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Situationism

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I J A P H C

ASGER JORN AND THE CONTROVERSIAL TOPICALITY OF SITUATIONISM

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Abstract

With focus on the significance of Asger Jorn for situationism, in view of two Norwegian collections containing works by him, and with particular regard to contemporary performing art, this article discusses the question whether – and if so: as to whether – situationism and its strategies are still of topicality today.

Keywords: Asger Jorn, Co-ritus, Kunstsilo, relational aesthetics, relational antagonism, postspectacular theatre, détournement, dérive.

The performer finishes his text by inviting the audience to follow him on a tour through the building. It is called *Kilden* (meaning *The Source*), and it's Norway's second biggest theatre and concert hall, located in Kristiansand, Norway's fifth biggest city (tendency growing). The performance is titled *FOR ANDRE TING*, a pun playing with the different meanings of the Norwegian formulations *for andre ting* (for other things) and *forandre ting* (changing things), and it is a project I realized with students of the Bachelor's Programme in Theater Education at the University of Agder in 2018.²

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² *FOR ANDRE TING* was first presented on April 20th and 21st 2018, and then again in the framework of SAND-festival on September 14th 2018, developed with and performed by the students Leon Berglie, Åshild Bjørnstad, Ida Vaage Brådalén, Sander Cyvin, Line Hauge, Håkon Henriksen, Fredrik Landmark, Lise Lilletun Christensen, Marthe Løvik Markussen and Truls Ørbek.

As the spectators follow the performer's³ invitation and leave the theatre bar, where they before were received with popcorn, music, and a casual introduction into the performance's ostensible topic: change, they find the performer waiting for them in front of the door to the main theatre hall. But instead of opening this door for them, he just opens it quickly for himself and disappears behind it, leaving the spectators alone on the corridor. However, they do not have to wait long for something else to happen. As if triggered by the performer's slamming of the door, an avalanche of white cardboard tubes comes down a staircase on the corridor's opposite site. Shortly after this, the door of one of the elevators at the end of the corridor opens, and another performer appears.⁴ She slowly leaves the elevator, eyes the white tubes scattered on the floor in front of her, and finally picks up one of them. She begins to compare the tube's form and size with the different elements of the corridor's architecture, likens its length with a segment of a handrail, covers an inscription on the wall with it, leaves it on the edge of a flat-screen installed beneath the inscription, finds another tube hidden behind an edge of the recess the screen is installed in, tilts the tube from a vertical into a horizontal position, follows the horizontal line it indicates across the corridor, arrives at another staircase with another handrail, lays the tube on the handrail, lets it go and thus slowly slide down the handrail until it falls to the ground on the staircase's next landing, finds another tube clammed in a gap between the staircase's railing and a connected balustrade – and continues her way further down the corridor in this manner.⁵

In the course of the tour, which not only leads through the inside of the "award-winning and spectacular building"⁶ of *Kilden*, but finally also out of it and through the surrounding area, more of these white tubes appear and are used in further ways. Actually, for the first time, they already did appear before the audience left the theatre bar, namely

³ Fredrik Landmark.

⁴ Marthe Løvik Markussen.

⁵ For a picture of this scene see Universitetet i Agder, 2018. For further pictures and reports on the project (in Norwegian), see the online sources Anthonsen, 2018, and Eikeland, 2018, (the latter also contains a video-trailer).

⁶ Kilden Teater og Konserthus, 2018.

during the introduction there, when the first-mentioned performer, while reciting his text, opened a cupboard from which they rolled out. And when then, while the performer continued with his text, two other performers⁷ tidied up the scattered tubes by setting them, in three upright rows, into a white cardboard box, the attentive spectator might have noticed that they actually built a little model of another ‘award-winning and spectacular building’ in Kristiansand – very well-known as well beyond the city: the old, closed down corn-silo right next to *Kilden*.

This silo was designed by the architects Arne Korsmo and Sverre Aasland in 1934⁸, built in 1935, and enlarged in 1939⁹, when it also was awarded with the Houens fonds diploma, one of Norway’s most important prizes for architecture. But this award is not the main reason why the silo is so well-known in Kristiansand and beyond. First and foremost, this reason consists in the fact that it now shall become a museum. And not just any museum: It shall become a museum of particular national importance and international visibility.¹⁰ Some even envision it as the “leading museum in the Nordics”¹¹. In any case, however its relevance as museum will finally be assessed, it shall become “Norway’s most exciting” and “most spectacular museum building”¹². And it already has a name: Kunstsilo.

The background of this project is this: The London-based hedge funds manager and art collector Nicolai Tangen, who originally is from Kristiansand, wants to give his art collection – considered as the largest collection of Norwegian modernist art as well as the most important collection of Nordic modernist art – to his city of origin. More precisely: He wants to give an indefinite right of disposal over this collection to Sørlandets Kunstmuseum (SKMU) – Kristiansand’s museum for fine

⁷ Åshild Bjørnstad and Sander Cyvin.

⁸ Nasjonalmuseet, 2019. Many other sources indicate 1935 as the year the building was designed.

⁹ The original building from 1935 had 15 cylinders. In 1939, this number was doubled, so that the building got its present 30 cylinders. Later, the building’s storage part was enlarged as well, and in 1985, a lift tower annex was added on the building’s northern side (see Brandal Olsen, 2006).

¹⁰ See Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, 2018b.

¹¹ See Kristiansand kommune, 2016 (my translation from Norwegian).

¹² See *ibid.*, see additionally Sandberg, 2016, 21.12. (my translation from Norwegian).

arts. But there is one precondition, and this precondition is that SKMU leaves its current domicile and moves to a new building, a building with enough space for the collection – and especially with a particular signal effect: the Kunstsilo. The corresponding plan came first up in 2015¹³, and since then, the project has been, and still is, very controversially discussed in Kristiansand and beyond – which in fact was the actual topic of *FOR ANDRE TING*, respectively the central issue its thematization of change involved.

The latest significant step regarding the changes the Kunstsilo project implies, was that the Norwegian government, in the beginning of October 2018, finally granted support for the project's realization. Since then, it looks like the Kunstsilo can soon be built – as designed by Mestres Wåge Architects, who won the corresponding architectural competition in 2016. The building process shall start as soon as possible, and the opening is planned for 2021.

But what has both *FOR ANDRE TING* and this development in Kristiansand to do with the seminar documented here, *ART AS FORCE – Situationism and popular art?* After all, this seminar, as part of Oktoberdans-festival 2018, took place in another, very different Norwegian city: Bergen. It even particularly focused on Bergen: as the place where situationism, due to the activities of Gruppe 66, stood strongest in Norway, as the seminar's program text puts it.¹⁴ And apart from that: What has the reference to *FOR ANDRE TING*, to Kristiansand and to the Kunstsilo to do with the particular topic of the text at hand: Asger Jorn and the Controversial Topicality of Situationism?

Kunstsilo and KODE

As regards the reference to *FOR ANDRE TING*, it is first and foremost motivated by *ART AS FORCE*'s declared intention to take its point of

¹³ The idea to transform the silo into a museum was actually not completely new then. Already in 2013, the architect Liv-Marit Engebu suggested to make it the first Norwegian textile museum (see Engebu, 2013, 16.04.).

¹⁴ See BIT Teatergarasjen, 2018b.

departure in performing art, as well as in my interest to approach this text's topic from both a scholarly and an artistic perspective. Not less decisive – or actually: most important – is the fact, that this performance, as I will show later, in fact contains several aspects that are linked to the question of situationism's topicality.

Concerning the reference to Kristiansand and the Kunstsilo, it neither is as far off from the context and topic of *ART AS FORCE* as it might seem at first sight. In fact (not too surprising in a small country like Norway), there is a number of quite concrete links between the current situation in Kristiansand and Bergen's situationist heritage – in particular because this heritage is first and foremost represented at KODE, Bergen's museum for fine arts, which also co-organized and hosted *ART AS FORCE*. The first link – a quite recent one – is that Karin Hindsbo, the former director of KODE, was member of the jury which chose the winner of the architectural competition for Kunstsilo (and before coming to KODE, she additionally had been the director of SKMU). Another link – in this case a historical one – consists in the fact that Arne Korsmo, one of the original silo-architects, also designed the Villa Stenersen in Oslo. This villa was built from 1937 through 1939, almost simultaneously with the silo in Kristiansand, and was originally meant to serve as domicile for both the family and the art collection of financier Rolf Stenersen – who later, in 1971, gave the foreign works of his collection (or more precisely: sold these works at a symbolically low price) to Bergen, where they are now presented at KODE, as the Stenersen Collection.

