR to participate in Krijgers van Arnhem inside Vvestlife. During the event, the interview with this refugee was replayed. His story resonated in the musical performances of singer-songwriters Rick Krewal and Simone Lieberwirth, and poet and musician Ronny Shenk. Writer Lilian Regtvoort recited her poem Breathless that was also inspired by the refugee’s life story. In between the performances was a public discussion session about the topic ‘fleeing for freedom?’. Additionally, artists Herbert van der Lugt (Arnhem) and Khattar Shaheen (an artist and Syrian refugee from Arnhem) exhibited numerous paintings and drawings (mostly portraits) in Vvestlife (fig. 49).255 The result was a multi-disciplinary and multi-layered program, conveying a personal story which simultaneously raised awareness about the situation of all refugees living in Arnhem. By addressing the story of one refugee, a member of a vulnerable minority in Arnhem, The Netherlands, and also Europe, and by showing artworks from a Syrian refugee, Krijgers van Arnhem to some extent increased the urgency and tangibility of the refugee crisis. At all times casting an orange light on the performances and everyone inside, the five hundred life vests potently supported the event of OSCAR.

Lastly, the political fashion show If the Sea Could Talk (26 August) (fig. 50) can be seen as one of the most striking uses of Vvestlife. On invitation of ruangrupa, the Copenhagen-based organisation CAMP (Center for Art on Migration Politics) organised this forty-five-minute fashion show together with Rwandan artist and fashion designer Dady de Maximo, and the foundation Arnhem voor Vluchtelingen (‘Arnhem for Refugees’). What unites them is a commitment that also

254 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VN3rChDHMjE&list=PLVfYyvSHDZg63cMObcLar4jf0zZghv6cSl&index=7 (last accessed on 20 December 2017).
evidently applies to KUNSTrePUBLIK: to help refugees by giving them a voice. After an introductory talk by Danish curator and one of the founders of CAMP, Frederikke Hansen, male and female models walked out of Vvestlife to show de Maximo’s creations to the public. The collection they showed not only consisted of satin dresses and suits, but also of pieces that were made with UNHCR rice bags and orange life vests. It seems that these contrasting glamorous and expensive, and unusual and cheap materials highlighted the unequal status of citizens and refugees. Significantly, the male and female models included refugees from Arnhem who participated as volunteers. However, because of the different nationalities of the models, the refugees completely blended in with the professional models – their differences were momentaril erased. On multiple levels, Vvestlife nurtured transactions; ruangrupa collaborated with CAMP, Frederikke Hanse with Dady de Maximo, Dady de Maximo with refugees, refugees with models, etc. For the duration of the event, its organisers and contributors became active users of art, whilst all the members of the audience were turned into passive spectators. To some extent, the fashion show was therefore like any other art performance with spectacularised ‘art’ and passive spectators, to which both Tania Bruguera and Stephen Wright so strongly oppose (and many others for this matter). Despite not having been able to actively participate, the public became aware of the use-value of art, and the active role they themselves might assume if they would organise an event.

Two other Open Call activities also “activated” Vvestlife, but the organisers of these activities did not establish an explicit connection with the work’s theme. Performing outside the tent, the Volver choir used the chairs from the artwork as seats for their audience. The choir sang Spanish songs, which seemed to be unrelated to Vvestlife, against the background of the life vests. As a result, the life vests and the artwork itself functioned, both literally and figuratively speaking, as the background of the performance. This was presumably also the case with Word Bites, a mixed performance with poetry and music by Hugo de Haas. For both the Volver choir and de Haas, Vvestlife served as a free stage to show their skills, enabling them to reach out to new people.

Most of the Open Call activities at Vvestlife gave refugees from Arnhem the opportunity to participate, and in case of three events – just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt, Krijgers van Arnhem, and If the Sea could Talk – refugees played a role in bringing the projects to life. Analysing the Open Call events vis-à-vis Vvestlife provides valuable insights in how people can meaningfully contribute to a work of art, whilst this work of art simultaneously supports the aims and ideas of a certain community. Thus, by offering a platform to refugees from Arnhem, the organisers of the Open Call activities (in combination with Vvestlife) fulfilled a context-dependant, political use-value. In terms of generating sustainability, one of Bruguera’s criteria for Arte Útil, it can be argued that the usefulness of Vvestlife remained limited as the position of refugees in Arnhem was not significantly and irrevocably improved. However, the artwork did mediate transactions between different

inhabitants from Arnhem. As such, mutual understanding and solidarity may have been achieved on a micro-level. Small outcomes, however small they may be, ought to be acknowledged.

3.3.2 The Exchange

One of park Sonsbeek’s most iconic places was chosen by Dutch, Arnhem-based artist Rob Voerman (Deventer, 1966). His site-specific installation The Exchange incorporated the so-called Grote Waterval (‘Large Waterfall’), one of the largest artificially created waterfalls in The Netherlands, dating from 1826.\(^\text{257}\) The prominent right part of the installation, which was built across the water to completely conceal the waterfall (fig. 44), consisted of an irregularly shaped construction made out of aluminum, round glass windows, and small, differently-colored stained glass windows. Bringing up all sorts of associations, the construction looked like a cross between a cave, something from outer space, and a Frank Gehry folly.\(^\text{258}\) Inside were tables and chairs, where visitors could sit to watch and listen to the waterfall. The open left part of Voerman’s installation, mostly constructed with wood, functioned as an entrance, on top of which the title of work was visible. Thanks to the large table, it could be used as a space for talks and meetings (Rob Voerman sometimes worked here on his laptop). The Exchange was built as a kind of bank. As its extraordinary exterior and location foretold, it stood out completely from ordinary banks.

Voerman’s bank introduced visitors to a new currency, called ‘The Square’, whose bills were designed by the artist himself. In addition to depicting one of seven types of habitats (forest, ocean, desert, mountains, arctic, tundra, and the city), every single bill contains an unique QR-code. This code represents one single square meter somewhere in the world, either on land or in the water. By scanning the QR-code on the self-chosen bill with a mobile phone, visitors were not only able to see which square meter on earth is connected to their bill, but also uncovered its value. If the square meter of land or water turns out to be gravely polluted, the value of the bill is more or less between zero and ten, whereas if the square meter is unpolluted, it has a value of one hundred.\(^\text{259}\) Whenever a lucky visitor acquired a bill with the maximum value, she or he earned a symbolic reward in the shape of a glass of mineral water. Unsurprisingly, relatively few square meters on earth are perfectly unpolluted, and consequently very few bills have a value of one hundred. In a world where a currency is derived from the environmental condition of land and water, it would, hypothetically speaking, become profitable to undo, reduce, and prevent pollution on a global scale. Herein lies Voerman’s message: tying our monetary and ecological systems together is the only way to put a stop to pollution and global warming. With this in mind, while listening to the loud sounds of rushing water, it is as if


\(^{258}\) After the ending of Sonsbeek ‘16, this part of Rob Voerman’s installation was reinstalled on land, at sculpture park Anningahof in Zwolle (The Netherlands), as part of their 2017 sculpture exhibition, see http://www.anningahof.nl/2017_tentoonstelling.html (last accessed on 18 November 2017).

\(^{259}\) To determine the values of square meters of land and water, Voerman used databases, available for everyone on the internet. See http://www.robvoerman.nl/projects/the-exchange (last accessed on 19 November 2017).
the waterfall is safeguarded inside the bank like a natural treasure. Perhaps water will be the gold of the future.

In accordance with his desire to increase the awareness of the importance of protecting nature, Rob Voerman used his artwork to raise money for the foundation Masarang, which endeavours to protect the rainforests and animals of Indonesia together with local communities. By selling sets of Square bills and postcards, Voerman and the Sonsbeek hosts managed to collect €8283. After the founder of Masarang, dr. ir. Willie Smits, received the check on 17 September, he gave a talk about his projects in Indonesia at the ruru huis. Thanks to the fundraising, The Exchange was put to use for a cause from which people, in this case Indonesians, would later profit. It can be seen as a ‘transACTION’, between Voerman, the Sonsbeek hosts, visitors, and Smits, which also goes ‘beyond action’, because Voerman helped other people via Masarang. When combining the efforts of Voerman and Smits, The Exchange arguably qualifies as Useful Art; Voerman is of course not the first artists to critically address the problem of pollution, but unlike many others, he and Smits achieved visible results, succeeding in making a difference.

With seventeen Open Call activities – almost twice as many as Vvestlife –, Rob Voerman’s The Exchange was unquestionably a popular work during Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION. Similar to Eko Prawoto’s bamboo installation, its location and original aesthetic must have contributed to its appeal. However, as explained in the introduction, it can be argued that the relatively large number of activities not automatically equates the artwork’s high use-value. To form an understanding of the use-value of The Exchange, three events that can be linked to Voerman’s intentions (insofar as he has explained it) are singled out for analysis. The fourteen remaining events, among them several private birthday parties, get-togethers, and musical performances, either appear to be unrelated to The Exchange (they could also have taken place in or around another artwork), or they are difficult to examine in relation to the work, because of the lack of information.

Yoga teacher Doris Lilienweiss devised a somewhat surprising, artwork-inspired activity. On the grass next to The Exchange, she organised a themed yoga session, focussed on the question ‘How can practicing yoga contribute to a more sustainable world?’ Lilienweiss was supported by hang player Sebastiaan Stevens, whose percussion instrument matched well with the calm and contemplative nature of the yoga class. For those who merely witnessed the session, it was as if there was no connection whatsoever between the yoga and The Exchange. After all, yoga is not uncommon in park Sonsbeek during the summer. Taking its inspiration from Voerman’s artwork, Lilienweiss’ exclusive yoga class, in a sense, pushed the boundaries of yoga as a therapeutic practice that mainly involves introspection. In return, the boundaries of Voerman’s artwork, that is, the limits of its

usefulness, were stretched a little further; _The Exchange_ was not really suitable for yoga, but it nonetheless inspired a yoga session. Moreover, two different disciplines (i.e. yoga and art), which generally operate separately, were temporarily brought together.

