

Take action: Experiences in staging an interactive platform for audience engagement in public space.



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Carla Cruz 2003

INTRODUCTION

In the hyper mediated society we live in, “we have gone from public space to public image” as Paul Virilio stated in 1995 (quoted in NU: 2002). People are no longer addressed as citizens with an opinion or considered to have an active role in society; instead, they are seen as mere consumers or digits on polls. In this society, we no longer feel we have something to say, or can say something back to the system, be it economical, political, or cultural, in such a way that we can participate instead of just watching. People are not expected to be producers of their own culture, but to consume products with the false notion of freedom given by multiple choices in products on offer. We are addressed as consumers in all aspects of our lives, but not expected to create alternatives. Somehow, we feel comfortable with this situation where everything has been arranged for us. The escalation of non-participation is reflected in a public space crowded with commodity advertisement, explicit regulations and implicit codes of behavior, such as how loud to speak in a given space. Within such a ‘noisy’ public sphere, actuality is presented with pre-fabricated meaning, instead of leaving space for constructive opinion. In this context, I wanted to develop a critical tool to question the democratic public sphere and disentangle these implicit power structures that define our relation to society.

Can art lead a spectator, the “alienated city dweller” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.30) to become a social actor? I proposed a tool, which is also a platform that could instigate the transformation from spectator to ‘actor’. This tool is intended to question and analyze our role in society. Whether we are producers or mere consumers, whether we are actors or simply audience. And if we are any one of these, can we become the other, or be both simultaneously? It is a meaningful question without a pre-defined direction for an answer. The action leaves space for those who come across it to produce their own opinions about their role in society.

Consequently, my research started by creating a platform that engages the audience to experience the metaphor of manipulation. Based on the historical usage of hand puppet theatre in political debate, *Act 2 – do you want to manipulate for a change?* addresses the public as citizens and not as a specialized art audience. The placement of *Act 2* within the public space supports this. With *Act 2* I proposed this: to provoke the passer-by on the squares of Rotterdam to act on a platform that can be used as a tool to debate our position in this society, by providing space and open time for the engagement. Through inviting the passer-by to step out from anonymity in public space, I raise the question about how we individually behave in this social, cultural and political context, stimulating the participant to become aware by doing so—a political being with a public self.

To support my practical research, I studied the writings and practices of the following artists and writers: Guy Debord, Bertolt Brecht and Krzysztof Wodiczko.

I chose Guy Debord for his ideas about the construction of ‘situations,’ as a strategy of engaging people as citizens in social change. His essay *The Society of the Spectacle* motivated a change in art production in relation to society and politics. In this book, Debord proposes to use artistic strategies such as creativity, as a tool that can be used in everyday life, not just within the traditional art framework. What fascinated me in his writings was the debate on how to overcome the hyper-media society that turns every experience into

representation. Debord asks the question: how can we reshape the social world by regaining control of our wishes, opinions and lives through games and festivities, where organizers and participants are one and the same?

Bertolt Brecht was my second source, because of his methods of addressing the theatre audience by means of *alienation* in order to de-alienate them, which means to break the hypnotic relation with art and society in general. Brecht attempted to blur the borders between stage and audience, provoking critical thinking as a means to stimulate action.

Krzysztof Wodiczko was chosen for his interest on specific political contexts and for the way he uses art as a critical tool to reveal the complexities of those same contexts. He uses the street as a domain to activate the meaning of his works, like the series of vehicles, from the 70's and 90's.

All three of them position the role of the artist as a responsible individual in social, political and cultural construction. They give and demand a part of this responsibility from their audience, and by doing so they create tools to collectively question, negotiate and construct a vision of society.

Through the reflection done in this paper, I will connect my reading of the authors mentioned above, their activities and ideas with my own practical experience in staging *Act 2 - do you want to manipulate for a change?* I will propose arguments for the importance of audience participation, of the role of art and the artists in democratic public discussion and of creativity as a tool to imagine and construct our own vision of society.

In the chapter one, I will reflect on the development of *Act 2* over the past year and its relation to my previous practice. Following, in chapter two, I will analyze the use of art as a critical tool, through the investigation of the methods developed by the Debord, Brecht and Wodiczko. The third chapter takes a closer look at the different levels of participation and at the roles of the various participants involved in *Act 2*: at the spectator as actor and at my own role as a critical tool provider. In the fourth chapter I will present a consideration about translating the work to a different audience through documentation.

CHAPTER I

Act 2 – do you want to manipulate for a change?

Interventions in the public arena

Public space is on the one hand a place, which affirms social constructions and norms, and on the other hand an arena for discussion and creation of new social and political discourses. This duality within public space has been a major field of research in my art practice. For this reason the reason I attempt to insert my work directly in the public space, to confront not the specialist art audience but the general public, directly.

Each and every day people negotiate between their individuality and social power structures: political, economical and cultural structures that compose the social fabric, which regulate our behavior and define our social relation. However, in the same way that our culture shapes who we are, we also shape it back. For instance, by organizing collective public events. Personally I want to activate a critical position in relation to these structures, not in order to escape them but to make them visible, to better understand them, and their source of power. And by doing so, find out how can they be altered.

Playing with the puppet theatre reference

I myself felt manipulated, restrained by what others want to impose on the majority. In how I behaved, wore clothes, thought and dreamed, I found traces of mass consumption advertising. These conditions, and the urge to discuss them publicly, developed from the use of the marionette (string puppet) as a tool for manipulation into the use of street theater and hand puppets, as a physical and ideological platform for engaging the public.

I use the hand puppets street theatre as a strategy to deal with power structures, making them visible and easier to criticize through play, through a simple representation, in the form of puppets. I expected, by choosing the puppet theatre metaphor, to engage the public through the power of play and humor. As an interactive platform, the street theatre of hand puppets became the perfect vehicle.

The popular hand puppet street theatre has a strong tradition in Europe from the middle ages, when the representations used where the story of the life of Jesus Christ. After the 'Reformation' in XVI century, those representations were taken outside, from the churches to the squares. (Seara Cardoso) In the 60's and 70's in Portugal, under the fascist regime, the street puppet theatre besides being a stage where narratives can be told and moral values passed on, was also a place where social and political issues could be addressed. This kind of street performance diminished with the increase of mass media and broadcast television, although it could be seen regularly on the Portuguese squares until end of the 80's. People gather around the theatre and were encouraged to participate. Hand puppet theater then functions as a sort of popular

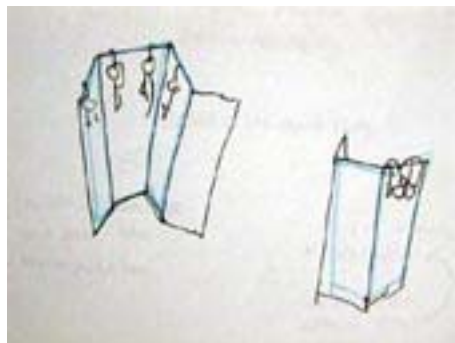
forum, an arena for both entertainment and discussion. The audience can react, and change the course of the events by shouting back, responding directly to the construction of the narrative. In some specific cases, such as 'the one man theatre, that would go around the country from fair to fair' (Seara Cardoso) this kind of theatre would make a satire of political issues, or represent political events that happened in the capital, informing then rural communities of those events as a sort of journal, function as informational vehicle and opinion raiser. Theatre has been used as place of provocation, capable of challenging its audience to think of social issues and by affecting both mind and feelings. It can exist as activist theatre, or more extremely as agit- prop - "Theatre for agitation and propaganda; a vibrant element of popular political theatre in the Soviet Union, it soon spread throughout the west." – stimulate social change.