In this donation lies a further, particularly interesting link to the current situation in Kristiansand – or more precisely: a quite striking similarity. Because just like the hedge funds manager Nicolai Tangen made the building of Kunstsilo the precondition for giving his collection to Kristiansand respectively SKMU, the financier Rolf Stenersen likewise gave his collection to Bergen only on condition that a new museum would be built for it – as it then was done in 1978 in form of the building of KODE 2.

But these are still not all the links and similarities between the Bergen – and the Kristiansand-situation. An additional one – which is of special importance here, as it concerns the question what the

Kunstsilo-project has to do with this text's particular topic and its reference to Asger Jorn – consists in the fact that both the Tangen Collection and the Stenersen Collection contain works by Jorn, and that these works are in both cases highlighted as belonging to the collections' flagship-exhibits.¹⁵

This is not only of interest here due to Jorn's significance for situationism in general. It is particularly interesting with regard to *ART AS FORCE*'s focus on situationism in Norway. For Jorn also played a quite important role for the development of the concept of Co-ritus (even though he finally distanced himself from it), which then became crucial for the work of Gruppe 66 in Bergen¹⁶ – and thus also for Norwegian situationism in general.

Asger Jorn and Co-ritus

The development of the concept of Co-ritus is usually attributed to Jorn's brother Jørgen Nash, Jens Jørgen Thorsen, and Hardy Strid, who signed the corresponding *CO-RITUS Manifesto* from 1962 and put the concept into practice on several occasions. In Bergen, Thorsen did so together with Olav Herman Hansen in 1966, as members of Gruppe 66. But the concept was also significantly influenced by Jorn, who closely worked together with Nash between 1960 and 1963, when their joint project was to transform the farm Drakabygget in the south of Sweden, which Nash had bought in 1960, into a Nordic Bauhaus (as Jorn wanted to call it) respectively the Bauhaus Situationniste Drakabygget (as Nash then named it).¹⁷

As Jakob Jakobsen has described it in detail, Jorn "played a central role in the early development of the place", and "his experimental aesthetic was a decisive inspiration for Nash and the precondition for the activities there."¹⁸ Central for this experimental aesthetic is Jorn's critique of Marx's concept of value, respectively this concept's Marxist interpretation, as he presented it in his text *Critique of Economic Policy*, first published in excerpts under the title *The End of the Economy and the Realization of Art* in 1960.

¹⁵ See KODE, 2019, and Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, 2018a.

¹⁶ See Arntzen, 2011. This article was the main point of departure for the seminar *ART AS FORCE*.

¹⁷ See Jakobsen, 2011, pp. 227-228.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

According to Jorn, value neither consists only in exchange value, nor is it necessarily linked to work. Instead of the human being's workforce, Jorn regards simply "the human being's time and nothing else" as "the variable capital to which he himself owns the property rights"¹⁹ – a property which "only becomes value if this lifetime is realized"²⁰, as he puts it in the text's version published in 1962. This "realization of a lifetime" can, in Jorn's view, only happen "through its variation, its changeability."²¹ Or, as he puts it in the text's first version:

The space time of a human life is its private property. This was Marx's great discovery in the perspective of human liberation, but at the same time it is the point of departure for the errors of the Marxists, because property only gains value in its realization, in its liberation, in its use, and what makes the space-time of a human life a reality is its variability.²²

As regards this variability and the realization of the human being's lifetime, what is crucial for Jorn is sociality – or, as he calls it, the "social value" of individuals, which they gain due to "the variability of their behavior in relation to others."²³ For "[i]f this variability becomes private, excluded from social valorization – as is the case under authoritarian socialism – human space-time becomes unrealizable."²⁴

Just like sociality is for Jorn the necessary precondition for the valorizing realization of human lifetime, the means to enable this sociality, respectively to counteract the privatization of the variability of human behavior, consists for him in art – or more precisely: in experimental artistic activity. Already in his pre- or proto-situationist *Notes on the Formation of an Imaginist Bauhaus* from 1956, Jorn describes the aim of this formation as the promotion of an "integral revolutionary cultural attitude" by the development of "new possibilities of artistic

¹⁹ Jorn, 2015 (1962), p. 200.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 202.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jorn, 1960.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

experimentation"²⁵ – respectively, as he calls it already half a century before this term's academic boom, "artistic research"²⁶. And in *Critique of Economic Policy*, he speaks of an "artistic liberation", whose "goal [...] is the liberation of human values by the transformation of human qualities into real values" – in which he sees the beginning of "the artistic revolution against socialist development, the artistic revolution that is tied to the communist project..."²⁷

This belief in the socializing, liberating and revolutionary role of art was not only the reason why Jorn then left the Situationist International in 1961, after its conference in Gothenburg had led to the decision – following a suggestion by Raoul Vaneigem – that the groups new principle should consist in turning away from making art.²⁸ His adherence to this belief was also the reason for him to engage in the Drakabygget-project – as a measure to maintain the development of the 'new possibilities of artistic experimentation' he had in mind – and to even take part in the proclamation of a 2nd Situationist International (even though he rather effaced himself in this respect) in form of his contribution to the text *The Struggle of the Situcratic Society: A Situationist Manifesto* from 1962, which is considered as the 2nd Situationist International's constituent document.²⁹

²⁵ Jorn, 1956.

²⁶ Ibid. It is remarkable that Jorn in this context explicitly states that "[a]rtistic research is identical to 'human science'", understanding the latter as "'concerned' science, not purely historical science", and demands "the same economic and practical means and possibilities" for artistic research "that are already at the disposal of scientific research" (ibid.). He thus anticipates what then, in the 1990, in fact happened in form of the academization of artistic research in Europe – in Norway in form of the legal equalization of scientific and artistic research in 1995 – and in the meantime significantly characterizes academic art education. Of particularly interest is in this context the contrast between the anti-capitalist attitude on which Jorn's demand is based and those traits of the later boom of artistic research, which for example Tom Holert critically discusses as symptoms of current capitalist approaches to "convert 'knowledge' into a vendible goods and market it as spectacle" (Holert, 2011, p. 43, my translation from German).

²⁷ Jorn, 1960.

²⁸ See Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2015, pp. 10-11.

²⁹ Jorn did not sign this manifesto, but is considered as one of its main authors, together with Jacqueline de Jong, Guy Atkins, Jørgen Nash and Jens Jørgen

Art as Force

Jorn, in contrast to other situationists, thus adhered to the belief in a specific force of art. As Karen Kurczynski puts it, his “neo-Marxist interest in the social role of art” was similar to Theodor W. Adorno’s description of “art as an experimental force”, becoming “historically meaningful as a negative image of society as a whole.”³⁰ And conceiving “the true avant-garde not as a set of professional specialists, but as a collective social force made up of amateurs seeking new ideas and techniques through constant experimentation”³¹, Jorn obviously saw the *Drakabygget*-project as a particular chance to realize his aesthetic ideas.

The above-mentioned crucial influence these ideas had on Nash and other key protagonists of this project becomes particularly apparent in the interview which most likely is the main reference of the seminar title *ART AS FORCE*, namely the *Co-ritus Interview: Art is Pop – Co-ritus is Art* with Nash and Thorsen from 1963, where the latter states (in explicit dissociation from the 1st Situationist International):

The essential in situationism is the relationship of human beings to the forces of creativity; it is the intention to realise these forces through moments of creativity. The situationist idea is based on utilisation of art and the forces of creativity within art being used directly in the social environment. [...]

We believe that situationism is art and the creative human being (the artist) has to get involved in the social situation. [...]

Art can only be produced through experimental activity (Co-ritus, the concert at the spiral maze at Malmo Town Hall, Co-ritus at Aarhus student society and various wall painting actions are some of our experiments).³²

Thorsen. See Jakobsen, 2011, p. 252. See also the information accompanying the text’s online version (Jorn, Atkins, Nash et al., 1962).