On 17 July and 11 September, artists Lieke Schouten and José Sprenkels showed their miniature paintings in their own exhibition _Op de Bank_ (‘At the Bank’) (fig. 51). In size and subject, the paintings are quite similar: most of the works are only ten by ten centimeters, depicting abstract and figurative landscapes. The paintings seem to explore and emphasise different aspects of nature’s beauty, in a slightly romantic and idealised way. Given Voerman’s ideas behind _The Exchange_, by which he essentially aimed to provoke more discussion on the preservation of nature and its resources, it could be argued that the location of Schouten and Sprenkels’ exhibition was well chosen. Yet, the link between the exhibition and Voerman’s installation was also kind of vague. For one, the artists did not explain the relationship between their works and aims, nor those of Voerman’s. It would seem therefore that the paintings were not made especially to acknowledge or contribute to Voerman’s artwork, also because ‘nature’ is a returning theme in the oeuvre of both artists. On the one hand, the exhibition _Op de Bank_ seemed to attest to the use-value of _The Exchange_, because the paintings and Voerman’s work complemented each other thematically. On the other hand, it is surprising that Schouten and Sprenkels did not clarify their choice for _The Exchange_ and the (thematically) connection, which to some degree makes the exhibition, as well as the use-value of Voerman’s work, arbitrary.

On the final day of Sonsbeek ’16: _transACTION_, as part of the ‘Best of Open Call’, Sara Beumer parked her car closely to _The Exchange_. Identical to the three previous recordings of Studio Beumer, next to _Bakehouse_, _Vvestlife_, and the _ruru huis_, the spontaneous interviews hinged on one question that was based on the artwork: ‘Can we do without money?’. This time, though, the question was not as much personal as hypothetical and philosophical. Many of the interviewed people shared their dislike of the effects of money, elaborating for example on seemingly better alternatives (such as countertrading), or the negative ways in which money rules people’s lives. A world without money is, however, according to most of these people, simply impossible. Contributing to Voerman’s artwork as a platform for political discussion, Studio Beumer offers a timely discourse on the role of money as a system that remains largely unquestioned. This online discourse was to a large extent based on an artwork, but it was directly established by members of the public, without Rob Voerman, ruangrupa, a banker, or any other “expert(s)”.

Judging by the number and the diversity of the _Open Call_ events, _The Exchange_ was one of the works from _Sonsbeek ’16_ with a relatively high use-value. However, an analysis of the _Open Call_ activities in relation to the works where they took place seems to demonstrate a relatively minimal use-value. Contrary to _Vvestlife_, the majority of the _Open Call_ activities were thematically unrelated to

263 See the playlist at Youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLViYvSHDZg61WVzSx6RQs2pd2-VD9zkvC (last accessed on 17 January 2018).
The Exchange. This difference is hard to explain, and perhaps mainly a coincidence. One of the explanations is that, contrary to Vvestlife, the political message of The Exchange was not really explicitly visualised. Because of the huge amount of life vests used for Vvestlife, the ‘political expressiveness’ trumped the aesthetic qualities of the work. With The Exchange it was arguably the other way around: the aesthetic qualities of the imaginatively shaped installation, and Voerman’s artistic craftsmanship seemed dominant elements of the work. This different focus of attention on political expressiveness and aesthetics may have resulted in relatively many (Vvestlife) and fewer (The Exchange) political, artwork-specific uses. Both in terms of practical possibilities (e.g. space, table and chairs, availability of electricity), their central location, and the urgency of the addressed political issue, The Exchange and Vvestlife appear to be quite similar. However, since (Syrian) refugees first arrived in Arnhem at the end of 2015, and the sheltering of refugees continued to be a very sensitive topic of debate throughout The Netherlands in 2016, the refugee crisis may have generally received more attention and momentum than worldwide pollution and climate change. Whereas Vvestlife was used as a platform by some refugees and people who wanted to help them, The Exchange was in the end not taken up as a free tool by nature enthusiasts or activists, or champions of a alternative currencies for that matter.

3.4 A critical article about Sonsbeek '16: transACTION

After the opening of Sonsbeek '16: transACTION, important national newspapers (NRC and Volkskrant), and even The New York Times brought the exhibition to the attention of readers, praising the ways local communities and others were involved and enabled to participate. Its unpretentious and accessible theme can also be seen as one of the reasons for the good reception of Sonsbeek '16, which resulted in an estimated 150,000 visitors. Not everybody was amused with the possibility to become a participant as opposed to a spectator. During an interview, well-known Dutch writer Jan Siebelink (1938), for example, disapproved of Sonsbeek '16, saying that he “just wants someone to make beautiful art.”264 The brief evaluation of Jeroen Boomgaard, lecturer Art and Public Space at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, will be discussed below to formulate a critical position regarding the approach of ruangrupa and the artists of Sonsbeek '16 to make useful platforms for transactions.

In his short article ‘De vierde wand en het derde object’ (‘The fourth wall and third object’) (2016), Jeroen Boomgaard comparatively examines Sonsbeek '16 and Manifesta 11 (2016), based on their shared aim of involving publics in contemporary art. With regard to Manifesta 11, Boomgaard characterises the collaborations between artists and a number of inhabitants of Zürich as individual,

one-to-one exchanges. Whereas participation within the frame of Manifesta 11 took place during the making of artworks, which were later shared with audiences, Sonsbeek '16 invited everyone to use the works after their installment. Unlike Manifesta 11, as Boomgaard sees it, Sonsbeek '16 at all times kept the door open for exchanges, and appropriations of artworks.

Because of ongoing opportunities for transactions during Sonsbeek '16, between the artworks, hosts, and publics, Boomgaard states that art was “extradited” to users in the name of “servitude.” He illustrates this with Alphons ter Avest’s Bakehouse, Maze de Boer’s Common Ground, and Rosella Biscotti’s Yow-wow-wow-wow-wow (this last work is not discussed in this thesis). With the bakery and the playground, the artist-intended “servitude” was fixed from the beginning: baking and playing. These dominant functions, to Boomgaard, prevented the works from speaking to the imagination, and therefore they partly “disappeared”. Unlike Bakehouse, and Common Ground, the “servitude” of Biscotti’s installation was unclear. Yet, this work in the end also did not stir the imagination, according to Boomgaard, because of the host, who explained ideas behind the work to visitors.

On the one hand, there is truth to Boomgaard’s critical remark. Since the servitude of some works was immediately apparent, it can be argued that transactions between the public and these works were too determined by the works and the artists. However, on the other hand, Boomgaard omits the Open Call, and therefore he pays no attention to the self-invented uses it encouraged. Consequently, he leaves out the fact that the servitude (i.e. usefulness) of the works was also very much in the hands of the public. Rather than unacknowledging the different dimensions of meaning of the artworks, and thus letting the artworks partly “disappear”, many organisers and participants of Open Call activities did in fact enrich and support these dimensions of meaning in different ways. Krijgers van Arnhem provided extra context to the refugee crisis and the political message of Vvestlife, for example, and the wedding that took place in Bamburst seemed to enhance the distinct materiality of work instead of making it superfluous. Additionally, as was argued in this chapter, the Open Call showed that despite the more or less obvious servitude of some works, the transactions that took place were not always consistent with the possible servitude of the works. Examples are several music performances in The Exchange, and the performance of the Volver choir next to Vvestlife. Also, the servitude of some artworks, for instance The-the Servant-servant, which was built as a hidden church, seemed to contradict the relatively small number of Open Call activities. In short, whereas Boomgaard argues that on the whole the works to some degree “disappeared” because of their obvious servitude, I would argue instead that the works sometimes seemed to disappear because the uses of the artworks were not always related to their theme and material qualities.

As Boomgaard does not look beyond the predetermined servitude and uses (such as baking with ter Avest’s oven), his claim that visitors were reduced to “consumers” is too overgeneralised. The

266 Ibid.
267 Ibid., 33, 34.
“consumption” of artworks may apply to the predetermined uses, such as baking and playing. However, by leaving out the Open Call, Boomgaard overlooks that the publics (children and adults) were challenged and compelled to creatively express and organise themselves differently, either individually or collectively, and that in doing so, they seemed to momentarily bypass their fixed role as meek consumers. To some degree, the artworks allowed organisers and participants of Open Call activities to push their boundaries, and as a result the works may have provided them with new perspectives on their skills, professions, and ideas. The singers and musicians who performed in Bamburst, The Exchange, Vvestlife, and The-the-Servant-servant, for example, may have had to perform differently due to acoustics, or because of the manners in which audiences were standing, sitting, or walking nearby. What Boomgaard, moreover, ought to have acknowledged is that, presumably, users often did not feel as though they were consumers of art. Visiting a public park is generally not associated with consumerism. Furthermore, whether they were organisers of the Open Call activities or not, people did not have to pay to use the installations, and most of the public Open Call activities were also free of charge.

