12 November to 6 December 1992
Christiaan Bastiaans, Rob Birza, Maarten de Reus, Berend Strik

Cooperation in a wider framework - Kaulingfreks
(Kaulingfreks, R. (1993) Welcome Stranger, p.65-69)

One of the great Western ideas that has been exposed to criticism recently is that of the subject. Since Descartes unequivocally established "I think, therefore I exist", the subject has taken on almost mythical proportions. The cogito is the only seat for correctness and certainty. We see ourselves as inalienable entities that need to be convinced of the existence of something. Only when I think, it is so. Of course, my thinking is not entirely private and incomparable to that of others. We present our things and this representation is bound by logical and conceptual rules, but it is and it remains my representation. Only when I succeed in transferring my performance to others; there is understanding and knowledge. In this way Western culture was able to develop modern science with its emphasis on empiricism, and to create political systems with an emphasis on the formation of opinions.

It will come as no surprise that criticism of the subject is one of the central pillars of a radical revolution in culture. Jean Francois Lyotard's formulation of this revolution as a 'crisis of the big stories' points to a discrediting of the idea of the autonomous subject. Nietzsche emerges as one of the founders of the attack in the context of postmodern criticism. For Nietzsche it was perfectly clear that the Cartesian clarté with its emphasis on knowing I was a kind of misunderstanding, a fable, yes even a lie. As far as the cogito is concerned, he also said very clearly: 'I will not get tired of underlining one small, simple fact over and over again... a thought comes when 'she' wants it and not when 'I' want it: so that it is a falsification of the facts to say that the subject 'I' is the precondition for the predicate 'thinks'. It thinks: but that this is precisely the old famous 'I' is, to put it mildly, just an assumption, an assertion and, above all, not an 'immediate certainty'. [1]

Nietzsche's ideas have been further thematised in our time and brought to attention by Deleuze [2]and Foucault, among others. In 'the words and things', Foucault shows by means of an extensive source research that the subject is no more and no less than one of the epistles that have underpinned Western knowledge since the Renaissance. The book concludes: 'One thing is certain: man is not the oldest, still the most constant issue of human knowledge...we can say with certainty that man is a recent invention...Man is an invention whose archaeology of our thinking can easily prove the young date. And perhaps also the approaching end... We can bet that man would disappear - like a face of sand at the border of the sea'.[3] However, the success of 'The words and things' caused a huge problem in public opinion. It turns out to be very difficult, if not impossible, to imagine ourselves without me. In a culture centred around the subject, the idea of a post-subject is very confusing. Ethical problems arise with regard to the responsibility of authors. Whoever says or does what must be able to be addressed about it and make their motives clear.

Anonymity has been a point of discussion ever since. Is anonymity a widening of this line of thought or just an example of it? The world without me may seem conceivable, but for the time being it is very difficult to imagine it. This intellectual problem is becoming particularly acute, not so much because of the statements of philosophers, but, of course, because of events in culture itself. The development of the mass media and the simultaneity it implies make it increasingly difficult to distinguish authors. In art, the frequent use of quotations and the appropriateness of other visual languages is another example. However, the most widespread example of author blurring is the computer and especially the networks it produces. Here the information circulates freely and

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[1] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *voorbij goed en kwaad*, Amsterdam 1979, p. 25

[2] zie zijn essay l'Homme une existence doufeuse in: Deleuze. Foucault. Parijs, 1986

[3] Michel Foucault, De woorden en de dingen' Baarn, zonder jaartal, p. 419

anonymously and is constantly modified by the users. In networks, the traditional parameters of an information flow no longer apply: there is no beginning or end, no linear development, no individual author, no overview and so on. Electronic information has led to a questioning of intellectual property (both as a right and as a duty). This discussion is given weight above all by linking authorship to the subject who, in his or her words, expresses his or her essential inner self. What I want to say is that much of the confusion surrounding the idea of a post-subject world stems from a clinging to traditional representations in an increasingly compelling experience of the "non-I".