³⁰ Kurczynski, 2014, p. 4. Kurczynski draws this parallel not without taking the obvious differences between Adorno’s and Jorn’s approaches and understandings of art into account (see *ibid.*, p. 199).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³² Jens Jørgen Thorsen in Nash & Thorsen, 1963.

Indeed, it was exactly one of these wall painting actions – more precisely: Nash’s unauthorized use of Jorn’s name in connection with this action – which finally caused Jorn’s dissociation from both the concept of Co-ritus and his brother, in the same year the interview was given.³³ And apart from this final dissociation, the concept of Co-ritus can anyways be seen as a radicalization of Jorn’s ideas which exceeded their limits. For while Jorn, as Jakobsen points out, indeed “had re-articulated” the notion of “the specialized and singular artist genius that had been the dominant conception of the artist in society ever since the Renaissance”, but nevertheless “remained within it” and “was not able to move beyond his status as a singular creative subjectivity”³⁴, the concept of Co-ritus, with its “demand for collective participation”, posed “a more socially-oriented interpretation of Jorn’s notion of art as an experimental field in the movement between the singular and the social.”³⁵

Yet, it is clear that this notion was the crucial foundation for the conception of Co-ritus. And Jorn’s dissociation from this concept, which was, as mentioned, first and foremost triggered by his personal quarrel with Nash, did not at all mean that he also abandoned his interest in art as social force. Still years later, in his book *Magi og skønne kunster* from 1971, he writes: “I do not want to conceal that I regard the artistic freedom which allows the aesthetic element to permeate social life and environment as more valuable than the one which allows the immurement of art in museums or other isolating surroundings.”³⁶

Value vs. Value

In front of this backdrop, returning to the contexts of Bergen and Kristiansand, one can hardly avoid the question what it means for the value of Jorn’s works when they in fact are immured in museums like KODE and Kunstsilo. And the obvious answer to this question is, that

³³ For a detailed description of this dissociation’s circumstances, see Jakobsen, 2011, pp. 270-274.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 265.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 264.

³⁶ Jorn, 1971, quoted without pagenummer in Høyer, 2010, p. 5 (my translation from Danish).

the value this immurement both presupposes, confirms and furthers is the exact opposite of the value Jorn had in mind – or at least, considering the rather moderate tone of the quote from *Magi og skønne kunster*, a lesser value than the one Jorn favored.

Of course, Jorn's art was already subject to certain kinds of immurement and of financial value added in his lifetime, even while he still was a member of the 1st Situationist International – which was, as Kurczynski remarks, “an ironic situation (to put it mildly) from the point of view of the SI but also one that explicitly benefited the group.”³⁷ In 1959 for example, Jorn's *Modifications* – prime examples of the situationist strategy of *détournement* – were exhibited at Galerie Rive Gauche in Paris, a “well-established and commercial”³⁸ gallery, as Jakobsen points out. And on this occasion, nine of the twenty exhibited paintings were sold to art collectors.³⁹ But in this case, Jorn was actively involved in the presentation and contextualization of his works, first and foremost in form of his text *Détourned Painting*, which appeared in the exhibition catalogue. In this text, Jorn clearly declares his artistic attitude – among other things in form of a critical dissociation from action painting. And in his affirmative reference to what he calls “sofa paintings”⁴⁰ partly lies, as Kurczynski shows in relation to his later painting *L'avant-garde se rend pas* from 1962, “explicit ridicule of opportunistic avant-gardism”, respectively of “the increasing popularity of the term ‘avant garde’ as little more than a label of commercial success.”⁴¹

Obviously, the ‘immurement’ of his works in galleries, museums and collections alone was not the biggest problem for Jorn, at least not as long as he could see the respective curators, gallerists and collectors as a kind of allies in his artistic and political efforts. In fact, the Drakabygget-project was to a great extent financed by sales of his works. And his later donation of a large number of works to Henie Onstad Kunstsenter was, according

³⁷ Kurczynski, 2014, p. 191.

³⁸ Jakobsen, 2011, p. 221.

³⁹ See the corresponding information on the purchase of five paintings by the Italian collector Paolo Marinotti in Storsve, 2017, p. 104. See also the corresponding information, including details about the four further sales, in Elhajoui, 2018, 07.09.

⁴⁰ Jorn, 1959.

⁴¹ Kurczynski, 2014, p. 4.

to the center's website, motivated by his wish that "his works in other media" should "be seen in relation to his paintings."⁴² The fact that he apparently neither was against his works' collection by his contemporary Rolf Stenersen can presumably also be traced back to the fact that Stenersen was to a lesser extent interested in the accumulation of artworks with an already established and ensured financial value than in the promotion, support and defense of modernist art⁴³ – the contemporary art of his time.

In contrast, the actual problem for Jorn were attempts to collect – respectively to appropriate – his work for purposes he did not willingly support or which he even saw as opposed to his artistic and political attitude. His dissociation from both the concept of Co-ritus and his brother Nash, triggered by the latter's unauthorized use of his name in the context of the above-mentioned wall painting action, is one example for this. Another example is his furious refusal of the Guggenheim International Award, which he should receive in 1964, but rejected in form of a telegram to Harry F. Guggenheim with the wording:

GO TO HELL WITH YOUR MONEY Bastard. REFUSE PRICE. NEVER ASKED FOR IT. AGAINST ALL DECENSY [sic!] MIX ARTIST AGAINST HIS WILL IN YOUR PUBLICITY. I WANT PUBLIC CONFIRMATION NOT TO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN YOUR ridiculous GAME JORN.⁴⁴

In form of this rejection, it maybe becomes most evident that Jorn, due to his fundamental communist attitude, tried to strictly and particularly resist both his work's and his name's 'immurement' and appropriation for purposes in the spirit of, as Kurczynski writes, "the increasingly commercial mainstream art world with its promotion of art as an economic investment, [...] transforming the radical critiques of the prewar avant-gardes into a postwar spectacle of pseudo-criticality."⁴⁵

⁴² Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 2019.

⁴³ See Ustvedt, 2014.

⁴⁴ Wikipedia, 2014.

⁴⁵ Kurczynski, 2014, p. 191.

In view of this, it would of course be interesting to speculate about how Jorn would have reacted to the purchase of a large number of his works by Nicolai Tangen – and how he would have commented on the use of his works as flagship-exhibits of this hedge funds manager’s collection. From a communist perspective like Jorn’s, this actually can’t be perceived otherwise than as a severe misuse of his art. After all, it is not a secret that, as Melanie Gilligan has stated in 2007 already, “the prominent cultural influence of hedge fund managers in their newfound roles as powerful art collectors” is directly linked to “their mounting control over global economic wealth”, and that hedge funds, as “unparalleled tools for siphoning money away from other areas of the economy and into the pockets of a privileged few”, “are emblematic for today’s widening economic divide between rich and poor.”⁴⁶ In general, it doesn’t seem too exaggerated to describe hedge fund managers as incarnations of unregulated, neoliberal capitalism. And particularly with regard to Jorn’s concept of value, it is quite unlikely that he would have approved of his works’ collection by a hedge fund manager – at least considering the usual ways in which such managers treat artworks “as a new asset class”, invest in ways that lay the foundations “to further inflate prices”⁴⁷, and thus devalue the non-commercial aspects of art in favor of its financial value’s predominance.

Admittedly, in the particular case of Tangen, at least three things have to be considered: Firstly, Tangen has repeatedly expressed that his interest in art is not a purely economic one. His master’s degree in art history is frequently mentioned as a proof for this, and the enthusiasm he shows for the art he collects indicates this as well. Secondly, according to his own statements, his business practices distinguish themselves from the usual practices of hedge fund managers, insofar as they operate with investment time ranges of six to eight years and more instead of the average two months.⁴⁸ And thirdly, the donation of his collection to Kristiansand respectively SKMU is declaredly based on his wish to give something back to his city of origin – as it likewise applies

⁴⁶ Gilligan, 2007.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See Harket, 2016.

to his AKO Foundation on an international level.⁴⁹ Additionally, the fact that he concentrates on collecting modernist art, which on the one hand could be interpreted as a way of playing it safe on the basis of mainly economic considerations, distinguishes him, on the other hand, from collectors whose “predilection for contemporary art” indicates their “risk-o-philic tastes and constant pursuit of the right kind of profitable edge”⁵⁰, and thus implicitly validates that his interest in art is not only economically motivated, but also attaches importance to an already proven art historical significance of the works he collects.