(www.greenleft.org.au/back/1996/246/246p28.htm - 1/31/2003).

My choice to adapt to this kind of structure was based strongly on the ability to raise public opinion in an entertaining way, on its seductive power, for the puppet theatre is related to our (European) collective imagination and its use of satire and humor as a critical tool. Furthermore I liked its low-tech aesthetics and its mobility. Because I could approach the audience mainly through the structure itself as the mediator, visually and by its content, it left a more open space for the public to build their own opinions, without looking for the artist one's. For all the qualities stated above, the hand puppet theatre was perfect. *Act 2* isn't a traditional theatre, because it was never my intention to construct narratives, or lead others to do so- it was intended to deconstruct pre-fabricated narratives.

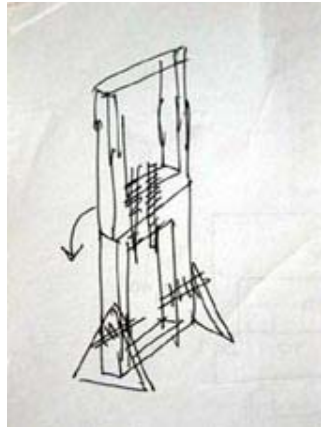
Act 2, first phase

Act 2 developed through several versions where the box and the puppets changed during the process of use within public space. It started as a big cardboard box that could be folded and transported by a single person. Painted in bright green to attract attention and with text written in red, on all sides, stating what it is about, inviting or giving instructions. On the inside the participants could find different sorts of puppets, characters from the Dutch and Portuguese traditional hand puppet theatre and key figures from the world politics.



Sketch for *Act 2*, cardboard box

Soon I discovered a couple of set backs on the cardboard box structure itself. It was too light, which meant easily blown of by the wind. I liked to use the Portuguese style, not so familiar to the Dutch, because it made it a non-conventional puppet set, which pleased me, since this was not a 'real' theatre anyway. But it was problematic since people didn't connect to it when used in the Netherlands. I kept these thoughts in mind when the choice to reshape it was made. The cabinet form, as a structure for a puppet show, was actually more announced by the words painted on the sides – 'poppen theater' then by the shape itself, but that was also changed quite soon to 'poppen kast,' after a few talks with participants and Dutch colleagues, which means 'puppet box', a more open concept. After discussing, inquiring, putting it through a number of street tests, making some adjustments, a new design was constructed.



Sketch for Act 2, wooden box

Act 2, Second Phase.

I learned from the first structure that needing to enter a box kept passersby from engaging the puppet theater. I decided to transform the new puppet cabinet into a two-sided structure. A shape of a wooden box when folded, and a type of scenery when open to its full height. Front and back like a stage setting. Written in red on the bright green colored surface is 'Kies een pop en speel' (pick a puppet and play), with the pictures of the starring characters pasted on its surface. On the upper part, there's something in between a puppet theatre hole and a TV frame where the action can happen. The color of the wood is maintained so as to look like a backstage, the puppets are hanged in some hooks, there's also written, but in white, the same inviting words 'pick a puppet and play'. It is 2,10 meters high for 0.90m wide and it folds down to become a smaller box on wheels. Two wooden triangles that travel inside the box are placed in the sides, when open, to assure its stability. A strap is open and left loose in the sides. It is designed specifically to be transported by a single person, who can pull it through the streets easily. The decision to construct it in wood was made to give the structure strength against the elements, such as wind and rain, and to better convince the passerby of the seriousness of the invitation. Being perceived as something in between theatre, a spontaneous activist act and art, I felt that I had to be closer to an actual theatre structure, but not running the risk of being only interpreted as such. This step from a totally improvised cardboard construction to a

something more thoughtful was a necessary one. In terms of visual impact, I embedded the low-tech Do-It-Yourself aesthetics notion, in order to make it look unprofessional, but at the same time created an attractive colorful structure that is able to stand out in the midst of the visually crowded public space. Following also in the footsteps of a conceptual and avant-garde tradition of a low technical production, insisting that art can and should be done by all and using the strategy of small means to highlight the content, the DIY aesthetics is meant to take away any artistic aura. I don't want to impress the passerby with an outstanding construction; instead I want to have signs imbedded with meaning that can be used in a casual way.

The key elements in the *Act 2* platform are the puppets offered to be manipulated. The use of hand puppets for *Act 2* relate to all sort of readings, such as: play and entertainment; touching instead of contemplating as a different way of communicating; presenting issues that seem distant in a closer way, by using icons; to the direct connection to the concept of manipulation by the necessity of inserting one's hand inside the body of the doll to give it life. The no- needed expertise to handle these types of puppets was quite important in decision to use them as critical tools.

I choose to offer to manipulate characters that symbolically represent manipulative behavior, such as politicians. Therefore I searched for the headlines of the newspapers for the key figures of the moment in the fall of 2002. The figures mostly used during the whole project were: Tony Blair, George Bush and Saddam Hussein. Others such as Putin, Balkenende or Bin Laden were added in relation to their appearance on the news. The political characters I've chosen are known worldwide, they are every day on the news channels. That is why the choice of taking their images out of the newspaper and transfer them directly to fabric to make their heads, was made. They came to us by mediated images, like television, newspapers, etc. They don't need any other symbol to represent them; the newspaper quality portraits are enough to be recognized as the power signs they are. Not men, but symbols.

CHAPTER II

Art as a critical tool

Attempting in my own art practice to create situations that can raise questions about the present state of society and about what role we have in it, I found it necessary to explore how other artists use artistic strategies to question social constructions. Throughout this chapter, I will examine how art can be a critical tool, by analyzing the tools offered by Guy Debord, Bertolt Brecht and Krzysztof Wodiczko.

Guy Debord (1931/1994) was an artist, filmmaker and the main theorist of the Situationist

International (1957-1972, a revolutionary organization that divided its action between, artistic practice, art criticism, urbanism, and the revolution of everyday life). In his influential books *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and *Report on the Construction of Situations* (1957). Debord proposed that art could be the “exact critique of the existing conditions”, the human condition in this society “and their deliberate overcome” (Debord, 1999, p.18) through action. Art would be actually a tool to think on the world critically and question the social constructions that sustain our culture.

Debord analyzed his contemporary society—Western Europe in the late 50's, early 60's, just after the appearance of broadcast Television—as a *society of spectacle* where everything is mediated through images, and ‘direct’ experience is replaced by representation. Hence “the spectacle is not an ensemble of images, but a social relation among people mediated by images” (Debord, 1967, SS. Chap I point 4). The notion of “contemporary urban everyday life of capitalism” that Debord characterized exists through a saturation of mass culture forms, such as: TV, newspapers, billboards and advertising. These forms were “penetrating everywhere as an act to cover over, and hide the discontinuities of everyday life” (Highmore, 2002, p.140), which for Debord were mainly the gaps between classes. “The spectacle does not reflect society overall—it organizes images in the interest of one portion of society only; and this cannot fail to affect the real social activity of those who merely contemplate these images” (Jappe, 1999, p.7). So as Debord stated: all differences are leveled to a certain image promoted as normal, and to which we should conform and live up to.