In concluding his article, Jeroen Boomgaard argues that a metaphorical wall standing in-between the artists and publics was missing during Sonsbeek ’16 and Manifesta 11. Dwelling in the artwork itself, without being entirely submerged with it, this “wall” is baptised as a latent “third object”. Only by engaging with the work of art, would the third object somehow activate itself for the benefit of the onlooker or user. What defines the third object more than anything else, in Boomgaard’s eyes, is its purpose and ability to make spectators and users aware and reflexive of their engagement independently of predetermined intentions, interpretations, or uses offered by the artist through the work.268 Thus, by encompassing a third object, the artwork “makes us wonder why we do what we do, feel what we feel, are what we are.”269 With Alphons ter Avest’s Bakehouse, for example, the third object would have let users of the work reflect on why they are baking, why the process of baking makes them feel what they feel, and how baking eventually affects them as human beings. I would like to point here that despite the artist’s exclusion of a third object, users of ter Avest’s oven may in fact have been aware and reflexive of their baking (why they liked doing it, and how baking defines their personalities). Finally, in following Boomgaard’s argument, it can be said that the third object grants works of art their relative autonomy and right to exist, because of the unique ways in which they trigger people to question certain things.

To prevent the shallow, one-sided consumption of art, that is the non-reciprocal relationship between user and artwork, Boomgaard is right in calling for the need of a third object. Without a third object, people are arguably not immediately supported and motivated to fully grasp how they have used a work of art, and how this has affected them as well as the work, which could mean their use is

269 Ibid.
ultimately not that different from the use of other, more ordinary useful objects such as kitchen utensils. In other words, the third object might be necessary for establishing the use-value of art. Functioning as a sort of wall from which people’s uses “backfire”, the third object seems akin to an encouragement of dialectical thinking. Defined by literary critic Frederic Jameson (1934) as “a thought about thinking itself”²⁷⁰, dialectical thinking is – in a Marxist and Adornian sense – a meta-level of reflexion in the process of constituting knowledge. Similarly, the third object is like a meta-level used for thinking about use-values – a tool for understanding the tool itself.

The third object is an interesting, but also a rather ambiguous and tricky concept. First of all, the presence of a third object within the artwork (its ontology, if you will) is ambiguous, because it is not immediately visible. Secondly, when the third object has become tangible, its effect supposedly has to remain subtle and minimal. This seems difficult to anticipate and control prior to the creation of artworks. Furthermore, the balance between “pulling” people in and “pushing” them away is challenging, and the same goes for the paper-thin line between inspiring self-reflexion, contemplation, and original thought, and steering people towards certain ideas, beliefs, and perhaps even political ideologies. How artists should approach the incorporation of a third object without consciously or unconsciously ‘manipulating’ uses is not addressed by Boomgaard. Tackling the positive and negative effects of a third object, both before making an artwork and after presenting it to audiences, clearly demands caution.

All in all, Boomgaard’s criticism towards Sonsbeek ’16 seems to be aimed at the ways the curators and the artists of the exhibition permitted the partial disappearances of works of art in favour of stimulating transactions between the works, hosts, and the public. Firstly, he claims the works were partially invisible in their inability to stir the imagination, because they were either too overshadowed by their utility, and / or by information provided by the hosts. Secondly, the lack of a “third object”, which would have prompted users to question their uses of artworks, not only led to shallow uses, but also to a limited visibility of the works. The approach of ruangrupa and the artists they invited for Sonsbeek ’16 can be summarised as an “extradition” of art to the public; it did not really matter how or why the artworks were used, as long as people were able to use the works – of course without damaging them. Boomgaard’s point of view centers on his term third object. He stresses that without a third object, audiences cannot engage with art in a meaningful way, and in return artworks are inevitably less meaningful. I would suggest that the third object is ultimately not a solution. Both the extradition of art to the public (attempt to dissolve the hierarchies between curators, artists, and publics), and the incorporation of third object (attempt to establish beneficial boundary between artworks and publics) have considerable risks. Perhaps the main risk of proposing there is no such thing as ‘bad use’, as is apparent from analyses in this chapter, is that uses of artworks are arguably more often than not unrelated to the works, resulting in trivial and non-reflexive uses. Besides its

ambiguous physical qualities, a third object is also fraught with risks, because users may become either too drawn and manipulated by artworks, or they too easily withdraw from using when the effects of the third object are somehow too strong. Thus, as strategies for encouraging meaningful uses and reflections on human life, the extradition of art to the public and the inclusion of a third object may be considered two sides of the same coin.

By “opening the door” to the public’s repurposing of artworks, and thus lowering the barrier, ruangrupa has managed to make some people take a step into relatively unfamiliar territory. Even without third objects, it seems likely that many visitors and users have contemplated and questioned useful art as a strategy to interest people in art. The inclusion of a third object might offer a chance to better anchor and examine the uses and use-value of works of art. Yet, small steps probably need to be taken before it can be successfully implemented; spurring people – including art professionals – to get used to re-using artworks presumably takes time.
CHAPTER 4

The paradoxes of usefulness and uselessness, heteronomy and autonomy

*Can one make works which are not works of ‘art’?*²⁷¹

—Marcel Duchamp

So far, this thesis has explored Useful Art by focusing on the ideas and theories of Tania Bruguera and Stephen Wright, the practice of ruangrupa, and the uses and the use-value of six artworks from Sonsbeek ’16: *transACTION*. In order to gain more insight in the implications of *Sonsbeek ’16* as a Useful Art exhibition, both within the realm of contemporary art and the public domain, this final chapter investigates tensions between art’s usefulness and uselessness, and heteronomy and autonomy.

In encouraging publics to use artworks, *Sonsbeek ’16* repudiated the seemingly exclusive right of art to uselessness, championed for example by Clement Greenberg in the previous century. Because of influential theorists like Greenberg, the negation of art’s uselessness has become synonymous to negating its autonomy, which has to some extent guaranteed art’s ongoing isolation from other fields of enquiry, as well as society at large. This isolation, discussed by Stephen Wright in his lexicon, long enabled art to develop itself as a discipline in relative freedom, preventing it from being absorbed too much by religious, political, and economic interests.²⁷² However, autonomy has increasingly become a millstone around the neck of art. As Wright rightly points out, art is inevitably less authoritative as a result of a focus on autonomy:

> The price to pay for autonomy are the invisible parentheses that bracket art off from being taken seriously as a proposition having consequences beyond the aesthetic realm. Art judged by art’s standards can be easily written off as, well... *just art*.²⁷³

Its reputation as useless has been hollowing out art. By working from the premise of use-value, from the question of how art can be of use to society, artists and art practitioners might buttress the validity and position of art. But could it be that replacing uselessness and autonomy with usefulness and heteronomy comes with difficult obstacles and sacrifices? And are these binary oppositions in the end


²⁷³ Ibid.
perhaps too restrictive and untenable? This final chapter touches upon some of the possibilities and dangers of art-related usefulness as a new approach for executing, curating, and evaluating contemporary art.

4.1 Legitimising contemporary art as useful

Indications for contemporary art’s tenuous position can be found within many Western societies; it is as if art has ended up at the bottom of the food chain. In The Netherlands, due to the financial crisis, the government’s budget cuts have gravely affected the arts and culture sector. The cuts come down to over half a billion euros and the loss of about twenty-thousand permanent job positions since 2013.274 Aimed at improving employment opportunities for artists, a new plan was devised by the Dutch Minister for Culture, and presented by her in February 2018.275 It remains to be seen whether things will significantly change for the better now that The Netherlands is experiencing a growing economy. The second largest, Dutch political party since the elections last year, the PVV, has been strongly opposing the government’s subsidises of the arts for many years, implying art is a ‘leftist hobby’.276 Arts organisations in the United States, particularly small and local initiatives, will probably receive quite a blow as a result of budget cuts during the Donald Trump presidency. As announced in Trump’s budget plan from 2017, the four most important, independent cultural agencies are likely to be cut.277 The lack of financial support from governments forces many artists and others in the field to work (several) side jobs, whilst appealing to other funds and sponsors. This often entails explaining and justifying the potential (cultural, or use-)value of a certain project. It would, thus, seem that clamping on to notions such as art’s ‘purposeless aesthetic purpose’ and ‘art for art’s sake’, or deliberately leaving this open, are luxuries a lot of artists can simply not afford.

Lack of (financial) support can be seen as one side of the story. Another is the struggle to legitimise art, that is, to demonstrate that art can in fact be valuable for society. Reflecting on the situation in The Netherlands, lecturer John Byrne writes: “What was once generally accepted as a necessary and functioning component of a progressive and selfreflexive society is now treated with

distrust and disdain.”\footnote{278} Perhaps more often than not, art professionals fail or neglect to put into words exactly how and why their efforts can be of value to others, from within or beyond the artworld. However, nowadays they cannot always easily get away with that, as was proven, for example, by the controversy surrounding last-year’s, large budget art event Documenta 14 in Athens.\footnote{279}

The assumption that art does not really matter can be refuted by showing what artists have to offer us. Briefly put, they are in a privileged position to question things, as opposed to giving answers, and from this position they could, if they want, strive for social changes. By exposing a different side to a story, viewpoint, or problem, artists are not only able to criticise, and raise awareness and understanding of overlooked limitations, but also to stretch these limitations and broaden perspectives. Correspondingly, the reception of projects may be unexpected, giving rise to new unaccounted and unsolved dilemmas.

Unexpected outcomes are called side effects by artist Cesare Pietroiusti (1956), who started in Psychiatry, and he describes them as indispensible stimuli for further developments of ideas, knowledge, methodologies, etc.\footnote{280} Pietroiusti assumes that art is the only practice “with the freedom to consider side-effects as a positive part of a project.”\footnote{281} Thus, whereas scientific research mostly carries on from, and expands on, positive results, artists work with positive and negative results, which are to some extent impossible to pin down as either positive or negative. Accordingly, achievements cannot be translated into algorithms, models, or technological tools for analysis. In the same way, as I have tried to show, the usefulness of works of art is never a universal fact: unlike, say, a car or a screwdriver, the use-value of artworks demands constant scrutiny.