However, it must remain an open question how Jorn would have seen this. Considering his communist conviction, it is at least very unlikely that he would have assessed these facts as balancing out the inequities caused by the business practices characteristic for hedge funds. And, in contrast, it is not too unlikely that he would have regarded Tangen’s charity-activities – despite and besides their positive effects – not only as the philanthropically motivated ways of giving something back as which they are presented⁵¹, but also as investments in an image polishing which serves the justification and maintenance of exactly those business practices whose negative effects put the claim of philanthropy into perspective.

But this hypothetical speculation about Jorn’s possible opinion on his works’ collection by Tangen should not be misunderstood as an

⁴⁹ AKO Foundation also supports SKMU in other respects (see AKO Foundation, 2019), as well as it, as of late, supports the collaboration between this museum and the faculty I am working at, the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Agder, where it finances a new PhD position, directed at research on the Tangen Collection. This relation to the foundation respectively Tangen was and is subject of differentiated critical discussions at the faculty. This is for example reflected in the fact that the mentioned PhD position’s vacancy explicitly demanded that the respective research shall relate to the area of tension between art historical, societal and philosophic-aesthetical perspectives, and both examine and problematize the conditions of art production, curating, art historiography and critique. Furthermore, the Kunstsilo project in general is part of the faculty’s scholarly discourse (see for example Forskningsgruppe Kunst og barn og unge ved Fakultet for kunsthøgskolen, Universitetet i Agder, 2018, 25.01.).

⁵⁰ Gilligan, 2007.

⁵¹ See for example the way these activities are portrayed in Harket, 2016.

argument in the spirit of the animosities against the Kunstsilo project. On the contrary, the harsh contrast between the different attitudes, represented by artists like Jorn on the one hand and by a hedge fund manager like Tangen on the other, is in fact one of the most interesting aspects of the Tangen Collection's future presentation at Kunstsilo. For exactly the access to works like Jorn's, which this presentation will facilitate, bears the potential to also facilitate and further a differentiated critical discourse about this contrast – and hopefully even forms of institutional critique which can broach exactly this issue.

Of particular interest is the discussion of this contrast obviously with regard to the question which is central for the text at hand: the question whether – and if so: as to whether – situationism, particularly the situationist notion of art as force, still is of topicality today. In other words: To ask what Jorn would have said about his works' incorporation in the Tangen Collection makes particular sense in order to discuss what this incorporation says about the contemporary status of situationism and situationist art, and to what extent this contemporary status differs from situationism's historical status. The relevance of this discussion thereby consists in the fact that – while situationism's art-historical importance and its significance for the development of contemporary art is widely uncontroversial today – the question (as to) whether situationist theories and practices still are (or can be) effective in contemporary art is a quite controversial one.

The Controversial Topicality of Situationism

As regards the question of situationism's historical status, the incorporation of Jorn's works into collections like Stenersen's and Tangen's, respectively these works presentation in major exhibitions of modernist art, can of course be seen as a confirmation of the art historical significance of situationism. At least, it can be seen as an implicit confirmation of this significance. For, in contrast to a number of special exhibitions on situationism in recent years⁵², neither the Stenersen nor the Tangen Collection focuses

⁵² An example for such exhibitions in the Norwegian context was the double-exhibition *An Army of Liars – Situasjonistene i Skandinavia* and *This World We Must Leave – An Idea of Revolution* at Kunsthall Oslo (November 25th 2016 – February 5th 2017;

on Jorn as a situationist in particular. Both collections represent the relevance of his work for modernist art in general – the Stenersen Collection with works ranging from 1943 to 1968 (including two undated works), the Tangen Collection with works made between 1939 and 1970.⁵³ And both collection's information texts chose the fact that Jorn was a CoBrA-artist as the most noteworthy information about him (which of course makes sense in view of both his CoBrA-membership's significance for his artistic career in general and CoBrA's significance for the development of the fine arts in post-war Europe). Thus, his situationist background is not mentioned in these texts. Still, due to the fact that both collections' portfolios contain works from his situationist phase, they indicate at least implicitly that this phase was of a certain relevance for his oeuvre's general art-historical significance.

Regarding the question of situationism's possible topicality, in contrast, the fact that Jorn's works are contained in such collections implies something completely different. First of all, it shows that these works are not at all immune against their appropriation by and incorporation into the – to use Kurczynski's formulations again – “commercial mainstream art world”⁵⁴, which Jorn tried to defend them against. And if the popularity of the term ‘avant-garde’ could – in Jorn's time – be perceived as a symptom of the prewar avant-gardes' radical critiques' transformation into a “postwar spectacle of pseudo-criticality”⁵⁵, the present presentation of Jorn's work as iconic for modernist art can be seen as the result of this work's cold-war anti-capitalist criticality's absorption by post-cold-war capitalism itself – indeed valorizing this work as art-historically significant on the one hand, but also reducing it,

This World We Must Leave – An Idea of Revolution was first presented at Århus Kunstbygning, November 19th 2010 – January 9th 2011). Very recent examples are the exhibitions *Jacqueline de Jong & The Situationist Times. Same Player Shoots Again!* at Malmö konsthall (September 15th 2018 – January 13th 2019) and *The Most Dangerous Game. The Situationist International en route for May '68* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin (critically described and compared in Henriksen, 2018, 19.11.).

⁵³ Thanks to both KODE and AKO Foundation for granting me insight into the respective lists of works. Particular thanks to my colleague Frida Forsgren for obtaining the consent from AKO Foundation and conveying the respective list.

⁵⁴ Kurczynski, 2014, p. 191.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

on the other hand, to a mere document of a failed and unsuccessful critical project of the past, which no longer is of any topicality in the present.

Especially Jorn's works' inclusion into the Tangen Collection can almost seem like an illustration of the notorious TINA-doctrine, coined by Margret Thatcher after the end of the Cold War, meaning 'There Is No Alternative' – to capitalism. In fact, if assuming that capitalism has finally won, and if looking for corresponding confirmations, one can hardly come up with a more obvious example than the incorporation of a communist artist's works into a hedge funds manager's collection provides. And even from the opposed point of view, from a perspective which refuses this assumption and rather sees the capitalist appropriation of a communist's artworks as a reason to advocate the necessity of a critique of capitalism all the more, one at least has to admit that this appropriation proves certain limitations of Jorn's anti-capitalist artistic approach – or, more generally speaking, of situationism's force.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily disprove this force's topicality completely. One possibility to assess its current status consists for example in seeing it as not entirely lost, but rather as repressed by 'the archive', as Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen describe it in the guide to their exhibition *This World We Must Leave – An Idea of Revolution*, first realized in 2010/2011 and focusing particularly on situationism.⁵⁶

The Challenge of 'the Archive'

"[T]he archive", as Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen put it in a Foucaultian sense⁵⁷, "is an instrument of power, it is a place where history is made and staged with a view to legitimizing the prevailing state of affairs", thus having "the function of perpetuating the ruling values and naturalizing the existing

⁵⁶ The exhibition was shown twice, first in Århus Kunstbygning from November 19th 2010 through January 9th 2011, and then again in Kunsthall Oslo from November 25th 2016 through February 5th 2017, in the latter case together with the exhibition *An Army of Liars – Situasjonistene i Skandinavia* (see Kunsthall Oslo, 2016). See also footnote 52.