Debord was concerned about how people lived more through representations and according to other people's models, instead of from their own desires. Living an illusion of freedom, Debord proposed “an art that would create situations rather than reproduce already existing situation” (quoted on Jappe, 1999, p.6) against contemplation and non-participation. in a society where everything is pre-fabricated for our consumption, where we ought to be mere spectators of reality, These situations, defined as a “concrete construction of momentary atmospheres of life and its transformation into superior passional quality” (Debord, 1999, p.18), would be deliberately constructed and enjoyed by the same people. This would lead to genuine dialogue between people, to experience real life instead of just believing in the generalized image of reality presented by the mass media. These constructed moments, by promoting real encounters between people, could be instruments to reveal any ‘discontinuities’, by distinguishing different life styles from the promoted one, and “awaken us from the dream of commodity” (Highmore, 2002, p.141). Those situations

motivated by individual desires would, in the end, lead to a new life style— a true revolution was the change of behavior and communication between individuals.

The Situationist International or S.I., proposed a world where art would cease to exist separated from everyday life. To make this passage from passivity to participation happen, artists were asked to make available their strategies and expertise's. In the beginning, these situations that ought to be lived by the constructors of the situations themselves would have to have a director, the artist. "We have to begin with a phase of small-scale experimentation. It will probably be necessary to prepare plans or scenarios for the creation of situations. To this end we must develop a system of notation, which will become more precise as we learn more from the experiences of construction" (Debord, 1999, p.22). The artistic gestures proposed by S.I. as practical and intellectual tools, could help to discuss and access the world through personal and direct experience "actualized in everyday life" (Jappe, 1999, p.68) and would change our life style to an extent, that at a high stage, "everyone will become an artist, i.e. inseparably a producer-consumer of total culture creation". (1960/ Fabian Tompsett) <http://www.notbored.org/si-manifesto.html>)

The situations were meant to reduce the number of people that are only passive audience and raise the number of 'actors' (Debord, 1999, p.22) in society. These situations should be consequent on a society, 'that would matter for the collective'. The creation of situations introduces total participation and interaction. The direct agents will live the situation that they also constructed collectively.

The 'situations' proposed by Debord can be critical instruments in the extent that they can practically question society by creating different ways of living, in a playful and festive way. These 'momentary ambiances' could stress the state of everyday life, by being initially constructed as an extraordinary moment. By direct experience of the exception, we can compare the rest of everyday life and understand that things can happen and be lived differently. "We must develop a systematic intervention" based on "the material environment of life and the behaviors which it gives rise to and which radically transform it." (Debord, 1999, p.18), This is how art in Situationist terms—on becoming aware of the difference between everyday life and the constructed situation— can act as a tool to question social constructions that sustain our culture.

An example of the Situationist strategy of creating "momentary ambiances of life and their transformation" and "invention of games" (Debord, 1999, p.21) is what Debord calls 'drifting', a different way to experience the city. On these drifts "the practice of a passional journey out of the ordinary" (Debord, 1999, p.21) one makes their own rules wandering through the urban fabric instead of following pre- established ways of behavior, and with no specific aim other than the drift itself.

Debord believed in art as an instrument to analyze society through 'drifts' or situations, to be able to pin point its problems and spring them out to discussion. His concept of art as a critical tool is a playful one, where individuals make their own rules. This is vital in the theories of Debord, for by creating new rules in a game situation we can better understand the rules to which we conform in everyday life, and practice already in the game how it could be different. In practical terms I find little actions made by the S.I.

“Situationist techniques have yet to be invented” (Debord, 1999, p.22) but their influence is enormous through what they theorized.

BRECHT I analyzed Bertolt Brecht (1898/ 1956); a playwright, theatre theorist and director, through his theoretical writings edited by John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre the development of an aesthetic*. Brecht's dramaturgy engages the audience in an open dialogue to arouse them to be more active and a participant in social construction. His aim was to change society, at all levels and it is “precisely theatre, art and literature which have to form the ‘ideological superstructure’ for a solid, practical rearrangement of our ages way of life.” (Brecht, 2001, p.23). Brecht worked within a Marxist framework; therefore the whole body of art contains the ideas and morality, of any given society. For Brecht, first are the social conditions that we live in, how we relate to these and to each other. Then there is art that comments, rewrites, uses that material to present society to an audience in order to make the audience act consequently towards the social structure. This means the “spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences)” (Brecht, 2001, p.71)

For Brecht, art is an instrument to be used to awaken people to the human condition as a social construction, therefore, possible of being re-shaped when something does not feel right or suitable anymore. Taking the opportunity of having an audience seated in the theatre to entertain, Brecht aimed, to teach an audience how to use that experience to think critically. “It has as a purpose the ‘teaching’ of the spectator a certain quite practical attitude” (Brecht, 2001, p.78). This means that the critical attitude ought to be transported to everyday life. However Brecht did not want to give out knowledge of how things should be, but to give the tools for others to think critically towards ‘social conditions’. Brecht presented his narratives on human behavior as ‘historical’, which means subjected to constructed social-political conditions, therefore “shown as questionable and alterable: man itself as dependent on certain political and economic factors and at the same time as capable of altering them” (Brecht, 2001, p.86). By making this transparent, the audience is made aware of the social constructions and aroused to question and alter behaviors, and the greater society as a whole.

Brecht’s Dramaturgical Strategies

Brecht criticize the so-called aristotelic theatre—a kind of play that universalizes the spectators on the basis of “common humanity”—where the audience is supposed to identify with the hero, accept its fate and live its passions as if it were theirs, Brecht’s new concept of theatre is objective and rational. It individualizes the audience, so they can reflect on their own position in society. It “turns the spectator into an observer, but arouses his capacity for action, forces him to take decisions” (Brecht, 2001, p.37), about the ‘injustices of life’. Inviting both relaxation and reflection, Brecht leads the audience to think critically towards what is presented, and not feel emphatic about it. The idea is to have a relaxed audience, not a hypnotized one. Brecht gives a good example, by saying that people should keep their hats on in the auditorium, which

culturally would mean a lack of respect. But what Brecht meant was to create a more ordinary atmosphere that would help develop a more detached and critical look at the play—like watching a football match. This keeps the audience aware that it stands in a theatre, and not to think of the illusion of the play as reality itself, by over-identifying with it. This was achieved, for example, by seating the audience in a café style, leaving the lights on in the auditorium and allowing for people to smoke.

Brecht also stimulated a more detached and critical attitude through instruction for the actors' behavior- by addressing the audience directly, never losing his own identity and representing 'in quotation marks' as "he acts, as portraying how" someone else's "behaves" (Brecht, 2001, p.136). This refers to his character as existing in the third person. It makes the audience aware, all the time that this is a representation, not reality. The attitude the actor adopts, is a critical one. Attitude- which shows what the actor thinks of the character portrayed—invites the spectator to "criticize the character portrayed" (Brecht, 2001, p.139). In this way the actor's performance becomes "a discussion (about social conditions) with the audience he is addressing" (Brecht, 2001, p.139).



Brecht – Mother, final scene in the Theatre Union's Production, New York, 1935 (in Willet, 2001, p 158)

The further use of projections, set design, light effects and music (and other disruptive elements that could be added to provoke double readings of what was presented on stage) established that "the production took the subject matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation: the alienation that is needed to all understanding"(Brecht, 2001, p.71).

All this means the breaking down of the "fourth wall" (Brecht, 2001, p.71); the invisible wall between stage and audience. Brecht called this effect that "purges audience and stage from everything magical" (Brecht, 2001, p.136) the alienation effect. The 'A-effect' arouses the audience to use reason and reflect upon what they were seeing. To act as in a "sporting arena" as "experts" (Brecht, 2001, p.44) where the relation between the audience and the characters on stage is not emotional or hypnotic. The alienation is achieved through the presentation of incidents that, although familiar, appear strange to the audience. "Have you ever really looked at your watch" (Brecht, 2001, p.144), which is Brecht bringing attention to something ordinary made strange, and not taken for granted. This is when a critical look is drawn upon within a particular situation. Brecht offers, by doing so, dramaturgy as a tool. To be used by the audience to criticize society and make one's own assumptions.

