

Art critics in the daily press are, in most cases, freelancers who give their opinionated views on a pluralistic art scene covering everything from traditional techniques to graffiti and other illegal visual expressions, dance and theatre related performances as well as internet-based art. The art critic is also expected to have a global overview of crucial biennales and big art events taking place in remote areas of the world.

Without significant improvement in the financial base for freelance art critics there is a clear risk of undermining serious art criticism and abandoning it to the superficial and banal.

This anthology examines the role of the art critic in an expanding art world of commercial markets and government subsidized institutions. The interdependence of art critics, art museums, private galleries, art fairs and artists is discussed in depth. The problem of loyalty and the relationship of freelance journalists to the publications they write for is another important topic highlighted.

The Swedish Art Critics Association invited some international critics to participate with their Swedish colleagues in the Pressures on Art Criticism seminar at Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

Pressures on Art Criticism contains essays and statements by leading writers and artists including Mårten Arndtzén, Carlos Capelán, Christian Chambert, Lars O Ericsson, Ronald Jones, John Peter Nilsson, Lars Nittve, Ann-Sofi Noring, Margareta Tillberg, Sabine Vogel and Janneke Wesseling.

The Swedish Art Critics Association Press

ISBN 978-91-633-4960-7

Pressures on Art Criticism

Edited by Margareta Tillberg

Pressures on Art Criticism

What is an Independent Art Critic Today?

Edited by
Margareta
Tillberg

Today, almost all art critics in the daily newspapers are grossly underpaid freelancers. It is not possible to make enough money to survive by only writing art criticism, and it is common that critics also work part-time as curators, researchers or teachers. Does this undermine the credibility of the critic or does it, on the contrary, open up new approaches?

Important questions considered in this book are: Should the critic be inside or outside the art system? Is it possible for the art critic to be a complete outsider? Is it feasible to be autonomous and only a representative for the common reader? What is the distinction between being an independent or being an autonomous art critic?

The qualified critic in mass media has a personal voice which addresses and attracts a broad readership. To what extent is the content of today's criticism influenced by editorial politics? Are specialised media and the blog challenging the criticism in daily newspapers or are they productive alternatives? Is it likely that critics are approaching the end of using the review format, and in the future it will be replaced by other kinds of critical texts on art, such as in-depth interviews and philosophical essays?

Copyright © 2009. The Swedish Art Critics Association Press and the authors. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

Pressures on Art Criticism: What is an Independent Art Critic Today?

Publisher:

The Swedish Art Critics Association Press
Svenska Konstkritikersamfundet
Swedish Art Critics Association
c/o Avdelningen för konsthistoria och visuella studier
Lunds universitet
Box 117
SE-221 00 Lund
<http://www.aicasweden.org>

Editor: Margareta Tillberg

Organisation: John Peter Nilsson
Project coordinator: Christian Chambert
Transcription of the seminar: Isabel Thomson
English language revisions and translations:
Angela Barnett-Lindberg
Graphic design: Magnus Eidehall
Printing and Reproduction: Kph Trycksaksbolaget AB, Uppsala
Paper and Cover: 100 g scandia 200 and 240 g scandia 2000

Pressures on Art Criticism:
What is an Independent Art Critic Today?

Art Criticism/Cultural Studies
ISBN 978-91-633-4960-7

Editor: Margareta Tillberg

Contents

- 9 Preface**
Margareta Tillberg
- 15 Independencies and Interdependencies in Art Criticism Today**
Margareta Tillberg
- 23 From My Personal Point of View**
Lars Nittve
- 29 At Your Service**
Sabine Vogel
- 51 Questions to Sabine Vogel**
- 55 Art Criticism in the Netherlands at the Beginning of the 21st Century: A Personal Observation**
Janneke Wesseling
- 71 Questions to Janneke Wesseling**
- 81 What Does the Artist Have to Say about Art Criticism?**
Carlos Capelán and Ann-Sofi Noring
- 87 Panel Discussion**
Mårten Arndtzén, Lars O Ericsson, Ronald Jones, John Peter Nilsson, Sabine Vogel and Janneke Wesseling
- 141 Participants**

Preface

Margareta Tillberg

The seminar, *Pressures on Art Criticism: What is an Independent Art Critic Today?*, had the goal of examining the role of art critics in daily newspapers in various countries. Perspectives on their relations with the market, their friendships, and their ideological positions, were discussed at the meeting. Other important parts of the dialogue were freedom of speech, the boundaries for freelancers of their loyalty to their papers, as well as the low fees paid to critics for their work. To address these urgent issues some international critics were invited to participate in this seminar with their Swedish colleagues. Most of these critics are, or have been, writing for daily newspapers for a long time.