⁵⁷ Or more precisely: Corresponding to the second of the three ways in which Foucault applies the term, as Knut Ove Eliassen points out (see Eliassen, 2010).

order.”⁵⁸ Accordingly, they state that “there is rarely space in the archives for the revolts and revolutions of the past, and if there is, they are always relegated to ‘history’ and severed from any kind of contact with the present.”⁵⁹

From this point of view, collections like Stenersen’s and Tangen’s, respectively museums like KODE and SKMU/soon-to-be Kunstsilo, can easily appear as prime examples of such archives, and it is tempting to interpret the way they incorporate and present works like those of Jorn as illustrative of how such archives exercise their power. Of course, a closer look soon reveals that it is a bit more complex than that. As regards the Stenersen Collection, it was already mentioned above that its way of archiving Jorn’s works has another history than Jorn’s works’ incorporation into the Tangen Collection. And particularly the fact that a seminar like *ART AS FORCE* was co-organized and hosted by KODE, and that ‘the archive’ thus opened its doors for an event not only explicitly highlighting Jorn’s crucial role for situationism, but also inviting Bolt Rasmussen as keynote speaker⁶⁰, clearly puts an interpretation like the one suggested above into perspective. In a comparable manner – even though in a more general form, and up to now without a particular reference to situationism – the way the Tangen Collection is currently introduced by SKMU also proves that this ‘archive’ neither simply excludes the ‘revolts and revolutions of the past’. When for example art historian Frida Forsgren, in her lecture *Kunst, Krig og Cobra!* on April 10th 2019 at SKMU, talked about a number of Scandinavian artists’ works from the 1940s contained in the collection, the way these works – and the respective, often communist artists (among them Jorn) – contributed to the resistance against the German occupation and the Nazi regime, was one of her lecture’s main aspects. So, in this case, there obviously is space in this archive for the revolts and revolutions of the past – respectively for past resistance against ruling power. And instead of relegating this resistance to history and severing it from the present, the

⁵⁸ Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2010, p. 9. See also Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2016, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See BIT Teatergarasjen, 2018b.

act of reminding of it can unfold a quite topical relevance in view of the recent rise and success of right-wing populism. Admittedly, when seeing it like this, the next step in order to avoid the allegation of exercising the archive's excluding power would in turn have to consist in not severing this view from the fact that there is a connection between this success of right-wing populism, the financial crisis from 2007/2008, and the reinforcing effects which hedge fund speculations had on this crisis. Of course, it would be quite a surprise if a discussion about a topic like this would be initiated by the promoters of the Tangen Collection and the Kunstsilo project themselves. But events like the mentioned lecture can at least give impulses for such and similar discussions, and especially panel debates like the one SKMU arranged on June 7th 2018 under the title "En gave til besvær?"⁶¹ open 'the archive' for critical discussions and make room in it for questioning the prevailing state of affairs. Even Tangen himself, though he also has reacted quite annoyed to some of the harsher hostilities against the Kunstsilo project, has explicitly stated – for example in a talk at Arendalsuka 2018, referring to the then imminent assessment of his collection's quality by the leftist Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen*⁶² – that he in general "loves protests" and has, after all, "never been particularly fond of the establishment" – a statement followed by the remark that his collection's inclusion of "protest art" reflected exactly this.⁶³

⁶¹ For the panel debate's documentation, see Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, 2018, 07.06.

⁶² The talk took place on August 17th 2018 under the title *Regjeringens kulturpolitikk og en samtale om kunstsiloen* in Kulturhuset Arendal. For its videodocumentation, see Arendalsuka, 2018, 17.08. (the quoted statements, translated from Norwegian, are documented between 1:09:50 and 1:10:15). For the assessment of the Tangen Collection's quality in *Klassekampen*, see Hammer, 2018, 18.08.

⁶³ Of course, it could be further discussed as to whether such statements and a corresponding inclusion and affirmation of critical challenges can also be seen as ways of absorbing the respective critique. Additionally, a statement like the one directed against 'the establishment' is, in view of the current rhetoric of right-wing populism, a slightly infelicitous wording and has to be treated with caution. At the same time, when taking into account that Tangen argues in defense of his collection and the Kunstsilo project in the context of a very heated public debate, the expectation that he would expose himself to the contrariness between his role as hedge fund manager and his collection of communist artworks would be quite a high one.

So, on the one hand, a closer look shows that the question of how in – or exclusive an archive like the Tangen Collection – respectively the museum administrating it – is, and how it exercises its power, cannot simply be answered by applying Bolt Rasmussen's and Jakobsen's general assessment of 'the archive'. However, on the other hand, there are as well aspects which at least give cause for discussing to what extent this assessment might be adequate nevertheless. A particular example for this can be found in the context of the more superficial sides of the collection's promotion, or more precisely: on SKMU's instagram-account. On March 29th 2018, the purchase of Jorn's painting *L'Abominable Homme des Neiges* from 1959 was announced via this account, and in contrast to the lecture mentioned above, this announcement almost appears like an invitation to be used as evidence for Bolt Rasmussen's and Jakobsen's thesis that the archive tends to exclude references to 'the revolts and revolutions of the past'. For the painting stems from Jorn's situationist phase, even from the time of his membership in the (1st) Situationist International and his close collaboration with Guy Debord. In fact, *L'Abominable Homme des Neiges* was painted in the same year in which Jorn's and Debord's book *Mémoires*, one of the milestones of situationism, was printed. Among other things, this book presents and exemplifies the situationist key concepts of *dérive* and *détournement* in the context of the situationists' general critique of the 'society of the spectacle', as Debord would then set it down particularly in his homonymous book from 1967. But this situationist and thus spectacle-critical context isn't mentioned at all in the announcement's text. Instead, like in the collection's general information text, what exclusively is mentioned is Jorn's role as founding member of CoBrA, along with an additional brief explanation of the group's interest in primitive and spontaneous forms of expression, and surrealism and automatism as its sources of inspiration.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ See Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, 2018, 19.03. The announcement can also be found on SKMU's official homepage by searching the internet for the terms "Asger Jorn" and "Tangensamling". Since the respective URL consists of four lines of text, it is not indicated here.

It is of course clear that one can't expect a sophisticated art historical treatise on an instagram-page, and admittedly, it might seem a bit unbalanced to contrast the art historical lecture and the panel debate mentioned above with a brief announcement on social media, which, in addition, is obviously not based on the most thorough background research. With considerable certainty, the omission of the painting's situationist context is simply an unintended accidental slip, resulting from a continuation of the collection's general information text's way of referring to Jorn, without checking this way's adequacy for the particular subject it is applied to. But exactly as such an accidental slip, this omission appears all the more as an effect of the excluding power of 'the archive'. In other words: It bears a certain significance with regard to the question how 'the archive' works. For this accidental slip shows, that it, to a certain degree, functions by referring to itself, to its former choices and selections of information – or more precisely: that it serves as the primary source of information for the archivists working in it. Thus, the announcement exemplifies that 'the archive', besides its openness on other levels, at least partially functions as an 'echo chamber'. In this respect, the corresponding effect consists indeed in the exclusion of information about the archived painting's situationist creation context and its revolutionary spirit. And as 'legitimizing the prevailing state of affairs', as Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen put it, this effect can particularly be described because it circumvents bringing up the contradictory fact that *L'Abominable Homme des Neiges* is not only an anti-capitalist painter's work in a capitalist's collection, but also an anti-spectacular work which is going to be exhibited in 'Norway's most spectacular museum building'.

From a perspective like the one formulated by Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen (at least as regards its version from 2010, which differs as I will show later, from the two authors' more recent views), this must of course appear as a blatantly obvious confirmation of the assumption that situationism's anti-capitalist force, instead of being lost, still exists – and that it exactly therefore is repressed by the archives of capitalism. That this assumption accordingly is linked to the belief that this force just has to be brought to the fore again, becomes particularly explicit when Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen describe their exhibition – *This*

World We Must Leave – as a “counter- or anti-archive, where the constantly circulated and repeated narrative of the ‘naturalness’ of capitalism is challenged and rejected”⁶⁵, or when they state that the “concepts [...] which have historically been used to reflect the established capitalist world” – even though the respective “vocabulary may seem in many ways to address an older, now vanished historical period” – have “perhaps never been more relevant than now”⁶⁶ (i.e. in 2010). The same belief is expressed in their book *Expect Anything Fear Nothing* from 2011. This book documents the homonymous conference which took place on March 15th and 16th 2007 in the Youth House in Copenhagen – as “an attempt to shed light on some of the marginalised dimensions of the Situationist International” and “to use the concepts and strategies of the Situationists in the present moment”⁶⁷ (which was the moment after the protests against the eviction of the Youth House had – in consequence of this eviction on March 1st 2007 – resulted in street riots).

Recycling Situationism

The belief in the persistent topicality of situationism can of course not only be found in the quoted texts by Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen. In fact, the project to revive situationist concepts and strategies has its own history. A first revival – or, to use a term coined by Knut Ove Arntzen, recycling – of these concepts and strategies, in particular of the strategy of *détournement*, started in the late 1970s, with the development of those forms of artistic activism which are nowadays known as culture jamming. Likewise, the Reclaim The Streets movement, as it developed since the early 1990s, stands in the tradition of situationist approaches.

