

Paul Goede, Bastienne Kramer, Q.S. Serafijn, Jeroen Snijders
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Cooperation in a wider context - Ruud Kaulingfreks
(Kaulingfreks, R. (1993) Welcome Stranger, p.65-69)

Since Romanticism we have had an image of the artistic process as an intimate affair. Since the artist has to be a seer, he/she has to let images that correspond to his mood emerge through a very specific introspection. The images, however, not only reflect the interior of the artist, but at the same time they reflect a general preoccupation in culture, on the basis of which they evoke recognition in the viewer.

The activity of the artist is twofold. On the one hand, he/she has to sharpen his sensibility - in the matter of sensing collective motives in culture. On the other hand, he must develop a critical attitude towards the selection of the images to be realized. He can do this by being in constant dialogue with himself in the wordless realm of intuition or artistic sense. In doing so, his own ground for existence serves as a starting point, not the data of culture. The artist as a seer is therefore a genius in Kant's sense: Genius is the talent (natural endowment) which gives the rule to art. Since talent, as an innate productive faculty of the artist, belongs itself to nature, we may put it this way: Genius is the innate mental aptitude (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art.

One could say that in spite of all the social changes, this individualising image of the artist, with all kinds of marginal modifications, is still valid. This, however, at a time of increasing doubt about the subject, which is translated into a penchant for collectivity. At a time when, partly under the influence of the media, publicness reigns supreme and brings everything under discussion. What Baudrillard called hyper-vision. At a time when the influence of opinions can be called very great. At such a time, the old idea of individualistic artistry comes under a great deal of pressure. Collaboration then becomes an interesting experiment. Is it possible to have different artists work on a project? Artists are attracted to the idea. Their motives are always different, of course, but the curiosity about externalising inner considerations prevails.

Measured by the composition of the first group, it is not surprising that timidity set the tone of the (first) meetings. In spite of all the reservations, various positions soon came to light, which became increasingly sharpened during the discussions.

The first, and perhaps most pronounced, is the position of the autonomous artist. As mentioned before, the autonomous artist does not adhere in advance to an existing discourse, although he can make use of it: in principle he is only dictated by his inner self. In a way, the artist destroys tradition over and over again. As a consequence, the artist needs the work in order to come to himself, to make himself, to propagate himself. Without the work he would digest in himself, lead a false existence. This places a heavy burden on the work, in the sense that the materiality of the work takes centre stage. The meaning that a work has is carried by nothing but the thing itself. The reflection caused by the work, the references to the world through which recognition can take place, lies in its ringing. The form does not refer to a meaning, but is itself a meaning. In short, the artist has to make and in this process he makes himself. He does this in his studio, where he only has to answer to himself.

Opposite the idea of the autonomous artist is the one of the artist embedded in tradition. The artist is indebted to a tradition of thinking. Art is seen as a specific way of becoming aware of reality, it is the subject of artistic research, and the work of art is not the end but the means of becoming aware. The mentality of the work of art is subordinated to the thinking activity, which is nourished by both intellect and intuition. Here, too, the artist is a seer, not so much by his self-examination, but by his sensitivity to the presuppositions of our thinking. He has a necessary task to bring to light what is not noticed. The artist investigates and comments on the state of affairs in a culture -

not in concrete terms, but philosophically. The work of art acts as a commentary and complement to the previous awareness and deepens or criticises existing points of view. The work of art joins a discourse and only has meaning in the historical conversation.

Describing points of view in a discussion carries the danger of reification. Not only because they are placed side by side on paper, they are absolutised into fixed and clearly defined visions. In reality, this is a fragmented process of discussion, an exchange of ideas. After all, a discussion is never only theoretical: rhetoric and social skills also play a role. In this way, coalitions can be formed and fall apart, or people are forced by the discussion to defend a position further than they are actually prepared to. In other words, what is outlined here is more of a concentrate of different opinions: in reality, there are all kinds of intermediate positions.

Without wanting to divulge sensational kitchen secrets, it is clear that difficult negotiations were central. Thus, the idea of cooperation became a separate point of discussion. From an autonomous point of view, cooperation is the communication of different works. The various autonomous works are placed in relation to each other, creating new meanings and changing the individual meanings of the works. If only because they are placed side by side on paper, they are absolutised into fixed and clearly defined visions. In reality, this is a fragmented process of discussion, an exchange of ideas. After all, a discussion is never only theoretical: rhetoric and social skills also play a role. In this way, coalitions can be formed and fall apart, or people are forced by the discussion to defend a position further than they are actually prepared to. In other words, what is outlined here is more of a concentrate of different opinions: in reality, there were all kinds of intermediate positions. Without wanting to divulge sensational kitchen secrets, it is clear that difficult negotiations were central. Thus, the idea of cooperation became a separate point of discussion. From an autonomous point of view, cooperation is the communication of different works. The various autonomous works are placed in relation to each other, creating new meanings and changing the individual meanings of the works. For the more conceptual, the artistic activity follows from the formation of ideas and the emphasis is precisely on the discussion of the starting points. For them, simply making an image is more a matter of self-expression, meaningful for the artists himself/herself, but too individual to be of interest to others.

The fact that at the outset there was a sketch for a sculpture in the front room of which Jeroen Snijders defended its realization, did not make the discussion any easier. Collaboration seemed excluded and the presentation of a common idea thwarted. Resentment on both sides was the result. Resentment about the autonomy of the sketch, which was diametrically opposed to the in situ idea of the project. The relationship with the house was not felt. The maker takes upon belief that an autonomous attitude does not mean that the work stands completely on its own. It always enters into a relationship with its surroundings, transforms the space and is influenced by it. Resentment about time: it was too slow or too fast. From the point of view of autonomy, the time and tranquillity to work on an image - preferably in the studio - are important. Endless discussions about the starting points are then a waste of time. Conversely, from the conceptual point of view there is rather a lack of time to develop and specify the common starting points.

But there was especially resentment about the *fait accompli* set by the sketch, which the others more or less threw back on themselves.

In response to the total stalemate, Paul Goede consciously departed from his regular visual language and opted for a commentary position. By way of criticism of Snijders' 'material expression', he spontaneously 'produced' a chewing gum sculpture at one of the meetings. Q.S. Serafijn fell back on an earlier plan. Although the installation accentuated the homely atmosphere and the incidence of light in the house, it was directly in line with his own research into the significance of art-historical references to our culture today. Serafijn, for example, explicitly refers to impressionism, which is important through the thematisation and ultimate control of light, i.e. a vision of far-reaching rationalisation and control of nature.

Quite unexpectedly, Goede's commentary position entered into an alliance with what at first also seemed to be a purely individual attitude, but gradually articulated itself differently. Although the object plays a prominent role in the oeuvre of Bastienne Kramer, her often labour-intensive work does not revolve around the work of art, but around the real and worldly object. From this point of view, Kramer was also able to leave the regular idiom and free up space to further exploit the commentary position. The collaboration was once again a point of discussion and a different type of argument arose in relation to the group performance, namely the need to take risks. To seize the opportunity to move away from familiar imagery and undertake excursions in a field still unknown to the participants. However, the lack of time had become so great that in fact there was still one possibility left: to literally break through the previously mentioned relationship between independent images. Not only spatially, but also in terms of content, so that it would be impossible to see each image separately from the other. This is how the sitting pit came into being, with which Kramer did not only break through the spatial planning of the house, but also caused a breakthrough in the collaboration. Snijders' drying rack was broken into by Kramer's seat pit, while Serafijn's row of plants ran across Kramer's sculpture and Goedes sculptures interfered with the field of vision of the other sculptures.