WODICZKO Krzysztof Wodiczko is an artist, mostly known for his large-scale projections that juxtapose images with architecture thus confront a given context to create social-political meaning. Trained as an Industrial Designer in Warsaw, he started to question the mere functionality of design, and conceived the notion of interrogative design. I researched his art practice: specifically *Podium* and *Homeless* vehicles, through his writings in the book *Critical Vehicles*. These vehicles function as a tool to reflect on the exclusion of specific groups from social representation. Wodiczko engages with a specific social group, immigrants or the homeless people of New York City, which differs from Debord or Brecht who both aimed for a more general one.

Of all three authors I researched, Wodiczko was the only one who explicitly relates his public interventions to the notion of democracy. Wodiczko claims art can promote democracy, which he defines as follows: “the practice of making oneself heard (instead of passively listening to someone else’s voice.)” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.142). To create situations that present the specificity of the public space, object of his aesthetic investigation and experiments. Wodiczko felt the need to disturb the 'rulers voice' in the public space, to prevent it from becoming totalitarian. To keep the dialogue ongoing and the rope pulling between power and freedom of speech. Action, and the ideas a *participatory* democracy and the power of art to participate on this debate, becomes an instrument to “check the pulse” of democracy.

Wodiczko claims that his works attempts “to heal the numbness that threatens the health of democratic process by pinching and disrupting it, waking it up, and inserting the voice, experiences, and presence of those who have been silenced, alienated and marginalized.” (Wodiczko, 1999, p. XIII).

Wodiczko continues by stating: “communicating one’s own voice through the kind of public space that exists today is a truly difficult, political, cultural and aesthetic undertaking” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.142). In a way that artists can come in as set designers, as providers of media of self expression. Artists create tools that will open breaches on the discourse of public space now dominated by the government-state, real estate and corporate consumption. The task of Wodiczko “artistic speech act” is to make the passage from critical listening to critical speech. How art can function as a catalyst of social energies and desires - and be a mean for communication between different social groups- was solved in his work by the creation of critical vehicles.

I will now examine two examples *Podium* and *Homeless Vehicle*, in which Wodiczko uses art to think on constructed society and to act in the public sphere. These vehicles combine “methods of critical analysis with the existential metaphor of ideological performance” with a possibility to “acquire an instrumentality to assure the possibility of performing certain urgent and emergent task... providing emergency aid; exposing...opening dialogue” (Wodiczko, 1999, p. XV). These vehicles reveal the situation of the human being as a “citizen in a totally controlled environment,”. With these alternative vehicles Wodiczko promotes the freedom of speech and action.



Vehicle – Podium, 1977/79, Wodiczko

In projects such as the vehicle *Podium* (1977-79) a platform in the shape of a pulpit, on wheels, the strength of an orator's voice controls the speed of the locomotion. It takes the same energy to make the vehicle move as to address an audience. "The vehicle is propelled by an electric engine and moves in one direction only". (Wodiczko, 1999, p.77). Is this because the political speeches move also in one direction only? Or are directed towards something, not really a dialogue or a place to raise critical thinking, but to convince that this is the right way, and the only way? This mobile podium is like a speakers corner on wheels. This corner, in Hyde Park in London, always inspired me as a place of provocation, where anything can be said. Also on this platform, symbolically anything could be said.

Homeless Vehicle (1988-89), is a response to the homeless situation in NY City, its causes and consequences, and investigates the way of living of the homeless. The shelter vehicle attempts to function usefully in the context of NY city street life. Its point of departure is the strategy of survival that urban nomads presently utilize. "Through discussion with scavengers" (collectors, always on the move), "we developed a proposal for a vehicle to be used both for personal shelter and can and bottle transportation and storage" (Wodiczko, 1999, p.82) and useful, to make them even more visible in the city streets, to problematize the issue even more.



Homeless vehicle, 1988/89

Wodiczko uses what he call's 'interrogative design', a design aware of the social structures and their weaknesses, to uncover them to promote and inspire a *communication* of real "lived- through experience rather than operate as a substitute" (Wodiczko, 1999, p.16). In this way, people should perform their own critiques and desires: "it should not represent the ...vanquished, nor should it "stand for it, or "speak for" them. It should be developed with them" (Wodiczko, 1999, p.17). It then can be used as a media of communication to those who where suppressed by those same means. Based on inquiry of the conditions that produced a certain critical situation, Wodiczko designed this performative tool on the one hand to have a concrete solution, even though unacceptable as a real one, for a problem; and on the other hand, function

as a way to focus on the given problem as platform for public discussion. The design was developed to the specific needs of a group of homeless people. An emergency solution is provided (in the form of the project itself), but the real solution for the problem remains: the change of the conditions that provoked the problem in the first place. This change of condition is what Wodiczko wants to see discussed, by providing the public performance vehicles. The vehicles stress the existence of the problem (homelessness), and arouse heated discussions about it, by being “first aid” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.16) solutions. If we imagine the number of the homeless population in NY City, and all of them carrying these vehicles, it would be a major traffic jam on the sidewalks.

The homeless people are co-producers in the project by being involved in the designing of the vehicle with which they will perform: “The project is not put forward as a finished product, ready for use on the streets” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.82). Wodiczko first presented an initial proposal for this vehicle, to a group of scavengers (homeless) to be improved in collaboration with them. It was a starting point for further collaboration between skilled designers and potential users. Wodiczko stated, “only through such cooperation can the vehicle function usefully” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.82). Rather than just being appropriated by the group of homeless the vehicle is adapted, enhanced, finished with their collaboration, so it becomes practical, and really used by the scavengers, because it was design according to their needs. But the aim of the project is not only “to fulfill the need of homeless people as a means of transportation or as shelter,” but to create “a legitimized status for its users in the community of the city” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.83). The importance of the vehicle is in its visibility being as strong as its utilitarian aspect. That’s what it brings it, and the homeless issue into public discussion. It can then be seen from two different angles: one, showing that these scavengers are collecting, working for a living and that they too are part of the living fabric of New York City, two, they are, even if most of their rights as such have been taken away, still citizens. And because the vehicle was designed to look like other mobile services (like food vending and supermarket cars), the value of their activity is recognized in the collecting of the detritus of the city. The cart shows this, and at the same time it is outrageous that people have to live amidst trash. This is when the impossibility of the vehicle springs out, the impossibility of the vehicle as a solution, because the real solution requires the transformation of the social structures that provoked the problem in the first place. The movement of these vehicles throughout the city “are acts of resistance” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.83)—their existence provokes the passersby to recognize the issue address by these vehicles, and the society that excludes thousands of people from the basic means of life. Homeless people perform with the vehicle, thus acquiring new status, representation and voice.

These vehicles are objects that imagine ‘impossible’ solutions to real problems in an attempt to make them visible and provoke debate. “It’s an object that could be used, but at the same time it is more useful in raising more complex issues” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.128). The most important aspect is the symbolic use of the vehicle It is a tool for other to articulate their ideas, and gives a voice through promoting: real dialogue between individuals and democratic participation in society. Art opens a space for thinking critically on social issues; by addressing them in a different way, often making them easier, or simply possible to be discussed. Through an aesthetic approach, which Wodiczko names after Brecht an alienating one, Wodiczko puts forward issues to which we closed our eyes long ago, or that became so familiar that we don’t see them as a real, solvable problems anymore (as the homeless, becoming almost urban furniture) are public addressed.