Despite the fact that art is generally waived off as ‘just art’, artists might have an important role to play in today’s age, which is dominated by technological developments and digital communication. Since people will likely become more and more dependant on technology in the future, artists may in fact have no choice but to pick up on the effects of different technologies on societies. Technology is generally considered a driver of health and wealth. Indeed, with a rapid speed, technological inventions have been profoundly changing and improving the lives of many people on


\footnote{279} Documenta 14 was criticised by several Athenians, whose graffiti slogans, for example, called attention to the neocolonialist connotation of the German art event that was relocated to Greece for the first time – “I refuse to exoticize myself to increase your cultural capital. Signed: The People.” It can be argued, that Documenta 14 was too disconnected from reality to be ratified by the general public. Athens-based curator Nadja Argiropoulou summed up the anger as follows: “Their theory is beautiful, radical and timely, but they didn’t mingle or take the leap into the everyday or address the reality here. Circumstance is what humbles theory and makes art as important as real life.” See Smith, Helena, “‘Crapumenta!’ … Anger in Athens as the blue lambs of Documenta hit town”, The Guardian, 17 May 2017, see https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/may/14/documenta-14-athens-german-art-extravaganza (last accessed on 6 January 2018).


\footnote{281} Ibid., 79.
many levels over the past few decades. It is not really within our power to predict the rammifications of technologies like artificial intelligence, and robots in the future. Alongside the benefits, the dangers of depending on technology have already come into view, among them the protection of privacy. As people slowly seem to turn into slaves of technology, several philosophers, for instance Daniel Dennett, have been drawing attention to the difficult ethical dimensions of technology.\textsuperscript{282} This is where not only philosophers, but also artists could step in. By getting involved with technology, and addressing impending side effects, art may serve as a tool to counterbalance the power of technology, and the hierarchies that come with it. In the process of dealing with other pressing sociopolitical issues, for instance climate change, wealth gaps, and polarisation, artists could also seize opportunities to legitimise art, and thus dismantle the yoke of uselessness. As was demonstrated by several artworks from Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION, art can be useful in bringing people of different layers of society into contact with each other (e.g. citizens of Arnhem and refugees), consequently stimulating social cohesion, understanding, and creative ideas and solutions.

Another element to consider when legitimising art and the work of artists is the seeming need for a foundation for mutual understanding. By this is meant an understanding between art professionals and publics about how art could or maybe should function, as a pluralistic practice that involves people with an art education as much as people who lack it. Art’s claim to uselessness and relative autonomy have been sustaining a gap between the artworld and societies, and consequently between art professionals and publics. In the past as well as the present, people from outside the artworld often, to some extent, have to familiarise themselves with art-specific ways of thinking and making in order to understand and appreciate works of art. They become the ‘receivers who experience’, whereas art professionals are ‘facilitators of experiences’. On the one hand, there is nothing wrong with this: there will always be art collectors and art enthusiasts who merely want to visit museums and galleries for aesthetic experiences. On the other hand, it is safe to say that because of a gap of knowledge and expertise, many people today do not care to make the effort to take an interest in art. As current globalised societies seem to be more and more governed by principles of utility and consumerism, art’s reputation as useless seems to become more and more governed by negative connotations.

Developer of the useful museum, Alistair Hudson, argues that the possibility to use artworks and anticipate their usefulness helps dissolve the barrier between art practitioners and publics.\textsuperscript{283} Through the (mis-)use of a work of art, which does not require art expertise and jargon, people can understand it. Subsequently, these uses might serve as entry points for evolving ‘bottom-up’ art

\textsuperscript{282} Because of the growing influence of technologies, Daniel Dennett, for example, envisages humans will eventually lose their free will. See Dennett, Daniel C., \textit{Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting}, (Cambridge, Massachusetts / London, England: MIT Press), 2015.

\textsuperscript{283} “Do we live in postartistic times? Usology Round Table”, 29 April 2016, part of the program of Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times, at Museum of Modern Art, Warshaw, see https://vimeo.com/170783026 (last accessed on 10 January 2018).
practices. Thus, usefulness, in a sense, implicates embracing deprofessionalisation.\textsuperscript{284} A certain degree of deprofessionalisation of art practitioners in favour of collectively exploring usefulness together with publics could democratise art, turning it into a more inclusive, and therefore more easily legitimated practice.

4.2 Towards re-purposing the autonomy of art
In addition to autonomy, several other concepts are valued regarding the aim to uphold art’s uselessness. Tying aesthetics to uselessness, nineteenth-century, French poet Théophile Gautier wrote in 1835 that “the useless alone is truly beautiful, everything useful is ugly”.\textsuperscript{285} As discussed, Barnett Newman also defined art as the one and only aesthetic act, whilst claiming art is also the only moral practice precisely because it is useless. For Hannah Arendt, the uselessness of artworks impeded their reduction to mere consumerist products. Uselessness as an exclusive trait is also associated with open-endedness, as has for example become apparent from the more recent, dissent of curator Morgan Quaintance described in chapter one. This open-endedness, as Quaintance declared, grants art the freedom and power to criticise and undermine political ideologies.\textsuperscript{286} Exploring a cross-disciplinary approach between philosophy and art, philosophers Erin Manning and Brian Massumi similarly argue for the uselessness and open-endedness of art as a means for opening up possibilities for circumventing neoliberal capitalism. Uselessness is inextricably bound up with experimentation, according to Manning and Massumi. “What is most experimental is most useless. If something is truly new, the context for its use will not yet exist.”\textsuperscript{287}

Based on these promotions of uselessness, Useful Art can be anachronistically characterised as a category that does not concern (relative) autonomy, aesthetics, ethics, open-endedness, and experimentation. Rather than radically distancing itself from neoliberal and capitalist ways of thinking and operating, from money and power structures, Useful Art is supposedly entrenched with these ideologies. In other words, as cluster of politically uncritical art practices, Useful Art would be considered ‘bad’ art. If ever it was possible to distinguish “good” critical useless art from “bad” uncritical useful art, surely that time seems to have passed now that art practitioners are relying on information from the internet like billions of people. The artworld cannot function independently in a

\textsuperscript{284} In an interview, Bruguera has related Arte Útil to deprofessionalisation: “Arte Útil goes against [professionalisation]. It also champions, to a certain extent, non-skilled art in that the processes and strategies do not need high levels of artistic training”. See Fletcher, Annie, and Bruguera, Tania, “Exhibiting and Instituting Arte Útil: Annie Fletcher in Conversation with Tania Bruguera”, in Aikens, Nick, et al. (eds.), \textit{What’s the Use? Constellations of Art, History, and Knowledge, A Critical Reader}, (Amsterdam: Valiz), 2016, 432.


\textsuperscript{286} See chapter one for ideas about usefulness of Newman, Arendt, and Quaintance.

\textsuperscript{287} Manning, Erin, and Massumi, Brian, “For a Pragmatics of the Useless: Propositions for Thought”, Lecture at Western University, London, Canada, 5 March 2013, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsREJAI20o&t=906s (last accessed on 11 January 2017)
bubble as an alternative to economy and politics. Like all individuals, artists, curators, critics, etc. are influenced by flows of capital; contemporary art is not just a sociocultural, but also a commercial phenomenon. Though many artists are interested in developing social, process-oriented practices, which can be impossible to sell, it seems contemporary art is increasingly becoming an entertainment industry with more and more art fairs and biennials, offering “culturally justifiable” possibilities for city marketing, and possibilities for lucrative investments. When art’s uselessness is to be regarded as utopian, how would it then be possible to imagine Useful Art as a ‘feasible utopia’? (one of Tania Bruguera’s descriptions of Arte Útil, see chapter one).

Useful Art practices contain several what some might call pitfalls, and others might consider challenges. During a meeting of the conferation L’Internationale in Ljubljana in 2015, Manuel Borja-Villel, director of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid), explained his scepticism about Useful Art. Some of the many issues he addressed seem less problematic than others. For one, Borja-Villel questioned the focus on use-value, because of its inherent temporality and instability. On the one hand, the fundamental instability of use-value is, indeed, somewhat inconsistent with Bruguera’s formulations of Arte Útil’s mission for sustainable applications of art in daily life. For Bruguera, failure would disqualify a project as Arte Útil. However, sustainability over a longer period of time may not always be possible to accomplish, as is suggested by a number of temporary Arte Útil case studies. Not to mention that failure could eventually lead to new success. On the other hand, it might be possible to imagine the contingency of art’s use-value as a – perhaps crucial – advantage, which both Borja-Villel and Bruguera seem to overlook. By expecting unexpectedness, and more importantly, by acknowledging and working with inevitable side-effects of projects (to borrow Cesare Pietroiusti), Useful Art practitioners might differentiate themselves from producers of useful non-art products, applications, and services, etc. Put differently, whereas most products, applications, services, and so forth, are only productive and produced infosar as they have use-value, art could be the exception by anticipating and including failures. Ultimately, successions of good and bad outcomes might offer indispensable moments, pauses, as it were, for recognising, articulating and renegotiating developments.