Concerning the theoretical continuation of situationist concepts with regard to art, it was particularly Nicolas Bourriaud who, with his book *Esthétique relationnelle* from 1998, most sustainably influenced the respective discourse. Bourriaud thereby not only revived the situationist concepts he referred to, but also revised them, particularly in view of the

⁶⁵ Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2010, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁷ Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2011, p. 11.

societal and world political changes which occurred between the 1960s and the 1990s. According to him, “[t]he ‘society of the spectacle’ [...] is followed by the society of extras”⁶⁸ – a “further stage of spectacular development”, on which “the individual has shifted from a passive and purely repetitive status to the minimum activity dictated to him by market forces”, resulting from the fact that, “since the surrender of the Soviet bloc, there are no obstacles on capitalism’s path to empire”, so that “it can permit itself to stir individuals to frolic about in the free and open spaces that it has staked out.”⁶⁹ As regards the way in which art critically relates to this spectacular development, the difference between the 1960s and the 1990s consists for Bourriaud in a change of focus from “[s]ocial utopias and revolutionary hopes” to “everyday micro-utopias and imitative strategies”⁷⁰, from “future-oriented manifestos, and calls for a better world” to “utopia [...] being lived on a subjective, everyday basis, in the real time of concrete and fragmentary experiments.”⁷¹ However, he also sees a historical constant between these two eras, namely the artistic interest in participatory forms, constituting those “convivial relations”⁷² which give his book its name. Therefore, instead of putting the participatory art of the 1990s in contrast to the situationist approaches of the 1960s (and 1950s, to be precise), he attests the art he refers to that it “updates Situationism”⁷³.

As mentioned above, Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics have been of sustainable influence – an influence still lingering in the current discourse on contemporary art. But when referring to this book today, one also has to refer to its critique, which meanwhile has become a discourse of its own, pointing out a number of problematic traits of Bourriaud’s perspective – and particularly calling into question the topicality of situationism he assumes.

⁶⁸ Bourriaud, 2002 (1998), p. 26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Rejecting Situationism

The position which has to be mentioned first in this context is the one of Claire Bishop. In her text "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" from 2004, she especially argues that "the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests"⁷⁴. Democracy, as she points out with reference to the political theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, consists in dealing with social antagonisms, not in excluding or suppressing these antagonisms. But exactly such an exclusion she sees taking place in the examples Bourriaud refers to as 'updates of situationism'. According to Bishop, these examples "rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness."⁷⁵ There is, from her point of view, no antagonism in the communities these examples produce, as the members of these communities "identify with each other, because they have something in common."⁷⁶ As examples which – in contrast to the ones Bourriaud refers to – doesn't simply gather "like-minded art lovers"⁷⁷ and, in contrast, actually can be described as democratic in Bishop's understanding of the term, she finally refers to works by Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra. "These artists", as Bishop writes, "set up 'relationships' that emphasize the role of dialogue and negotiation" and "are marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging", as well as by "a tension among viewers, participants and context", particularly due to "the introduction of collaborators from diverse economic backgrounds"⁷⁸. As designation of this kind of art, Bishop introduces the term relational antagonism, and she closes her text by stating that "[t]his relational antagonism would be predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony", thereby providing "a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Bishop, 2004, p. 67.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

In a very similar way, Juliane Rebentisch criticizes Bourriaud in her text "Spectacle" from 2007. Arguing like Bishop with reference to political theories that understand social antagonisms as the basis of democracy, she states that "the problem of our day presents [itself (sic)] precisely not as one of division, as seems to be the assumption behind the demand, which traces itself back to Debord, for more immediate 'relationality' in the context of art."⁸⁰ And the parallel to Bishop's argument becomes even clearer when she therefore concludes: "What is needed, by contrast, is a renewed exposition of the divisions, one that sharpens them into conflict and distance." Thus, Rebentisch likewise calls the topicality of situationism, as assumed by Bourriaud, into question. Or more precisely: She even denies this topicality and states that, quite contrary to Bourriaud's assumption, "the critique of the spectacle is doubly untimely."⁸¹ Firstly, it is, as she argues in correspondence with Bishop, untimely because it, in view of the mentioned political theories, "participates in the utopia, problematic in itself, of social authenticity"⁸². And secondly, this untimeliness consists for her in this critique's unawareness of the fact that this utopia's "central motifs have in the meantime been adopted by the opposing side", namely neo-liberalism, which "includes even the last poor devil by granting him the potential of self-realization."⁸³ In this respect, her argument is actually not too far from Bourriaud's description of a society of extras. Nevertheless, in consequence, she categorically rejects Bourriaud's assessment that art's potential to unfold societal critique would lie in an update of situationism. On the contrary, she concludes that exactly "the diffuse discourse of the dominance of the spectacle [...] blocks such a critique", and she therefore pleads that "it should be suspended indefinitely."⁸⁴

Rebentisch's assessment is thus also contrasting the assumption that situationism's topicality was just repressed by the archives of capitalism. Instead of such a repression, she rather sees the motifs of situationism taken over, absorbed and co-opted by the current form of

⁸⁰ Rebentisch, 2007.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

capitalism itself, and any topicality these motifs might have had in the past, in spite of being problematic in themselves, has from her point of view completely vanished under the contemporary societal conditions. With this assessment, for which the incorporation of Jorn's works into the Tangen Collection can of course appear as a blatantly obvious exemplification, Rebentisch stands in the context of a broader discourse, having its roots particularly in Luc Boltanski's and Ève Chiapello's analysis of 'the new spirit of capitalism', as they carry it out in their homonymous book from 1999 – with the original French title *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*.⁸⁵

Regarding the discourse on contemporary art, the influence of this analysis can absolutely keep up with the one Bourriaud's description of relational aesthetics had. And a particular significant proof for this influence can be seen in the fact that it obviously also had an impact on the way Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen describe situationism's contemporary status in their more recent publications. In their introduction to the anthology *Cosmonauts of the Future* from 2015, they write for example: "The Situationist project failed, no doubt about it."⁸⁶ And with particular regard to the approaches of both Jorn and Nash, along with a noticeable reverberation of Boltanski's and Chiapello's analysis, they proceed as follows:

The Jornian idea of an experimental attitude has been perversely realized in the 'creativity' hype. Self-realization is now an obligation and not an escape. Nash's wish to activate people has been turned into a discourse of participation where people only participate in their own alienation, leaving the structures of the system intact. The critique of capitalist production and division of labour has been put to work as new management techniques enabling capitalism to further penetrate the human body and mind. The vision of the city as a great work of art without spectators has been realized upside down by capitalist city planning. [...] The problem is of course that the capital-negating

⁸⁵ See Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005 (1999).

⁸⁶ Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2015, p. 16.

dimension was closed down by the forces of history and reaction, transforming the anti-authoritarian project into individualised and hedonistic self-realization. The isolation of the critique of alienation and inauthenticity paved the way for new forms of control and exploitation that have taken on the shape of self-control and self-exploitation.⁸⁷

According to this changed way of seeing it, the formulations indicating a belief in a possible reactivation of a simply repressed anti-capitalist force of situationism, as they are contained in the guide to the first version of *This World We Must Leave*, are missing in the guide to this exhibition's second version from 2016. Or more precisely: They are replaced by other formulations. Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen no longer call their exhibition an 'anti-archive', but speak of it as an 'impossible archive' instead. And the paragraph containing the statement that the critical vocabulary of situationism had 'perhaps never been more relevant than now' is replaced by a paragraph describing the exhibition as an approach to "map an escape route through these revolutionary remnants and our own desperation"⁸⁸. Nevertheless, they still see the situationist project as reference point for "a revolutionary critique of present-day capitalist society"⁸⁹ and as an exemplary "attempt at a decisive break with the ruling socio-economic order and a projection of the coming into being of new forms of life."⁹⁰ So, they at least adhere to ascribing the failed project of situationism a certain topicality – inasmuch as they see it pointing "forward beyond the crisis-ridden capitalist order that survives today."⁹¹

If still regarding this capitalist order of today as a form of the spectacle, a possible way of naming the envisioned future beyond it could consist in calling it post-spectacular. And this leads me, finally, to the question how I position my own research in the context of the controversial discussion about situationism's topicality. For the term

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸⁸ Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2016, p. 13.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2015, p. 16.