Comparison

Common to all three authors is the wish to instigate change. Not to change the world directly but to release the impulse to act, through art strategies, to find different ways of living in this world. Through their artistic gestures and audience engagement they find ways to transform people from spectators to actors, from consumers to producers.

Each artist approached art as a critical tool differently: for Debord, the desire to transform spectators into actors, by proposing situations constructed and experienced by the same people; for Brecht to coach theatre audiences to critically think about society and finally for Wodiczko to stimulate discussion about political representation and democratic participation in our current society.

Reading Debord with Wodiczko in mind, public space is becoming privatized, and public space is therefore representing society only partly. So the participation of the citizens on critically using the public space to confront the establishment, is crucial in democratic society. Therefore as Wodiczko stated “art is an alternative act of speech and an important ingredient of the practice of democracy” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.142). The need here is to reclaim the public sphere, in order to reply in real-time, to state decisions. But how can we have our voice heard in a space crowded with powerful voices? For Wodiczko, it comes through the design of operative objects, like the vehicle that can become a “performative operator, a medium, a stage, or a prop, or an occasion. It becomes a forum by being an object” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.185). It is through the participants (homeless people) use of the object that is what stimulates critical thinking. Debord stimulates through his writings - which are actual calls for action- the organization of situations that stand for individuals opinions and desires. Through the deliberate creation of extraordinary moments, that provokes, by comparing those platforms to the experience of everyday life- analytical thinking towards the social constructions of daily becomes self-evident, both to politicize people and the public space and to reclaim it for discussion. This can only be done by action, through a real experience. Brecht took the advantage of having the theatre, and its audience, to do the same: he individualized the audience and alienated it from the subject matter presented in his plays, to better analyze it and consequently to criticize society itself.

This creation of critical tools Debord argued that should be done collectively, not to follow a direct path but defend the creation of platforms. Debord argues for “ephemeral” and “playful,” to allow participants to experience life directly and differently, according to their own desires, and by trying out new rules. Brecht, in his practice, was more of a director, but likewise he wasn’t prescribing a way of thinking- he was simply providing tools for his audience to think critically. It is necessary to note here that Debord’s writings were resisting the use of representations, because those were exactly in his view the reason for non-participation in society. So against contemplation, he suggested creation of extraordinary moments in everyday life. Nevertheless Brecht found useful the exemplary use of representation to arouse people’s critical thinking. And so did Wodiczko, by the use of the symbolic value of an object. Objects, in-between design or performance props, in-between a serious attempt to solve a problem and as an impossible device; to provoke discussion of a concrete issue, such as the homeless problem in New York city, that refers to a deeper layer of a problem, such as capitalist society constructions- a concept that all three try to bring out to the public and democratic discussion.

Relevant to my work is the symbolic value of an object, a performative object, such as Wodiczko's vehicles, that stand for something as a metaphor but not being exactly what it seems. In the same way Brecht's alienation effect, used as a strategy to arouse critical thinking by revealing the familiar in a strange way, is present in *Act 2* (it is used as a tool, on an unexpected place, with unexpected forms, or seen from an unexpected angle). My platform, attempts in the same way to raise questions and doubts It is designed to encourage the audience to interact with the piece itself and that will arouse, as Brecht would argue, questioning 'social relations' as natural and given. Allowing audience participation in the creation of the activating rules in a playful context, to analyze everyday life, as related to Debord. All this can shake the audience from its 'hypnotic trance' and make it consider the social structures that surround us. In that manner, art can be a tool to create a situation where people start to think. I aim through the use *Act 2*, a look-a-like political puppet theatre, to trigger critical thinking, about specific situations presented on our social, economic, and cultural context.

With *Act 2*, I work with a consciousness of world politics—the puppet theatre structure stands there as a reminder for the democratic values of choice, participation, free opinion and speech, in a society built around the principle that we should consume what others have produced for us. *Act 2* is a platform, for it creates a space to do something and is also a tool where people can “enjoy setting its reason to work” (Brecht, 2001, p.14), a tool to investigate our role in society.

In order for this platform and critical tool to be effective the engagement of the people, city dwellers, theatre audience or passersby, is then the critical question.

Audience/ participation and direction

How I attempt to engage the passerby to participate in *Act 2* and expose the different levels of involvement achieved. Looking closer at the role of the audience and my own as a tool provider.

Participation in public space is the key word in *Act 2* and in democracy, “such participation is a critical catalyst for change” (Felshin, 1998, p.12) and it is through this action that the passerby can critically think about his position on society. First of all, by choosing to be a participant instead of a mere viewer. To be on the ‘backstage’ and master the masters of the world (control the hand puppets). In a playful way this challenges the viewers and participants’ preconceptions, gives a place to realize certain assumptions and judge them critically.

I have always searched for strategies to involve the audience more in my artwork, seeking to restore ‘experience’ and interaction, in my artwork, against mere contemplation. In previous work that came into effect by the use of intimate media and playing with the viewer’s senses. My soft sculpture and tactile work are a direct example: *Chicken* (1999) – a meter high plaster chicken, placed in a public garden, in an eating position. With a hole in the back, inviting the public to place the hand inside the chicken’s ass. This process of developing a project as a shared dialogue between the artist and the viewer/participant is also evident within the groups I am involved, such as: ZOiNA,¹ a feminist collective of artistic practice based in Porto, ROOM an artist run space based in Rotterdam and CLANITICA an artist collective formed during my stay in Rotterdam.



Chicken, 1999, Porto

¹ Zoina is composed by Carla Cruz, Catarina Carneiro de Sousa and Isabel Carvalho, since 1999 has been working with issues related to gender and power discussing in the context of art and politics the role and representation of women. CLANITICA, international collective of artists initiated by Carla Cruz, Claudia Van Dijk, Nina Hoechtl and Tina Sejbjerg, working around communication and public space. ROOM artists run space based in Rotterdam and organized by Carla Cruz, Karin de Jong and Rebecca Moran, a platform for multiple artistic events and discussion on the field of artistic practice and exhibition.

Which audience?

The search to reach different audiences from the one I could encounter in an art venue, is not due to the 'type' of people, but to the attitude generated by these spaces. When one enters space, knowing a-priori that will encounter art, one is already in a different state of mind; it is like we prepare ourselves in advance to a particular mood that can be analytical, but mostly just contemplative. In the essay on *Blurring of Art and Life*, Allan Kaprow thus observes: in general "when participatory art is shown in an exhibition context, both artist and viewer unconsciously expect it to be, and act like, a picture- discrete and kept at a distance. When viewers are urged to become part of the art without further help or preparation, they feel put upon and become stereotypes." (Kaprow, 1993, p.152). The feeling of being on display, like the art objects encountered, makes us behave differently (we take our "hats off" in sign of respect, a behavior which Brecht challenged in his theatre settings). Differently from art venues where art is taken out from 'real life' and its political and social engagement neutralized, public space offers an encounter of indeterminate situations, intermediary spaces and transit areas where diverse functions mix. Therefore I set my aim to reach people in public space that are not expecting to encounter politicized artistic situations, —to affirm the necessity of being as Walter Benjamin said— a "state of emergency" towards society, "understood not as an exception but as an everyday condition, an ongoing motivation for critical judgment... to secure a vision of a better future." (quoted in Wodiczko, 1999, p. 16)

Being public is to be vulnerable. We go in the streets anonymously (at least the majority of us), feeling quite comfortable in these huge metropolis where nobody knows us. To be addressed by an art platform, to take a position, manipulate and become a political individual, it is the same as feeling exposed. As Rosalyn Deuchte says in her book *Evictions* that examines the relation between contemporary art, public space and political discourse, "publicness... it is a condition of exposure to an outside that is also an instability within" (Deutsche, 1996, p.303). I want to provoke and change this feeling on the public domain. I am, therefore, interested in this unaware audience, the passerby, to provoke individuals to stand out of the crowd.