Two other problems, which Manuel Borja-Villel hinted at, are more thorny, and perhaps partly insurmountable. Firstly, it can be argued that Useful Art practices are at a greater risk of becoming too ‘corrupted’ by economic and political interests, because they depend on implemention in everyday

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289 “For Arte Útil, failure is not a possibility. If the project fails, it is not Arte Útil.” See Bruguera, Tania, “Reflections on Arte Útil (Useful Art)”, in Aikens, et al. (eds.), What’s the Use? Constellations of Art, History, and Knowledge, A Critical Reader, (Amsterdam: Valiz), 2016, 316.
life. In the process of “making the world work differently”, useful artworks have to coalesce with certain systems, institutions, and environments. Artists have to collaborate with others and somehow have to immerse themselves before hoping to make changes, but to be successful means they have to stay clear of conflicts of interests. Useful Art can, thus, be seen as a double-edged sword: by putting art to good uses – aimed at counteracting hierarchies, according to Bruguera –, it is in danger of being misused simultaneously by the powerful to maintain or gain power, control, and a good reputation.

Secondly, in order to positively destabilise without destabilising itself as a practice, Useful Art arguably also has to open up spaces for reflexion and self-criticism. Also, to avoid being completely subsumed by an overarching system or organisation (e.g. education, company, municipality), it seems artists always have to make plain for all to see that their work is still art instead of something else. This is also easier said than done. The Association of Arte Útil has devised criteria, but these do not provide guidance for understanding the artistic visibility of Arte Útil projects. Conceiving a whole new theoretical toolbox, Stephen Wright insists – as discussed before – that by criticising itself (i.e. ontologising art) the artworld has been creating its own trap. Contemporary art positioning itself involves performing dominant theories, established by generations of leading scholars. To move beyond this crux, Wright opts for giving up ontologising altogether in favour of a non-stop ‘escape’ without any ‘rules’ (epitomised in the notion ‘coefficients of art’). Paradoxically, as Wright half-admits himself, negating the examination of the materiality of artworks, that is, to consider art ‘formless’, brings us back to the initial conundrum: how can Useful Art “escape notice, yet still make its presence felt?”

In other words, can the materiality of art become entirely incidental without pushing art towards anonymity? According to Borja-Villel, artworks cannot be critical without simultaneously revealing, and also being critical of, their conditions of production within the field of art. Indeed, to be critical also means to be critical of oneself.

These two antinomies related to the heteronomy of Useful Art both seem to point to the need for art’s relative autonomy. Contrary to Stephen Wright, John Byrne states that, despite the fact that the autonomy of art is no longer a given in today’s money-driven societies, all efforts ought to be directed towards it to ensure the relevance of art. Thus, central questions that arise are, first of all, how Useful Art generates use-value by being both heteronomous (by blending in with social reality)

293 Wright, Stephen, “& then your disappear”, northeastsouthwest, 1 December 2012, see http://northeastsouthwest.net/then-you-disappear (last accessed on 2 November 2017).
and autonomous (by generating art-specific visibility). And secondly, and correspondingly, how autonomy may be theorised anew; as a distinct ‘de-modernist’ framework for critical analysis, which do not only include evaluating the *materiality* of works of art, but also their *effects* on shaping human relationships. An answer to the second question of re-purposing the notion of autonomy can be distilled from the writings of the influential philosopher Jacques Rancière.

Known for connecting aesthetics and politics, and identifying ‘regimes of art’, Jacques Rancière has formulated a new approach for the autonomy and heterenomy of art. At the core of Rancière’s theorisation is the paradox that art belonging to the so-called ‘aesthetic regime’ (art from Enlightenment until the present) is neither autonomous nor heteronomous. For art to be recognisable as art (i.e. autonomous), it also needs to be part of life (i.e. heteronomous). According to Rancière, “art is art inasmuch as it is also non-art, something other than art.” In accordance with the indivisibility of autonomy and heteronomy, Rancière breaks with the traditional dichotomy between aesthetics and politics. One way or another, aesthetic art experiences offer opportunities for thinking about discrepancies between these aesthetic experiences and previous experiences, making us see things from a fresh perspective. As a result, one’s sense of being in the world is slightly altered. For Rancière, a political work may look very different, but it nonetheless operates in the same way, as a small or somewhat bigger rupture of the status quo. Rancière uses the term dissensus to describe the shared disruptive nature of aesthetic and political art. Because of dissensus, aesthetic and political artworks “hold the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community.”

Within Social Practice discourses, Jacques Rancière’s theories have been employed by Claire Bishop. Similarly to Rancière, she locates the autonomy of art within the sphere of human relationships, experiences, and identities. For Bishop, the autonomy of art is retrievable from aesthetic experiences, because of the impossibility to generalise such experiences into “logic, reason or morality”. In Social Practice discourses, the study of aesthetics is under pressure, according to Bishop. In *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), she calls attention to the often-overlooked aesthetic dimensions of socially engaged art. Studies of Social Practice artworks are generally, as Bishop sees it, clouded by ethical concerns; theorists tend to articulate artistic endeavours which arise from ‘doing the right thing’ without showing the legitimacy of these endeavours as art. Aethetics, which has become mainly associated with the visual aspects of

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300 Bishop refers to the studies of theorist Grant Kester, critics Reinaldo Laddaga and Erik Hagoort, and curators Maria Lind and Charles Esche; Ibid., 16-26.
art, does not exclude ethics. While emphasising Rancière’s ideas on art’s inextricable autonomous and heteronomous mode of operation, and the shared hope for a better world of aesthetics and politics, Bishop argues for aligning ethics with aesthetics. Thus, the evaluation of art – Bishop’s reading of Ranciere – should be focused on contradictions between art’s heteronomous ethical dimensions and its autonomous aesthetic dimensions. A comparative evaluation of these contradictory dimensions results on the one hand in understanding and, on the other hand, in misunderstanding. It is precisely because of this combination of understanding and misunderstanding that both the understanding and misunderstanding of art’s heteronomy and autonomy may become more clear and better defined.

Rob Voerman’s The Exchange can be used as an example to illustrate the contradicting heteronomous ethical dimensions and autonomous aesthetic dimensions. The ethical dimension of the work is mainly determined by Voerman’s aim to raise awareness to worldwide pollution. While using Sonsbeek ’16 as a stage, as it were, the artist hoped that people would not only contemplate the negative effects of current monetary systems, but also use his work to (collectively) come up with solutions. The aesthetic dimensions can also be related to work of the artist on the one hand, and, on the other hand, visitors and users of his work. Aside from his political commitment to combat worldwide pollution, Voerman decided to make an aesthetically appealing artwork. With his work, he also choose to highlight the waterfall, one of the park’s most beautiful – and unpolluted – places. As for the visitors and users of The Exchange, the aesthetic dimensions included people’s experiences of the waterfall and its overarching aluminum structure, which brought up different ideas, memories, and feelings. Although the ethical and aesthetic dimensions seem to partly overlap, in the sense that they are, broadly speaking, both influenced by nature and one of its most important resources – water –, the two dimension are also disconnected, because ethical aims of Voerman are not explicitly reflected in the work’s aesthetics. By creating an understanding of the ethical dimensions of Voerman’s work, the different aesthetic dimensions would be left unexplained, and vice versa.

To conclude, an investigation of Useful Art as a fundamentally heteronomous art practice seem to corroborate Jacques Rancière’s philosophical theory on the untenable separation between art’s autonomy and heterenomy, because it can be argued that Useful Art practices can only be heteronomous if they explore and explicate their autonomy. Rancière’s productive view on art’s heteronomy and autonomy is, in my opinion, also useful for rethinking the binary opposition between art’s usefulness and uselessness, which not only seems to inform Bruguera’s thinking of Arte Útil, but also the general belief that art is useless compared to other fields of enquiry. For Bruguera, artworks only qualify as Arte Útil if they are useful and beneficial tools for making change happen. However, as discussed several times, the use-value of an artwork always remains unstable. I would, thus, suggest that Useful Art projects are as much fixed pledges as propositions. In short, just as artworks cannot be

301 “In short, the aesthetic doesn’t need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, because it always already contains this ameliorative promise.” Bishop, Claire, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, (London / New York: Verso), 2012, 29.
302 Ibid., 30.
heteronomous if they are not also autonomous, useful artworks are perhaps only useful insofar as useless ideas, outcomes, approaches, etc., are anticipated or eventually integrated into the works. The useless “side-effects”, to borrow Pietroiusti’s term again, might lead to a better (mis)understanding of usefulness and uselessness. By integrating useless side-effects, Useful Art practices, moreover, might attain their relative autonomy and legitimacy as a category of art.
Conclusion

This thesis arose as a result of my close involvement in the exhibition Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION as an intern and tour guide. The possibility to physically use most of the artworks in park Sonsbeek, both in and outside the frame of the Open Call program, can be seen as a particularly striking, and perhaps cutting-edge aspect of Sonsbeek ’16. The aim of this thesis has been to investigate Sonsbeek ’16 by zooming in on the uses and use-values of six artworks that were located at park Sonsbeek. Additionally, the practice of collective ruangrupa, the artistic leader of Sonsbeek ’16, was examined. In order to investigate the artistic approach of ruangrupa and the uses and use-values of Sonsbeek ’16, the theorisation on Arte Útil by artist Tania Bruguera, and usership by theorist Stephen Wright were used as a theoretical framework.

The use of these theories on ‘Useful Art’ resulted in a slightly distorted view of Sonsbeek ’16 as a Useful Art exhibition. On the one hand, many characteristics of Arte Útil and usership can be related Sonsbeek ’16 as a whole, in particular to the theme of the exhibition and the ‘make friends, not art’ practice of ruangrupa. On the other hand, Arte Útil and usership were difficult to apply to all the six examined artworks.