⁹¹ Ibid.

‘post-spectacular’ is of significant importance in this regard, though, and this is crucial, in a very different meaning – which I use to indicate by writing the term without hyphen: ‘postspectacular’.

Postspectacular Theatre

The way I understand and use the term ‘postspectacular’ originates from my description of a postspectacular theatre in my homonymous study from 2009.⁹² In this study, I proposed this naming for forms of contemporary performing art which critically react and refer to the changed conditions of the spectacle – particularly to the fact that it has incorporated exactly those artistic strategies that once opposed it. Thus, the term ‘postspectacular’, as I understand it, indicates not at all a time ‘after’ the spectacle – and therefore neither implies its end. Instead, it refers to a critique of the spectacle’s current conditions, which is ‘postspectacular’ in relation to earlier, anti-spectacular forms, which, under these conditions, have become spectacular themselves. The ‘post’ in ‘postspectacular’ thus refers to the ‘after’ of this transformation’s recognition, whence the corresponding spectacular conditions are critically dealt with, and not to any ‘after’ of the spectacle as such.

In particular, this critique of the spectacle’s current conditions by a postspectacular theatre consists in challenging the belief in the critical force of immediate relationality. Instead of continuing to emphasize the assumed immediacy of performance by focusing on direct interhuman face-to-face-encounters, presence, bodily proximity and mutual sensing, postspectacular theatre plays with absences, voids, distances and interruptions – and thus evinces a fundamental mediality of performance and of interhuman relations in general, being the only means to bridge the gap between subjects, as well as the gap inside each subject itself.⁹³ One of the performances shown in the program of Oktoberdansen-festival 2018,

⁹² Eiermann, 2009.

⁹³ My argumentation is here – as in *Postspektakuläres Theater* – based on the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, particularly in form of its continuation by Slavoj Žižek, and the respective conception of the subject as split and divided from itself.

which can be regarded as a very recent example of a postspectacular theatre, even indicates this focus by its title: *BLANKS* – a solo by Ingrid Berger Myhre, in which she repeatedly disappears behind the scenography's central element, a big wall, or even leaves the room, while the performance, in this blank space, continues without her, replacing her body and its movements by projections on the wall, first and foremost projections of text, for example predicting how long it will take until she will reappear and what she will do then.

As examples like *BLANKS* show, a characteristic trait of postspectacular theatre consists exactly in what Bishop and Rebenitsch regard as needed under the contemporary societal conditions: the exposition of divisions. Accordingly, both Rebenitsch's position, and later also Bishop's, have been important points of reference for my description and theoretical reflection of postspectacular theatre. But, as my above given explanation of the term shows, as well as the term itself, I don't agree with Rebenitsch's assessment that one no longer should refer to the term 'spectacle' in this context. From my point of view, the term still is of theoretical relevance, provided that the changes of the spectacle and its transformation are taken into consideration and analyzed appropriately. And the term 'postspectacular theatre' is, as explained, the result of exactly this kind of approach.

Furthermore, I regard Rebenitsch's assessment also as too generalizing in other respects, and this concerns firstly the question about the topicality of a situationist strategy like *détournement*. Of course, Rebenitsch doesn't say anything about this strategy in particular. But her general critique of the situationist project, moulded by her rejection of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, implicitly includes this strategy, and thus suggests that it was inseparably linked with the demand for immediate relationality. In contrast to this suggestion, I think that *détournement* is not at all necessarily tied to this demand. On the contrary, it also can be used in postspectacular ways, i.e. in order to uncover the mediality always underlying interhuman relations.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ See also my corresponding argumentation with regard to the topic of participation in Eiermann, 2015.

A Postspectacular Perspective on *Détournement*

Again, examples for this can be found in the program of BIT Teatergarasjen – both in and beyond the framework of Oktoberdans 2018. A first example is the performance *Your Majesties* by Navaridas & Deutinger from 2010, shown by BIT Teatergarasjen in February 2018. This performance can be described as being based on a *détournement* par excellence, namely a *détournement* of Barack Obamas controversial Nobel Peace Prize speech from 2009. This speech is recited on stage by Alex Deutinger while he copies movements which Marta Navaridas performs behind the audience. By this, on the one hand, the speech is divided from both the body and the voice of its ostensible authentic ‘owner’, and thus exposed in its mediality and rhetoric calculus. On the other hand, it also divides Deutinger – both from himself and from the audience, as it, like the movements, clearly neither is an expression coming from him nor an effect of his encounter with the audience. Instead, it affects him from beyond this togetherness, interrupting any sentiment of immediate relationality from the start.

A second example, shown in the program of Oktoberdans 2018, is *Princess* by Eisa Jocson from 2017. In this case, the performance is based on a *détournement* of the Disney film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* from 1937, whose text is used in the performance in fragments, continually repeated and doubled by the two performers Eisa Jocson and Russ Ligtas, who mirror each other in Snow White costumes – and by this broach the issue of both the employment of Philippine dancers in Disneyland Hong Kong and their simultaneous marginalization due to their darker skin color, as the respective program text explains.⁹⁵ In other words: *Princess* uses a classical *détournement* in order to expose the (in this case racist) division between groups of different skin colors. And like in *Your Majesties*, the use of both text and movement which clearly is external to the performers, also divides them from the audience and continually interrupts any sentiment of immediate relationality, also and especially when they approach the audience with a microphone and ask

⁹⁵ See BIT Teatergarasjen, 2018c.

them, in very close and direct face-to-face encounters, questions like for example “What’s your name?” or “Where is your mum?”.

So, as these examples show, the strategy of *détournement* is a quite topical one in contemporary performing art – and not at all necessarily tied to the emphasis on immediate relationality. Instead, it proves to be in fact very suitable for evincing the fundamental mediality of interhuman relations and to expose divisions – in case of both *Your Majesties* and *Princess* even with critical reference to quite concrete political and social issues.

But this is not the only matter which has to be pointed out in contrast to Rebentisch’s generalizing critique of the situationist project. A further one is that even Bourriaud’s description of a relational aesthetics contains aspects, which can be seen independently from his focus on immediate relationality, or more precisely: which can be separated from this focus, by which Bourriaud narrows them. One of these aspects is his application of the term ‘social interstice’.

A Postspectacular Perspective on the ‘Interstice’

Bourriaud’s use of the term ‘interstice’ is based on a reference to Karl Marx’ description of “trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit: barter, merchandising, autarkic types of production, etc.”⁹⁶ – the *Post Capitalist Auction* by Jingyi Wang (in collaboration with Idun Vik), presented by BIT Teatergarasjen in March 2018, could be mentioned as a further example.⁹⁷ For Bourriaud, the interstice accordingly is “a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system.”⁹⁸ The contemporary art exhibition is, from his point of view, the prime example for this kind of space. It creates, as he writes, “free areas, and time spans, whose rhythm contrast with those

⁹⁶ Bourriaud, 2002 (1998), p. 16.

⁹⁷ See BIT Teatergarasjen, 2018a.

⁹⁸ Bourriaud, 2002 (1998), p. 16.

structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed upon us."⁹⁹

It can of course be discussed as to whether this assessment actually applies to art exhibitions – at least as to whether it applies to them in general. But I think that Bourriaud's description of the interstice applies quite accurately to a particular work by Heine Avdal & Yukiko Shinozaki / fieldworks, namely their site-specific project *Borrowed Landscapes*, first realized in 2011. I think so not only because the respective information text almost appears to be inspired by Bourriaud's wording, for example when it describes the project as "[a] series of location-inspired performances set in diverse private and public spaces, rethinking the notion of how we move or are made to move through them as well as the notion of everyday life."¹⁰⁰ The main reason why I think Bourriaud's description of the interstice applies to it is my experience of one of its performances in the framework of Oktoberdans 2012, where it was realized in a supermarket – a particular manifestation of the 'capitalist economic context' – during its usual opening hours.