Initially I stated my audience to be a non-selected one, but during the process I became aware that actually they were composed of a very specific group. Even though I addressed a diverse audience and consciously took the platform to places with different functions such as commercial places, dwelling, crossing areas, realizing that the common entertainment and leisure time in our European cities is shopping (browsing through items in the shops, hanging out in the big shopping areas, places that became the piazzas of our days). I returned to the same square over and over again, the Binnenwegplein (a commercial area of the center of Rotterdam) to address this specific crowd— city dwellers in their personal shopping mission. I am experimenting with the challenge of engaging the passersby through the piece *Act 2*, by placing an object of passive use in the public space, and examining which responses are aroused. Interested in the transformation of cultural products consumers into cultural constructors, the 'shoppers' were the appropriate audience.

Besides the visual interests it causes, playing within the context of the piece normally starts with a couple or a small group of people that act for each other. This attracts other passersby to stop and become a sort of an audience, some comments are exchanged, and sometimes a longer dialogue is held—mediated by the

presence of the structure. It can arouse dialogue between total strangers, when for example someone started to play for a friend and others stopped to watch and comment on the act. *Act 2* is a non-announced action. It does not aim to gather as much people as it can, thus it does not need a strategy to invite participation other than its actual presence in a public place. The aim is to reach each person individually as a citizen.

Participation

To take a puppet, and make play with it, is the invitation. The invitation is done mainly by the structure itself. One of the methods used for this engagement is symbolic: by the use of popular/ folk culture, the use of street puppet theatre. It is an aesthetic inspiration related to festivals, carnivals, parades, games, and street performances, as something done for and by the people. There is not a 'we' and a 'them'— we are both actors and audience. This experience is what can transform both the participant and what he was invited to participate in: society. I will not argue that we should all start living in a constant carnival, instead, I will argue to find for ourselves, in our culture, moments when collective activities organized by and for us happen. It was not my intention to put up such a platform (collectively built and lived) or to organize collective events within communities of which I am not a part. In the present condition, what I could propose, according to my concerns, was a tool to think about having a more active role in society.



Act 2 –Do you want to manipulate for a change? 2002/3 Rotterdam

Another method used to approach the public was humor, for its ability of breaking borders. As Walter Benjamin said: "It may be noted, by the way, that there is no better start for thinking than laughter." (Benjamin quoted in Duncombe, 2002, p. 80). This was the way I wanted to approach the passerby, to produce a smile—starting with making a joke of politics through puppets, then to make a statement that we are all puppets manipulated by power structures. This strategy might be understood, after the reading of Brecht's methods on theatre, as an 'alienation effect', producing a detachment from the subject matter presented, in order to be analyzed critically. The decision to portray key world politicians as puppets, as an invitation to think about manipulation and decision-making in our society, was part of the allure: to manipulate the 'masters of the world'.

The platform reached all ages, social strata, and in a multicultural city such as Rotterdam, a great number of ethnic groups and nationalities. It could be read and used by all of them, in their own terms. It raised private and public dialogues when read as a political comment- “We realized that in this area people are more politicized, more aware of political issues, and willing to discuss them” (report 12th March²) and was used a tool to explain world politics to children “A lot of head nodding, smiles, getting others to look, parents explaining to their kids who the people that the puppets represent are” (report 12th March).

The audience is invited to play on this puppet show, to reverse roles, to control, to speak, to make a speech, to give an opinion, to release fears and emotions, to be a master. In the meantime, making us laugh, and laughing themselves. Despite the dimension of the challenge, children attempted to play, had fun and questioned their parents; the parents then had to explain and think themselves on how to conceptualize things, what was it all about. An example is the staging on ‘Pretorialaan’ when “it became a bit didactic for curious children, a reminder (of the war) for some, and almost monumental for others that recognized in the structure a sort of symbolism to those who are against the war.” (report 22nd March). Adolescents showed their excitement for having a place to try out publicly their opinions, and show their ‘voice’ as when “ a teenager put up a whole theatre play for his friends making a lot of people gather around” (report 20th March). Adults let themselves go with the pleasure of playing, representing, manipulating, stating their opinion, and reasoning. On the 31st of March “the first to players were two friends, middle –aged women” that without other invitation than the platform itself, engaged in playing for each other amusement (report 31st March), comparing what is depicted in the media, and these puppets hanging there, harmless and hopelessly vulnerable, at their disposal, for manipulation.



Act 2- Do you want to manipulate for a change? 2002/3, Rotterdam

My Role and presence

Crucial for *Act 2* was to invite people to think and act critically, without pre-defining how the public should think or act. Therefore, I made the decision to neither stand next to the structure nor be a master of ceremonies.

² These ‘reports’ refer to the reports to be found on the appendix of this paper, which I wrote as a journal of the staging of *Act 2* during the development of the project.



Act 2- Do you want tot manipulate for a change? 2002/3, Rotterdam

I realized at an early stage that if I am beside the 'theatre' passersby feel they should be guided through the experience, which would mean further direction from my part.

Act 2 can be staged and played by everyone. I don't want to claim authorship over the work (even though I can be considered the ultimate responsible author of the tool) When I take the theater structure to public space I could be for many people, an activist, an artist, a political militant, a performer, someone who wants extra money, an entertainer. There is a certain degree of control from my part, since I provide the tool, choose the puppet theatre like platform, the shape, the characters, the place, all of this deliberately decided. But I am not defining what might be articulated with the tool provided. I don't direct the event itself, but give a platform, that can be used as a critical tool where passersby can establish their own position towards it freely, (and thus become co-author of the work, and producers of their own opinions).

Am I directing when I claim that I want people to question their roles in society by positioning themselves as actors or audience towards Act 2? Brecht, for example, intended to train his audience through the experience offered by his dramaturgy. The audience, by questioning representations of the world, would learn how to think critically upon the world itself. By taking a critical position in the auditorium they would learn how to do the same towards society. Brecht wrote that his dramaturgy and alienation effect would have as a purpose the 'teaching' of the spectator a certain, quite practical, attitude." (Brecht, 2001, p. 78) But, unlike Brecht, I make no claim to have such an explicit didactic purpose with the tool I provide. I have a more speculative and playful approach that does not direct a specific moral or moralistic agenda. I create an interrogative platform round manipulation and our role in democratic society that approaches passersby as citizens. The symbolic use of hand puppets in Act 2, as a playful approach, is the initial experience and reading of the work. However the choice of using political characters, lends to and does not exclude other possibilities for interpretation than the ones I might have thought when I proposed participation/manipulation. I want to stimulate people to question their role in cultural construction, without predefining what role that should be. That passersby 'act' for themselves includes exactly, in my point of view, the responsibility to decide how to act.

Am I empowering the passerby through *Act 2*? I will refer to the work of Wodiczko, *Alien Staff* (1992/96) to better explain my position. The *Alien Staff* is a portable “public address equipment and culture network” for individuals and groups of immigrants. It is an instrument through which the individual immigrant can address directly passersby in the city who might be attracted by the “symbolic form” (http://www.v2.nl/n5m/people/wodiczko_alien.html – 11/28/02) of the device.