In accordance with Arte Útil, the artworks at park Sonsbeek and the approach of ruangrupa were embedded in reality (1:1 scale). David Teh’s characterisation of ruangrupa, as a collective which considers art-engagers instead of artworks as “the object of curatorial care”, resonates with Arte Útil’s focus on the positive, visible effects of art on people’s lives. Finally, the deeper meaning of the theme ‘transACTION’ (something that lies beyond action: results, changes) clearly reverberates in the essence of Arte Útil (aiming at achieving lasting results and changes). To some extent, Stephen Wright’s concepts, compressed in his Lexicon of Usership, are applicable to Sonsbeek ’16. The Open Call can be related to usership. Different from many Social Practice works, the Open Call enabled people who do not work in the artworld to creatively use art for deploying their own skills and talents, though not all the organisers of Open Call events were interested in doing so. Correspondingly, usership is coined by Wright as “a self-regulating mode of engagement and operation”, occurring in reality, realised by what is readily available, and founded on socialised competence. Significantly, the Open Call program was mostly carried out literally beyond the gaze, and always beyond the expertise-driven decisions of artists and members of ruangrupa. Open Call proposals had to be approved by the organisation of Sonsbeek, but members of the Sonsbeek team – among them members of ruangrupa – left preparations and executions up to initiators. The Open Call can, thus, be understood as a user-generated discourse, and a separate sphere of usership within Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION, which to

some extent avoided hierarchical relationships. As it offered relative freedom to use artworks, the Open Call was perhaps a sublimated form of public engagement and agency.

Now the uses and use-values of six artworks of Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION. From an analysis of the Open Call activities, it became apparent that some artworks inspired far more self-organised events than others. Moreover, a number of events could be connected to the material qualities and ‘predetermined’ functions of the artworks, whereas other events were mostly or even totally disconnected from their materiality. Aside from the number of Open Call activities, their degree of connectedness with or disconnectedness to the artworks has played a central role in determining the use-value of the works.

The pingpong tables of Louie Cordero and the playground installed by Maze de Boer instigated relatively few events (five and three). A plausible reason is the fact that both works were difficult to appropriate for activities other than those imposed by the artists – playing a game of ping pong, and playing with play sets. The obvious similarities between the Open Call activities of Pong, all private and identifiable as recreational outings, demonstrate the work’s fixed function. Although the essence of the outings (to socialise, have fun, and celebrate) was not contradictory to Pong, the limited range of uses seems to point to the limited its use-value as an artwork. The three events at Common Ground were all different: a get-together, a magic show, and a role play. On the one hand, the magic show and the role play can be seen as different appropriations of the playground, but on the other hand they seem to have little to nothing to do with its function as a playground. In a way, both Pong and Common Ground are reminiscent of works by Rirkrit Tiravanija discussed in the first chapter. Rather than repurposing artworks as users, people are instead being used for activating artworks. In case of the Open Call, the relationship of the uses to the works were somewhat trivial.

Lacking a specific purpose in addition to functioning as platforms for ‘transactions’, the installations Bamburst and The-the Servant-servant of-of-the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving are quite different from Pong and Common Ground. A comparison between Bamburst and The-the Servant-servant also brings up different aspects and outcomes. Compared to Bamburst, which could be easily identified as an architectural structure, The-the Servant-servant is much more ambivalent because of its whimsical title, and semi-likeness to historical hidden churches. If people knew nothing about it, they would probably not have come to think of it as a church; if they had information, they would probably interpret the work as a church of sorts. Offering more room for the imagination, The-the Servant-servant was, thus, in a way, relatively more open-ended than Bamburst. The result, however, was only two Open Call activities, whereas sixteen events took place at Bamburst. This shows that in order to engender use-value by letting people repurpose a work of art, artists have to provide material components which users can build from, components that suggest utility so that users can find ways to re-use these component. No doubt due to its unusual aesthetic qualities, Bamburst was repurposed in many different ways in accordance with its open-ended function. These re-purposings seemed to complete the bare-looking installation, and the activities, in turn, had a certain allure thanks to the
enormous Indonesian bamboo poles.

On the one hand, Prawoto was generous in making a functional but at the same time functionless and therefore repurposable architectural artwork. Despite numerous Open Call events, it may be argued, on the other hand, that the use-value of Bamburst was shallow, because people could not really repurpose it in a “wrong” way. Thus, the work’s unknown ‘re-purposable purpose’ in a sense made the uses self-referential, excluding critical evaluations of the use-value of the work beyond its own aesthetic qualities. Because of its fundamental ambivalent status as a “hidden church” but also “non-church”, the uses of The-the Servant-servant were maybe less one-sided. However, considering the number of Open Call activities, its use-value was also kind of limited.

Contrary to the fixed usefulness of Pong and Common Ground, and the unfixed and ever-shifting usefulness of Bamburst and The-the Servant-servant, it would seem that Vvestlife and The Exchange were closests to provoking meaningful repurposings and generating artwork-specific use-value. Several of the uses of Vvestlife and The Exchange were both connected to the suggested sociopolitical aims – to engage people in attempts to save the earth, and the refugee crisis –, whilst also adding to, and thus partly transcending, the aims. To briefly go over them again, The Exchange was used for a thematic yoga session (on yoga as a tool for creating a sustainable world); as an exhibition space by two artists (twice); and for conducting radio interviews from a car. Vvestlife was used four times by Adam Uriel Ruff and Arnhem-refugees to call attention to hardships in Palestine (among other things); for conducting car radio interviews; as a performance stage and exhibition space during Krijgers of Arnhem; and used and adjusted for the political fashion show If the Sea Could Talk. Significantly, the majority of the Open Call activities taking place at Vvestlife directly or indirectly addressed the refugee crisis, and even involved refugees, whereas the majority of the Open Call activities of The Exchange was unrelated to Rob Voerman’s aim to raise awareness of the problem of worldwide pollution, and the possibility of a new currency.

The use-value of Vvestlife arguably lay in its capacity to inspire further discussion on the refugee crisis in Europe and sympathy for refugees in Europe, The Netherlands, and Arnhem, and to establish Vvestlife-inspired short-and-longer-lived relationships between different groups of people (in particular artists, refugees, and visitors). Accordingly, Vvestlife modestly increased social cohesion. By contrast, The Exchange inspired fewer artwork-specific uses, and it seems that these uses did not expand the work beyond its potential to encourage discussions and increase awareness. The money raised for Foundation Masarang was perhaps the only measurable important impact of The Exchange, which was not devised by participants of the Open Call, but instead by Voerman himself. Thus, when comparing Vvestlife and The Exchange, it is easier to deduce and define the use-value of Vvestlife. When it comes to the effectiveness of both works, that is, in making change happen instead of reflecting on necessary changes (which Bruguera’s considers a defining aspect of Arte Útil), Vvestlife may be classified as Useful Art.
As mentioned above, it was impossible to relate defining elements of Arte Útil and usership to every artwork. Wright’s concepts 1:1 scale, allure and double ontology could be used in particular for creating a deeper understanding of Pong and Common Ground, which were both ‘usual’ and ‘unusual’. Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION, moreover, included only a handful overtly political, and even less ‘politically affective’ artworks (one of the main characteristics of Arte Útil). In the end, what qualifies or disqualifies Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION as Useful Art is difficult to determine, because there is not yet one coherent, widely adopted theory for examining Useful Art. For Bruguera, Arte Útil is rooted in activism: what matters is turning art into a political tool for making beneficial changes. Usership art also has to do with rebalancing power structures, in the sense that it is an self-governing mode of engagement, which undermines ownership and expertise, and therefore hierarchies. Users creatively and legally repurpose something for their own benefits. In the spirit of this democratisation, Wright argues for deontologising art.

The discrepancies between the research results mentioned above, and Tania Bruguera’s ideas on Arte Útil and Stephen Wright’s lexicon of usership point to several weak points and gaps in the theories of Arte Útil and usership. What both Bruguera and Wright did not seem to pay enough attention to is the fact that the material qualities of a work of art somehow have to be taken into account in analyses of uses and use-value, in order to avoid the redundancy of artworks, and perhaps Useful Art altogether. Additionally, the fundamental instability of art-specific uses and use-values (as described in What’s the Use? (2016)) is a challenging, but perhaps at the same time productive aspect that Bruguera and Wright do not really address. By exploring the glitches between useful and useless experiences, Useful Art might legitimise itself as a critical practice operating in reality without being immediately debased by neoliberal capitalism.

Finally, the concept of aesthetics is also slippery in relation to Useful Art. Arte Útil and usership are both postulated as different from the traditional concept of aesthetics as pleasurable and purposeless experiences that are nothing more and nothing less than what they are. For Bruguera, aesthetics somehow has to be transformative: aesthetics is not something in and of itself, but rather ‘subjugated’ in favour of usefulness. As such, the aesthetics of Arte Útil is inevitably permeated by ethics (Bruguera: ‘aesth-ethics’). In a more rigorous manner, Wright repeatedly stresses the need to ‘deactivate’ art’s aesthetic function, for which there can be no place in usership practices.

With respect to Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION, art’s aesthetics undeniably manifested itself in different ways and on different levels, not just in relation to the artworks, but also in Open Call activities. Among the artworks, Bamburst’s and The Exchange’s material qualities were perhaps the most striking in terms of aesthetics and craftsmanship. These two works also happen to be the most frequently used works of the Open Call. Although the function of Bamburst was more or less ‘non-aesthetic’ because of Prawoto’s aim to make a ‘functionless’ work, it encouraged many events which included aesthetic experiences – wedding, photoshoot, parties, concert, Silent Sky Project. It can therefore be argued, that Bamburst gained an aesthetic function, because of usership. The fact that
users look for their own aesthetic experiences is also apparent from the many (more or less) aesthetic activities organised in and outside The Exchange – music performances, parties, and probably the Turkish lunchrooms.