In this sense Heidegger's work is enlightening. He makes it clear that it is a subject that has taken off. However, this does not mean that man would no longer bear responsibility and that our existence would be made self-evident. Heidegger argues for the ancient Greek idea of subject as a junction of experiences, as the place where something occurs. As he himself said, 'Man is not the lord of being. Man is the shepherd of being'.[4] That 'shepherd' does it to him. This is not about thinking in terms of cause-effect, but an attitude of caring for what comes to us. My experiences do not belong to me, they happen in me. My existence is a conduit to a world in which I share. Now the paradox of the subjectless becomes clear: in order to forsake my self, I need a strong inner life that does not appropriate the world, but participates in it, empathizes with it.

With Heidegger's ideas in mind, we can understand that, for example, Foucault's attack on the self does not mean collectivisation, nor a hiding in anonymity, but rather a constant modification of the voices of the world. The post-subject thought does not mean a loss of self, but a radical change of self.

It is time we ate art and our artists go. The above was intended as a background, as a description of the climate in which the discussions within the group took place. Christiaan Bastiaans, Rob Birza, Maarten de Reus and Berend Strik did not start with a discussion about the future exhibition, but with a discussion about the collaboration itself. They fairly quickly rejected the traditional ideas of collaboration, namely as a division of labour, as in a group exhibition, or as a collective, as in making a joint work. They were looking for a form of communality in which the voices of the others are constantly changing at the hands of their own interpretation.

They organized a conversation in which the ideas did not become the subject of criticism, but in which they circulated between the participants. Each of the artists mixed, as it were, the incoming information with their own ideas and suspicions and brought them back into the conversation. It thus became a network. In this way a common corpus was created that nobody had any ownership of. At the same time, the transformations of this commonality were personal and (personal signatures were created. The fields of information circulated freely and were constantly changing as a result of the different contributions. The artists did not speak on behalf of the others, but the speakers became interchangeable, for their speeches reflected the others. Of course, such a network transcends the strict domain of setting up an exhibition. In fact, in order to arrive at such a collaboration, it was necessary not to start with art and artistic points of view, but to end there. First set up the network, coordinate with each other, listen to the others and only then, as a result, create an exhibition. They also consciously started outside art, organized excursions, made music, shared meals and so on.

In other words, the direction of thinking was reversed: not from an 'I' mind, but from a network. However, this reversal did not only take place in putting the relationship at the centre, but also on more artistic grounds in thinking from the house. Instead of adding art to a house, the house itself was put at the centre. The house with its associations, memories, energies and fantasies. The house itself became a medium that could be listened to and by literally helping a medium's troops, atmospheres were conjured up and the house could exhibit itself. This information became the guideline for their contribution. The ideas of the individual artists were kept in the 'black box' and later weighed together.

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4 Martin Heidegger. Tijd van het wereldbeeld. Tielt, 1983.

Thus arose the show room, the energy room with an energy centre, the extended coffee room with aggressive coffee walls (where the occupant suddenly came out of the corner in the shape of a sphere with oranges, bombarded with herbs (nails). In these atmospherical rooms details such as the dancer, the glass plates and the videos that reflected the personal input of the participants were shown. Small shifts of accent within the network. This was also the case in the exhibition space, where the 'personal inalienable' was shown and demonstrated and at the same time put into perspective.

In this way the exhibition corresponded in a large extent to a philosophical discussion about the end of the subject. The artists showed the consequences of the disappearance of the autonomous self in a practical way. For example that it is difficult for the outside world to imagine how giving up the subject idea in favour of the subjectum works within the context of the cooperation. That, in the first instance, the network could only develop by closing itself off hermetically. The network was then so strong that it became compatible and that new information fields such as the house and third parties could easily be 'plugged in'. That the public demanded authors, wanted to hear directly from the artists how they saw it. That the artists wanted to keep control of what would be said.