Alien Staff (1992/96), Wodiczko

The *Alien Staff* resembles a ‘shepherds rod’ equipped with a mini video monitor that broadcast the face of the person holding the device, telling his migration story. The *Alien Staff* is at the same time an instrument, a performance and a network. The equipment was developed to serve the immigrant in his search for communicating his story, for a different representation or image from the ‘locals’, and to question the attempt by governments to nullify their difference for the benefit of ‘integration’. “It is an instrument whose function is to empower those who are deprived of power” (Wodiczko, 1999, p 119). Wodiczko, by working with such a specific audience gives voice to those that are voiceless in our society, in this case the immigrants. I am using similar strategies, and have similar aims as to disrupt the established representation in the public sphere and question who has a voice in the dominant culture. What is different is that I do not give the participants a voice rather I attempt to make them aware of their own voice and their ability to use it critically. Therefore the way I attempt to empower others by this staging of a ‘puppet theatre like’ tool is to raise questions about ‘the power of having voice’ within society and to attempt to make them aware that they are part of a greater whole, a global society, one that it is also their responsibility as a citizen.

Documentation

During the whole period of experimentation with *Act 2* on the squares of Rotterdam, I also made different investigations on how to record the events surrounding the project: from photographs, to media coverage, written text, video recording and story telling.

How the written reports effected a post-reading of *Act 2* and how they became the project's second life and body. How the documentation developed from the problematic issue of recording and publishing a direct action to become a space to reflect on the critical tool that *Act 2* is, when activated in public space.

The desire to use my skills as an artist in a socially engaged manner was born from exposure to art-based documents, such as: books or retrospective exhibitions on Feminism, Conceptualism and Dada. And specifically, ephemeral actions that were recorded in video, photography or text. *Act 2* does not present a given comment or narrative—it is a temporary interrogative tool, which is meant for the public space. What each of the participants and by-standers get from the tool, or the use of the tool, remains in their private thoughts. The documentation method that I developed is also not about the stories that people produce with it, but more about how I perceived the project in action. And it is exactly this that can be shared and become useful for others.

Important in the artistic gesture of *Act 2* is the direct engagement and interaction of citizens with a symbolic political hand puppet theatre, in the public squares of Rotterdam. With *Act 2* there is a stepping out from anonymity— a step I want the passerby to take by participating and have to perform his/her opinion, and furthermore to be seen by others. I chose the streets deliberately to activate my work, rather than the art venues, and to make this aesthetic intervention a vital part of society. Documentation of *Act 2* was first of all to keep a record for myself and to produce evidence of the platform's operation. Nevertheless, these documents became new layers, new appearances of the project, different from the actual events staged on a public square. I was quite reluctant on editing my documents and even more so making them public. For they wouldn't pay justice to the gesture, a responsible one-on-one interaction, tactile and experienced in the public space. Or that they would become more visible, than the event itself. (I was concerned that the event would be seen as on service of the documentation and not the other way around)

For *Act 2* to continue its "critical mission", as Wodiczko would say about his vehicles (Wodiczko, 199, p.208) after its activation in the public squares. I had to deal with the documentation in a public form. Reaching new audiences and creating new platforms for discussing our role as citizens in society.

When I first staged *Act 2*, I asked someone else to do the documentation, in photographic form, for me. So I could be completely concentrated in the action of the piece itself. Later, since I was dealing with the subject of mass media power and its manipulation and selecting the characters for the puppets as they were portrayed according to the newspapers headlines, it seemed a logical next-step to push back into the stream of mass media. I started a search for a reporter that would be interested in the event. The local newspaper

'Rotterdam Dagblad' was interested. A team of two reporters, a photographer and a writer, came to make the reportage. On the following day, it was printed on the cover of the culture session of this newspaper, with a photograph of the puppets in action. Mass-media coverage is an often used strategy by artists to reach a broader and multifaceted audience, the same happen here when the reportage was seen by a larger group of inhabitants of Rotterdam than those whom actually experienced it in the public space. Because I was taking *Act 2* more often to the public space and some of the times alone, I started documenting the events myself and always carried a digital photo camera.

Documenting implies a choice, what and how to present? My decision to make the documentation more personal was conscious of the impossibility of presenting only facts, the event as it happens in the perspective of the participants. The project was seen through my specific point of view. Therefore writing reports was a way of balancing both my wish to make available a critical platform and the need to be involved without directing the participants' experience.

The Reports

Documenting was, as described before, principally for my own records and personal use. But I soon felt the need to share what had happen during the couple of hours the structure was placed outside for interaction with a few artists and/or friends interested in similar art approaches. I started to send pictures with a small report, by e-mail, to this community of people. Immediately, these reports became appreciated by the recipients (confirmed by several e-mail replies, and proposals for further distribution, obtain from this mailing) It was due to the possibility of following the development of the platform— the pleasure of reading an analysis of a specific event —and its relation to the public space, historical context and the encountered audience. The comments received resulted in the growth in length and reflection within following reports. On the other hand, the pictures where withdrawn from the reports, leaving just an illustration of the event through text (solving ethical questions of distributing images picturing people not aware of have been photographed).

When the usefulness of the report to others was established, I made the decision to enlarge the audience of the reports to my whole mailing list, which means mostly an art audience that was not the target of the work itself. I think the reports are a much different artistic gesture, different from *Act 2* staged in public space. The reports reflect upon the performance, the act, and I felt quite comfortable to share them with a people, which share the same concerns as I do.

These reports multiplied the possible readings of the project: they told my side of the 'story', gave the action of the performance the notion of time by being a journal—contextualizing and by framing the action on the world or national events—and what was crucial, is that the reports offered me a space to reflect on the relevance of the tool. Here I could articulate my observation of the platform in action. From my initial guide "to raise deeper questions about people's position in the world: manipulated beings or able to control their own opinions, desires and destinies. To the development of the issues around the war and the emergency of

giving a platform to raise awareness around how mass media manipulate our opinions “ (report 21st April)
When I write the reports, I think back of what happen during the couple of hours I was out in the street with *Act 2*. I analyze what happened and take into consideration my mood and feelings, the surroundings and how they effect the staging and how *Act 2*, in return, effects the place it was exhibited. Through this analytical process the report of a previous staging became a catalyzer for the decision making of the next staging such as adding new characters as Bin laden “at the request of many participants” (report 31st March) or having to “redefine the role for this structure...” (report 21st April). The reports reflect on the specificity of each ‘event’ became a moment to consider the small scale of the tool provided and its use. They address the tension between the passersby as audience or participants, and myself when spotted and recognize as the person responsible and the tension between political daily events of the City of Rotterdam and in the world brought to us by mass media. I analyze each event through my concerns about our role in society and use of public space.

In the process of the project, the reports became ‘public’ in the real sense of the word, as I created a ‘weblog’ and began publishing them (<http://www.takeaction.blogspot.com>). People interested in the question of art as a critical tool could access not only the report of the day but also previous reports “A weblog is a personal web site updated frequently and arranged in date order. Weblogs can be political journals and/or personal diaries; they can focus on one narrow subject or range across a universe of topics. (<http://www.newbay.com/blogging.html>). The weblog format and its diary character was appropriated to publish *Act 2*’s reports because that more than being a data base weblogs are a temporal information network. As ephemeral on the web as *Act 2* was on actual public space.