Uses of artworks were sometimes difficult to define as either aesthetic or non-aesthetic. Illustrative examples are the events Krijgers for Arnhem, and If the Sea could Talk, which contributed to the expressivity of Vvestlife. Krijgers for Arnhem was at times more political (listening to story of refugee), and at other times a political-aesthetic experience (music performances, poetry recitement). Similarly, the power of If the Sea Could Talk resulted from conflating aesthetic and political elements, epitomised by the different outfits comprising beautiful satin dresses and suits, and life vests and rice bags. Because of its political character, the aesthetic side of the fashion show was at times almost a bit uncomfortable. Thus, experiences can be simultaneously aesthetic and political. Using art is all about appropriating and repurposing, which means people may attribute aesthetic and political functions to one and the same artwork.

To conclude, this thesis gives insight in Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION as a Useful Art exhibition. By examining Sonsbeek ’16 vis-à-vis theories on Arte Útil and usership art, I have also created a deeper understanding of some of the limitations of these theories in terms of identifying and analysing Useful Art.

Perhaps works of art are ultimately most useful when they encourage political, aesthetic, and political-aesthetic repurposings, which, depending on one’s perspective, may be both useful and useless. The job of the artist would then be to offer opportunities for multiple repurposings. Additionally, as pointed out by Jeroen Boomgaard, artists arguably have to make sure people can reflect on the meaningfulness of uses by using the artwork itself, not just to make them aware of the use-value of art, but also to let them discover the aesthetic or political implications of their actions. While thoroughly (empirically) examining a hodge podge of different kinds of repurposings, art scholars might attempt to formulate the aesthetic, and political use-values of artworks. In comparing uses, some actions might seem utterly meaningless compared to others. But this is where it gets interesting; when it is possible to pinpoint similarities and discrepancies within a complex array of antagonistic uses. Different repurposing make Useful Art socially decisive (and autonomous?), and simultaneously open-ended.

Given the inclusion of individuals and groups from and outside Arnhem, the social relevance of Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION has evidently set a new bar for upcoming Sonsbeek editions. With new Sonsbeek exhibitions coming up – hopefully in two, six, and ten years to come –, it seems future curators have no choice but to approach communities in Arnhem to collectively explore useful artworks that are capable of reviving and reshaping human actions and relationships.
APPENDIX

Open Call program and Fringe events, park Sonsbeek,
4 June-18 September 2016

Total number of activities: 84
Open Call: 79*
Fringe: 5
* 80 Open Call activities took place, 1 is not registered in this appendix due to missing information.

Artwork: Bakehouse
Artist: Alphons ter Avest
Number of events: 4
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>19 Juli</td>
<td>19.30</td>
<td>Full Moon Ceremony II by Foundation Aliran Tenage Dalam.</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>22 August</td>
<td>16.00-21.00</td>
<td>Party.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>11 September</td>
<td>15.00-18.00</td>
<td>breadSTORM by Happy Single Ladies.</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artwork: Aboriginal Embassy
Artist: Richard Bell
Number of events: 6
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fringe</td>
<td>18 June</td>
<td>14.00-15.00</td>
<td>Lecture ‘Water connects’ (Water verbind) by Cas de Bruin.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe</td>
<td>19 June</td>
<td>14.00-15.00</td>
<td>Lecture ‘Water connects’ by Cas de Bruin.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>29 Juli</td>
<td>17.00-19.00</td>
<td>Theater performance Zonderverdoving by Theatersport.</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>4 September</td>
<td>14.00-17.00</td>
<td>Stadstheater LAB.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>13 September</td>
<td>16.00-17.00</td>
<td>Schaduwtheater.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>17 September</td>
<td>16.00-18.00</td>
<td>Together nearly 100. Birthday party.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Artwork: *Yow-wow-wow-wow*
Artist: **Rosella Biscotti**
Number of events: 1
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/ Fridge</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/ Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>3 Juli</td>
<td>17.30-18.30</td>
<td>Music performance by 3IXTIES.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artwork: *Common Ground*
Artist: **Maze de Boer**
Number of events: 3
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/ Fridge</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/ Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>11 June</td>
<td>15.00-18.00</td>
<td>Picknick ArnhemLife (organised by Petra Dielman).</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>12 June</td>
<td>14.00-16.00</td>
<td>Magic trics by Max Lodewijks.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>30 August</td>
<td>13.00-14.00</td>
<td>Roleplay by Parelmoer.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artwork: *OXT*
Artist: **Kevin van Braak**
Number of events: 7
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/ Fridge</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/ Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>17 Juli</td>
<td>13.30-17.00</td>
<td>Music performance organised by Francine Sluiter and Tom Ruijfrok to collect money for foundation Orange Babies.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>19 Juli</td>
<td>16.30-20.00</td>
<td>Staff day Olympous college (high school).</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>27 August</td>
<td>11.00-17.00</td>
<td>Tableau Vivant #2 Jewellery from the park.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>7 September</td>
<td>11.00-16.00</td>
<td>Atelier 23 (workshop).</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>9 September</td>
<td>11.00-16.00</td>
<td>Atelier 23 (workshop).</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>10 September</td>
<td>12.00-16.00</td>
<td>Open Monumenten dag.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>11 September</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>Performance by Syrian band Repaired Fade Out</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artworks: *Pong & The Happy Camper*
Artist: **Louie Cordero**
Number of events: 5
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>15 June</td>
<td>12.30-16.30</td>
<td>Abel’s Donald Duck birthday party.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>19 Juli</td>
<td>16.30</td>
<td>Staff day of Olympous college (high school).</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>23 Juli</td>
<td>15.00-18.00</td>
<td>Picknick Arnhem Life (organised by Petra Dielman).</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>24 Juli</td>
<td>12.00-17.00</td>
<td>Goodbye party of Lucas.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>3 September</td>
<td>14.00-19.00</td>
<td>Anniversary party.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artwork: *Untitled*
Artist: Shilpa Gupta
Number of events: 3
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/ Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>20 Juli</td>
<td>10.30-12.00</td>
<td>Inspiration walk by Maya Wijsheid.</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>7 Juli</td>
<td>19.30-21.00</td>
<td>AanTafel Doelgesprek Picnic by Marije van Dijk</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>24 Juli</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>Dance-, theater-, and music performances by Festival Waterdruppels</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This artwork was opened on 14 Juli instead of 4 June.

Artwork: *You’re afraid to dive into the plasma pool, aren’t you? You’re afraid to be destroyed and recreated?*
Artist: Folkert de Jong
Number of events: 2
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/ Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>4 September</td>
<td>12.00-17.00</td>
<td>Kunst! Light artwork by artist Ruud Lans</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>14 September</td>
<td>12.00-17.00</td>
<td>Kunst! Light artwork by artist Ruud Lans</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artwork: Vestlife
Artists: KUNSTrePUBLIK
Number of events: 9
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/ Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>7 August</td>
<td>11.00-17.00</td>
<td>just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call/Fringe</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Public/Private/Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>13 August</td>
<td>11.00-17.00</td>
<td>just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe</td>
<td>26 August</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>If the Sea could Talk, fashion show by CAMP and Dady de Maximo.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>27 August</td>
<td>11.00-17.00</td>
<td>just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>3 September</td>
<td>12.00-17.00</td>
<td>just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>4 September</td>
<td>14.00-15.00</td>
<td>Music performance by Volver choir (language: Spanish)</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>8 September</td>
<td>11.00-16.00</td>
<td>Recordings Radio Beumer (in collaboration with Reinaart Vanhoe and Mattijs de Wit), ‘When were you a newcomer?’</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>16 September</td>
<td>14.00-17.00</td>
<td>Schrijverscafé OSCAR, Krijgers van Arnhem (‘Warriors of Arnhem’).</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>17 September</td>
<td>15.00-17.00</td>
<td>Word Bites by Hugo de Haas</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artwork: **Bamburst**  
**Artist:** Eko Prawoto  
Number of events: **16**  
Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>15 June</td>
<td>12.30-16.30</td>
<td>Abel’s Donald Duck birthday</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>24 June</td>
<td>14.00-16.00</td>
<td>Wedding Ellen and Derek</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>24 June</td>
<td>19.00-21.30</td>
<td>Fare well party</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>27 June</td>
<td>10.00-20.00</td>
<td>Slinger. Collecting wishes</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>2 July</td>
<td>19.00-00.00</td>
<td>Diner Marijke Stamatiou</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe</td>
<td>9 July</td>
<td>16.30-17.30</td>
<td>Silent Sky Project by artist Rob Sweere.</td>
<td>Public/Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>17 July</td>
<td>10.00-11.15</td>
<td>Enjoy Yoga by Lidy Rijntjes</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>17 July</td>
<td>16.00-21.00</td>
<td>Birthday celebration</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>19 July</td>
<td>16.30</td>
<td>Staff day of Olympous college (high school)</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>24 July</td>
<td>10.00-11.15</td>
<td>Enjoy Yoga by Lidy Rijntjes</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>31 July</td>
<td>10.00-11.15</td>
<td>Enjoy Yoga by Lidy Rijntjes</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>31 July</td>
<td>14.00-15.00</td>
<td>Concert by Gonda van der Zwaag, church songs and classical music.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>14 August</td>
<td>10.00-11.15</td>
<td>Enjoy Yoga by Lidy Rijntjes</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>25 August</td>
<td>10.00-17.00</td>
<td>‘Tear of the sun’</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>31 August</td>
<td>13.30-14.30</td>
<td>Photoshoot newly weds.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>4 September</td>
<td>14.00-17.00</td>
<td>Stadstheater LAB.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artwork: **The-the Servant-servant of-of the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving**
Artist: **Slavs and Tatars**