There are two aspects which constitute a significant particularity of *Borrowed Landscapes* in relation to an art exhibition, as Bourriaud sees it as prime example of the interstice: Firstly, and particularly when realized in supermarkets, *Borrowed Landscapes* opens an interstice not only between the usual 'communication zones', but inside one of these zones – by implanting a performance, consisting in actions that clearly deviate from those usually carried out in supermarkets, into this zone. And secondly, since this happens during the usual opening hours, the project opens an interstice not only for an exclusive group of 'like-minded art-lovers' (to borrow Bishop's wording). Instead, it opens it for two audience's: On the one hand, there is the audience which comes to see the performance and pays for it. On the other hand, there is an involuntary audience, consisting of the people who just go shopping there. And the difference between these two groups is also visible, due to the fact that the members of the first group wear headphones.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Shiba, 2012.

So, the description of the interstice in fact applies to *Borrowed Landscapes*. But – just like the ‘space in human relations’ opened up by the project is not only a space in the relations between members of one exclusive group – the ‘inter-human commerce’ that can take place in this interstice does not at all result in an immediate relationality. Instead, what actually results from it is an experience of divisions and separations. The members of the involuntary audience are clearly separated both from the performers and the paying audience because they don’t know what exactly is going on and what the other audience hears. And the members of this other audience – the paying ones – are clearly separated from the involuntary audience, because they do not know how the latter’s members think of and assess the unusual occurrences they witness. Thus, just like shown above with regard to the strategy of *détournement*, criticizing Bourriaud’s demand for immediate relationality does not at all imply that his description of the interstice must be dismissed as well. On the contrary: If not narrowed to Bourriaud’s focus on immediacy, proximity and convivial togetherness, it proves to be quite useful for illustrating exactly such examples which call the demand for immediate relationality into question and instead evince relational antagonisms.

Another example for this – likewise a project by Avdal and Shinozaki – is *carry on* from 2015, in which I was involved as dramaturge (and, when we realized it in the framework of Oktoberdans 2016 in Sentralbadet Bergen, as performer). This project takes its audiences, groups of up to ten people, on guided tours through the buildings it is realized in – often buildings which are themselves in a kind of interim status and thus predestined contexts for exploring them as interstices – as well as for opening further interstices inside them, between their usual functions. And often, parts of these tours also lead through the exterior areas of these buildings. So, like in *Borrowed Landscapes*, it also can happen in *carry on* that the audience meets passers-by, who then become a second, involuntary audience.

But what is actually even more interesting with regard to *carry on* is the relation that can be seen between its tour-concept and the situationist strategy of *dérive* – a way of exploring areas, mostly cities, in

contrast to the usual behavior their structures and conditions prescribe, in form of an experimental passage through them.

A Postspectacular Perspective on *Dérive*

Of course, the tours in *carry on* differ quite significantly from the situationist concept of *dérive*, at least from how Debord describes it in his text *Théory de la dérive* from 1956, for example with regard to the duration or the number of participants Debord recommends, and particularly because of the fact that they are guided. But actually, the guiding performers can rather be seen as parts of the environments the tours are leading through. And it's not only them who guide, but also small little cubes, which repeatedly – as a 'leitmotiv' in the literal sense of the word – appear here and there on the way, like little fragments of the surrounding architecture. Furthermore, it's always a group of performers who take the guiding in turns, and on the way, they repeatedly stay behind the audience or disappear, while others appear from unexpected places and take over from them. Sometimes, the audience even has to go a part of the way alone. Thus, one characteristic which the tours in *carry on* in any case have in common with the *dérive* is that they "involve playful-constructive behavior" and facilitate "awareness of psychogeographical effects"¹⁰¹. And – as the performers tend to sort of appear like parts of the respective environments – it also appears adequate to say that the audience members "let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there."¹⁰² In any case, this is also the way the tours are developed in the production process. They result from explorations of the respective spaces which practices exactly this strategy – a strategy also applied by Jorn in the context of his artistic research.

This leads me, finally, back to the beginning: To the reference to *FOR ANDRE TING*, which was, as it probably already has become clear, in a way a way of carrying on *carry on*, so to speak. As *carry on* uses

¹⁰¹ Debord, 1956.

¹⁰² Ibid.

black cubes, *FOR ANDRE TING* uses white tubes. And as the former of course are a reference to the 'black box' of the theatre space, the latter are, as already mentioned, a reference to the 'white cube' of the museum space, which in case of the Kunstsilo will in fact consist of white tubes. The guided tour in *FOR ANDRE TING* continues the way the tours in *carry on* are organized, and it thus similarly relates to the concept of the *dérive*. And like in both *carry on* and particularly *Borrowed Landscapes*, *FOR ANDRE TING* also involves, as its tour leads through the public areas in and around *Kilden*, involuntary spectators (respectively involuntary performers, like a cleaning woman appearing several times from different elevators in one of the performances) and quite clearly exposes divisions – for example when the tour comes to a short halt in front of a site fence blocking the way onto the quay behind the silo.

But these similarities are not the only reason to finally come back to this example. This reason also consists in the fact that *FOR ANDRE TING*, besides relating to the strategy of *dérive*, is likewise based on the strategy of *détournement*. In fact, it combines these strategies. Thus – besides the fact that I still, as promised above, have to explain what it has to do with the question of situationism's topicality anyway – concluding with reference to it appears particularly appropriate.

Finally: A *Dérive* through *Détournements*

Détournement, this strategy so significantly applied and developed by Jorn, is used in *FOR ANDRE TING* in two different ways: On the one hand, the visual reference to the silo in form of the tubes can be described as *détournement* – i.e. as *détournement* of an architectural form, which, in the context of the media attention directed towards the Kunstsilo project and the respective debate, has indeed become an iconic manifestation of this 'spectacle'. On the other hand – and this is the way it mainly is applied – *détournement* is used with regard to text. In fact, a large part of the performance's texts are *détournements* of articles and other texts related to the Kunstsilo project and the controversial debate about it. The text mentioned in the beginning – i.e. the text by which the audience is invited to come along on the tour – is for example the result

of a *détournement* of a text from a promotional video for *Kanalbyen*¹⁰³, a new, very expensive neighborhood, built – and in 2018 still in the building process – right next to the silo and closely linked to the Kunstsilo project and the related plans concerning Kristiansand’s future urban development. When looking at this video from a slightly critical perspective, it virtually appears like a direct confirmation of Bolt Rasmussen’s and Jakobsen’s diagnosis from 2015 that situationism’s “vision of the city as a great work of art without spectators has been realized upside down by capitalist city planning”, and that the respective “anti-authoritarian project” has been transformed “into individualised and hedonistic self-realization.”¹⁰⁴ For what the video promises is exactly a place for such hedonistic self-realization, and additionally, it advertises *Kanalbyen* as the epitome of a social meeting place, built in order to create a convivial social community – of course pretending this community’s openness and inclusiveness, and excluding, as far as possible, any indication of the exclusiveness the respective real estate prizes imply and the social divisions and antagonisms connected with this.

When ‘change’, the ostensible topic of *FOR ANDRE TING*, is introduced in the performance’s beginning, the *détournement* of this video’s text is, before it gets recited by the performer mentioned in the beginning, introduced by another performer¹⁰⁵ as the last one in a row of examples for change. More precisely: It is introduced as the result of a change of a text, which itself is about an example for change, namely the building of *Kanalbyen*. And the way this text was changed for its use in *FOR ANDRE TING* is explained by the information that words like ‘Kanalbyen’ were replaced by words like ‘staging’, or words like ‘building development’ by words like ‘performance’, and so on. So, as it then gets clear when the text is finally recited, this *détournement* has changed the promotional text about *Kanalbyen* into a text about *FOR ANDRE TING* itself, pointing in particular to the *dérive*-like tour that will follow by introducing the performance as an ‘eventful staging with many different routes one can go’.

¹⁰³ Sørmeqleren / Aptum Kommunikasjon, 2015, 30.11.

¹⁰⁴ Bolt Rasmussen & Jakobsen, 2015, p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Sander Cyvin.

Thus, by concluding with reference to *FOR ANDRE TING*, the topicality of situationist strategies like *dérive* and *détournement* becomes once more particularly clear. And when, in the performance's further *dérive*-like course, the controversial debate about the Kunstsilo project reverberates in form of further *détournements* in and around *Kilden* (whose building project had in fact triggered a similar controversial debate), it becomes equally clear that these two strategies, particularly in their interplay, can indeed function as a means to expose divisions and evince social antagonisms.

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