The Web Page

<http://www.anti-anti.net/act2/> The initial move to a weblog later developed into a website that functions mainly as an archive for the project. The web site allows me to connect the staging of *Act 2* to the public sphere, to world and daily events, like a newspaper. There are two interactive boxes, one with contains the image archive, and other which contains the reports. The latter box described above is connected to my ‘weblog’, through which I can publish my reports. One point worth mentioning is that the interactivity in the streets is completely different from the one on the Internet— the latter is semipublic; we are completely anonymous within the internet. On the web, we feel free but also unconcerned. Compared with the e-mail reports sent out immediately after each event to a network of friends and colleagues, the site addresses again an anonymous audience. But this interface is accessed privately, therefore the wanted ‘stepping out’ of anonymity in the public space that transforms passive audiences into politicized beings does not happen on the WWW as it does with *Act 2* in the public squares.

The Box as a Document?

The idea of presenting the physical structure of *Act 2*- folded as a relic, was out of question, when I use the structure it has to be in an active way. How do I keep its power active rather than being just a remnant of a public performance? Wodiczko stated that he designed his objects “above all to be functional in the living world”, but he has “nothing against their second life...” (Wodiczko, 1999, p.218). Different from Wodiczko, I don't want to exhibit the puppet theatre box just as a memory of the performance event.

The context of 'experiencing the piece' within different circles took place when I took it to Geneva - Switzerland, at the invitation of FORDE (an artists-run-space) to participate on the SOIA - Summit On Interventionist Art- with *Act 2*. There I adapted the tool to the context of the Summit's agenda. SOIA' s summit was organized in parallel with the G8 summit (the meeting of the eight richest and most powerful countries in the world taking place in Evian - the French city just across Geneva's lake) in order to analyze 'how can art effect social change' (paraphrasing Cicero Egli). So within the context of the summit, I setup the puppet theatre structure starring the eight representatives of the G8 countries (report 31st May), and placed it in the commercial area of the city of Geneva.

The action of reporting was a way of bringing the experience back to me. But, was also my need to regain control? Every time I give an appearance showing the project and make it public, I give the control to the audience. It is then that it becomes a tool for other. Nevertheless, I cannot grasp all consequences and effects of the use of the tool I offer.

CONCLUSION

Can art lead passive audiences – consumers - to become participants - social actors?

What I have experienced on staging '*Act 2 – do you want to manipulate for a change?*'

Considering the lack of spontaneous, non-commercial actions performed in our so-called public sphere, *Act 2* was set in the public space to stir up critical thinking about our role in society. The public sphere was traditionally organized around a square; nowadays is televised, changed as seen in Debord's analysis in his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, from direct experience to one mediated by representations. People meet at the same time in front of the TV to watch the news, "the millions simultaneously watching televised football games. Those are signs of collective attention" (quoted on Foster, 1998, p.9) as artist Martha Rosler stated on her critical analysis on the public function of art. Public space should be a meeting place, for people and ideas. According to art theorist, Rosalyn Deutsche, public space it is not a given space created for users but "arises from a practice" (Deutsche, 1996, p. XVI), which means that public space is generated by its use. As a space to negotiate differences, and "this is when a democratic space begins" (Deutsche, 1996, p.XXIV). From these observations about the contemporary public domain I felt the need to activate my projects in the public space to instigate questioning. Promoting discussion about social constructions in the public sphere will continue to guide my practice.

I see the role of the artist, as a responsible one, towards social, political and cultural construction. And for me, it was important to engage people in questioning the world we construct in a playful way. According to Brecht "art is never without consequences, and indeed that says something for it" (Brecht, 2001, p.151). He is implying that whether they are good or bad consequences for the audience depends on the artists' commitment to the social relevance of his/her work. My proposal with *Act 2*, a platform inspired by the hand puppet theatre, was to make through humor and play a source of critical thinking in public space. First of all, the project was to generate questioning, to unleash uncomfortable feelings on the passersby, by imagining stepping out of the anonymity of the crowd and play in a puppet theatre. Ultimately, the goal was to critically think as citizens about social structures.

Act 2, installed for a couple of hours, non-announced in the public squares of a big city, (Rotterdam and Geneva) addresses passersby not as mere consumers of cultural products, but as potential producers of culture. Through *Act 2* passersby could think on their position in society, by being invited to be actors, by the use of a tool to analyze the act of manipulation. Roles were then inverted: spectators into players, passive audiences into actors, thus stimulating a reflection on a transformation from manipulated beings to empowered citizens. *Act 2* provokes and engages people into participation. In an ideal point of view – *Act 2* will lead to spontaneous and active participation in social discussion. And the small scale of interacting with passersby in the streets of Rotterdam this debate took place. In a realistic one, or to the extent that I can be responsible, *Act 2* is inviting people to step out of the crowd and manipulate hand puppets portraying key political figures of world politics on public squares. But, by doing so each person is engaging in critical thinking towards their possible role as eventual puppet masters and citizens.

As a critical tool and interactive platform *Act 2* effected its audience in diverse ways, and in different contexts. The actual event in the public squares of Rotterdam, was successful in the way it instigated dialogue, and discussion on different levels of participation. The way it provoked different ways of communication in public space, and it aroused discussion and awareness of how the public space functions nowadays and how we behave in it, more as consumers rather than citizens.

In the context of the World Wide Web the publishing of the documentation through e-mailed reports and 'weblog' list, had also remarkable responses. First there were replies of the group address by my mailing list, expressing their enjoyment on reading the reports. Respondents related to these reports in different ways: they reacted on the achievement of *Act 2* as a public, interactive artistic gesture; on the way it addressed political issues on a controversial period of war; or on how *Act 2* surveyed the public squares and the community of Rotterdam. Some people distributed the reports further through their own mailing list. Another response, due to the e-mailed reports, was the invitation to present *Act 2* in different contexts. I was invited to publish one report in the bi monthly art newspaper, based in Amsterdam, HTV. I had an opportunity to take part in Geneva as a lecturer in a workshop on 'interventionist art' (SOIA), about my experience in staging *Act 2*, and to experiment with *Act 2* in the public squares of Geneva in the specific context of a city hosting demonstrations against the 'G8 summit'. The first connected me to an artist community and the second to an activist community. The response from these two contexts supported my intention to be critical towards society as an artist and as a citizen. The responses came to meet the need to document that belong to the need to distribute and share what I had achieved. As a major wish to effect non artistic audiences into critical thinking, I stepped out of the art discourse of academia to activate my work in a context charged with social and political meaning. Public space is, differently from the 'quasi neutralized' space of art venues. But soon I began the questioning of how to insert my achievements into art discourse, so it can also be an object of study, as other's documentation of their project were my object of study. The reflective space that the reports existed it became an effective vehicle to share and take further this reflection.

People might ask if I want to change the world. No, I would answer, but I want the world to change! These actions performed throughout the whole research period of *Act 2* can only be a grain of sand on the 'desirable awakening' of society, to paraphrase Brecht and Debord, by using artistic strategies and creativity to re-imagine the world collectively. My agenda is as simple as Guy Debord's was about wanting a new 'life style', "a rich life full of passion, not of passive contemplation" (Jappe, 1999, p.3), in all senses, cultural, social and political. As a metaphor for manipulation *Act 2* makes a comment on society's manipulative power structures, but at the same time it doesn't have a thinking guide line. Instead it gives rise to free thinking. It proposes a critical attitude towards society. This reflection period with *Act 2* strengthen my conviction on the use of artistic strategies that supplying people with tools to analyze social constructions, to stimulate participation on the democratic public discussion, therefore transform passersby into individuals with a public opinion, citizens.

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Act 2

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<http://www.forde.ch>

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Wodiczko

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for reports of Act 2

<http://www.anti-anti.net/act2/>

<http://www.takeaction.blogspot.com>