Number of events: **2**

Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/ Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private /Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fringe</td>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Meeting between children from elementary school Pieter Jongeling and refugees from Arnhem. Together they made picknick ‘rugs’, and played games.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>24 Juli</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>Concert by Edima (as part of Festival Waterdruppels)</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artwork: **The Exchange**

Artist: **Rob Voerman**

Number of events: **17**

Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/ Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private /Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>16 June</td>
<td>19.30-21.00</td>
<td>Socratic Debate by Paul Troost</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>13 Juli</td>
<td>11.00-16.00</td>
<td>Recordings for Video clip by VMBO class ’t Venster</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>13 Juli</td>
<td>16.00-20.00</td>
<td>Get together of class la Gymnasium Arnhem.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>17 Juli</td>
<td>13.00-17.00</td>
<td>Expo <em>Op de Bank</em> (‘At the Bank’) by artists Lieke Schouten and José Sprekels</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>19 Juli</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Presentation Rob Voerman for Olympos.</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>21 Juli</td>
<td>19.30-20.10</td>
<td>Performance by Eva Beunk’s rock/pop band Vantage, next to <em>The Exchange</em>.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>31 Juli</td>
<td>15.00-16.00</td>
<td>Concert Gonda van der Zwaag, church songs and classical music.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>7 August</td>
<td>15.00-17.00</td>
<td><em>Metaphorically speaking ‘Art Walk’</em> by artist Ide Andre, and music performance by Kasper van Moll (Broken Toaster Records), on invitation of Circa…dit.</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>13 August</td>
<td>12.00-19.00</td>
<td>Turkish lunchroom by Lunchroom Sofra</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>14 August</td>
<td>12.00-19.00</td>
<td>Turkish lunchroom by Lunchroom Sofra.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>14 August</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>Thematic yoga session by Doris Lilienweiss, inspired by <em>The Exchange</em>. With live music from Sebastiaan Stevens.</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>27 August</td>
<td>15.30-21.30</td>
<td>55Up and Going?</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>8 September</td>
<td>19.30-21.00</td>
<td>Socratic debate II by Paul Troost.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Public/Private/Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 September</td>
<td>17.00-19.00</td>
<td>Coehoorn entrepreneurs.</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 September</td>
<td>13.00-17.00</td>
<td>Expo <em>Op de Bank</em> (‘At the Bank’) by artists Lieke Schouten and José Srenkels.</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 September</td>
<td>16.00-21.00</td>
<td>Birthday party of Cile Schulz</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 September</td>
<td>11.00-16.00</td>
<td>Recordings Radio Beumer (in collaboration with Reinaart Vanhoe and Mattijs de Wit), ‘Can we do without money?’</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ruru huis**

Number of events: 3

Overview of Open Call and Fringe activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Call/Fringe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fringe</td>
<td>2 July</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>‘symposium’ <em>De rol van kunstmatige intelligentie in cultuur</em> by philosopher Merel Noorman.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>30 August</td>
<td>12.30-15.00</td>
<td>Roleplay Parelmoer</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Call</td>
<td>10 September</td>
<td>11.00-16.00</td>
<td>Recordings Radio Beumer (in collaboration with Reinaart Vanhoe and Mattijs de Wit), ‘What does your ideal city look like?’</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Open Call activities in and around all the artworks in park Sonsbeek**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public/Private/Registration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 Juli</td>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>Inspirationwalk with Elvira van Rijn from Maya Wijsheid.</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 September</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>Theater guided tour</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 September</td>
<td>19.00-20.00</td>
<td><em>Laatste Zomer Safaritraining</em> by Actief Fit Arnhem. Running- and Nordic-walking training.</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 September</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Guided Tour by artist Anouk van Reijen and opera singer Frédérique Klooster, who gave performances in and around the artworks, allowing for a different experience of the works.</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 September</td>
<td>14.00-17.00</td>
<td>Children’s party</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 September</td>
<td>12.00-13.00</td>
<td>Goodbye tour throughout the artworks</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Figure 1. Sculptures close to the white villa at park Sonsbeek, Sonsbeek ’52.

Figure 2. Seven core member of ruangrupa, f.l.t.r. Ade Darmawan, Indra Ameng, Farid Rakun, Ajeng Nurul Aini, Mirwan Andan, Reza Afisina, and Hafiz Rancaljale.
Figure 3. Stephen Wright, *Towards a Lexicon of Usership*, 2013, front page.

Figure 5. Van Abbemuseum in collaboration with Grizedale Arts, The Honest Shop, Museum of Arte Útil, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.
Figure 6. Several refurbished houses, part of Assemble’s project *Granby Four Streets*, 2015, Toxeth, Liverpool, United Kingdom.

Figure 7. Assemble, *A Showroom for Granby Workshop*, materials and dimensions variable, 2015, Tramway, Glasgow.
**Figure 8** Carl Andre, *144 Magnesium Square*, 1969, magnesium, 10 x 3658 x 3658 cm.

**Figure 9.** Groupe Recherche d’Art Visuel, *A day in the street*, 1966, Paris
Figure 10. Oyvind Fühlstrom, *World Politics Monopoly*, 1970.

Figure 11. Yoko Ono, *Chess Set for playing as long as you can remember where all your pieces are*, 1966.
Figure 12. Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Free)*, 1992, refrigerator, table, chairs, wood, drywall, food and other materials, dimensions variable, 303 Gallery, New York City.

Figure 13. Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)*, 1996, materials and dimensions variable, Kölnische Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany.
Figure 14. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, ceramic, glaze, and paint, 38 x 48 x 62 cm., photograph by A. Stieglizt (original artwork is lost).

Figure 15. Tania Bruguera, *Urine Luck!,* 2010, Queens Museum of Art, New York City.
Figure 16. Paul Ramírez Jonas, *The Commons*, 2011, cork, pushpins, and hardware, 389 x 325 x 163 cm., Contemporary Art Museum Houston.

Figure 17. Ai WeiWei, *Fairytale 1*, 2007, Inkjet-print, 92,5 x 92,5 cm.
Figure 18. Exterior view of ruru house, Jakarta, Indonesia, 2009.

Figure 19. Anggun Priambodo, *Toko Keperluan*, 2010, exhibition Ruru Gallery, ruru house.

Figure 21. Ok. Video: Militia, third Jakarta International Video Festival, 10-27 July 2007, National Gallery, Jakarta.
Figure 22. Artlab, *Lonely Market*, 30 April-1 May 2011, outside ruru house.

Figure 23. Gudang Sarinah Ekosystem, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Figure 24. Invitation inside *ruru huis*, 4 July 2015.

Figure 25. *Ruru huis* seen from outside, Looierstraat, Arnhem.
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Figure 27. Map of neighbourhoods in the north of Arnhem, *ruru huis*, 17 April 2016.

Figure 30. Detail of *The-the Servant-servant of-of the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving.*

Figure 32. Jan Rothuizen, Sonsbeek City, 18 September 2016, Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION, Arnhem.

Figure 33. Folkert de Jong, You’re afraid to dive into the plasma pool, aren’t you? You’re afraid to be destroyed and recreated?, 2016, Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION, Arnhem.
Figure 34. Louie Cordero, *The Happy Camper*, 2016, foam and fiberglass, picture taken before the opening on 4 June 2016, *Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION*, Arnhem.

Figure 36. Louie Cordero, *Gamera*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 152 x 168 cm., Osage Gallery, Hong Kong.

Figure 37. Maze de Boer, *Common Ground*, 2016, brick, steel, and rubber, dimensions variable, *Sonsbeek '16: transACTION*, Arnhem.
Figure 38. Eko Prawoto, Bamburst, 2016, bamboo, dimensions variable, Sonsbeek ’16: transACTION, Arnhem.

Figure 39. Wedding of Ellen en Derek at Bamburst, on 24 June 2016.
Figure 40. Rob Sweere, Silent Sky Project #72, at Bamburst, 9 July 2017.

Figure 41. Meeting between children from elementary school Pieter Jongeling and refugees from Arnhem, at The-the Servant-servant of-of the-the All-all Forgiving-forgiving, 30 June 2016.
Figure 42. KUNSTrePUBLIK, Vvestlife, 2016, wood, life vests, dimension unknown, Sonsbeek '16: transACTION, Arnhem.

Figure 43. Rob Voerman, The Exchange, 2016, wood, aluminium, coloured glass, dark Plexiglas, dimensions variable, Sonsbeek '16: transACTION, Arnhem.
Figure 44. Rob Voerman, *The Exchange*, 2016, view on the waterfall inside the installation.

Figure 46. Adam Uriel Ruff, *just*ice cream: brain:freeze / heart:melt*, mixed media, 100 x 250 cm., at Vvestlife.

Figure 47. Sign part of recordings Studio Beumer, at Vvestlife, 16 September 2016.
Figure 48. *Krijgers of Arnhem* (‘Warriors of Arnhem’), at Vvestlife, 16 September 2016.

Figure 49. Works by Khattar Shaheen, materials and dimensions variable, part of *Krijgers of Arnhem*, at Vvestlife, 16 September 2016.
Figure 50. CAMP and Dady de Maximo, *If the Sea Could Talk*, at Vvestlife, 26 August 2016.

Figure 51. Lieke Schouten and José Sprenkels, *Op de Bank* (‘At the Bank’), at The Exhange, 17 Juli 2017.


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