In the autumn of 2003, Moderna Museet in Stockholm organised a series of full-day seminars called *Forum Moderna* with the subtitle *What is a Modern Museum?* This was also the title of the first seminar, followed by ones about gender, globalization and economy. The fifth seminar in this series, *Pressures on Art Criticism*, took place on September 11, 2004 at Moderna Museet and was initiated by the Swedish Art Critics Association (Swedish AICA).

The president of Swedish AICA, Christian Chamberbert, delivered a welcoming speech and moderated the morning session of the seminar. The director of the Moderna Museet, Lars Nittve, started the day with a few recollections from his time as an art critic at *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Artforum*. Janneke Wesseling, from *NRC Handelsblad*, Amsterdam, in her keynote

speech, highlighted the impossibility of being an independent critic but the necessity to be autonomous. Sabine Vogel from *Berliner Zeitung*, the other invited speaker, opened her art critic diary and pointed out the Scylla and Charybdis of the profession. In connection with his exhibition *Ceci n'est pas une vidéo*, at Moderna Museet, Carlos Capelán had a talk with Ann-Sofi Noring, head of exhibitions and collections at the museum, about what the artist has to say concerning art criticism. The afternoon panel discussion was moderated by John Peter Nilsson, vice president of Swedish AICA, and included besides Sabine Vogel and Janneke Wesseling three critics active in Sweden: Mårten Arndtzén, *Expressen*, Lars O Ericsson, *Dagens Nyheter* and Ronald Jones, *Artforum* and *Frieze*. The editor appreciates the opportunity to include the contributions of the speakers and the participants on the panel in this book. The principal editorial work was finished at the beginning of June 2006 and it has not been updated since.

Swedish AICA warmly thanks Moderna Museet and its staff for co-arranging the seminar. We especially have in mind Lars Nittve, Ann-Sofi Noring and Paulina Sokolow.

Thanks also to Martha Nilsson Edelheit for her untiring support and careful comments.

The editor acknowledges generous funding from the Foundation for the Culture of the Future (*Stiftelsen framtidens kultur*), which made it possible to print this book.

The volume was not least the result of a teamwork of my colleagues on the Swedish AICA board: I especially want to thank Sophie Allgårdh for her assistance in the editorial process and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe and Ulrika Stahre, who were very encouraging in the production process. Thanks also to Gunnar Bråhammar, Lena From, Håkan Nilsson, John Peter Nilsson, Anders Olofsson, and Jelena Zetterström.

**Independencies and
Interdependencies in
Art Criticism Today**

Margareta Tillberg

What is an independent art critic today? This was the main topic of discussion for *Pressures on Art Criticism*. Independence is certainly a crucial problem which is obvious, especially in a small country like Sweden, where very few critics work full-time for the same medium. In order to survive economically the critic has to work for many employers and occasionally in different formats. The questions posed to the panel, and to the audience, concerned pressures from multiple perspectives. The critic is moving in a field full of participants. How is she/he to handle the relationship to the market, personal connections in terms of friendships among artists and representatives from institutions? And what about ideological positions? What attitude should the critic take to these various roles?

What would be an ethically accepted attitude a critic should maintain to retain a credible voice as a conveyor of art? The participants took divergent standpoints. Janneke Wesseling strictly keeps to her role as the outside eye reflecting on the exhibition, whereas Sabine Vogel has worked in various contexts, both as a curator and a critic. The important thing, though, everybody agreed, is to keep the audience informed about these incompatible positions.

Today, when the foundations for art production and art consumption are in constant flux it is natural that reflections upon these activities, produced in the name of art, are revised. These new conditions and their consequences for art criticism were the main issue for the subsequent discussion. What position is

the critic to take when art, as in many cases today, is more interested in the process itself than in the result (a product to look at, according to the traditionalist view); when the art work can be an investigation of interpersonal relationships or a video from an artist's workshop during the night, where nothing happens but some accidental rat appearing? Is the art critic to explain it to the angry visitor whose comment is "Not beautiful"? Is it the art critic's duty to serve and please the occasional reader?

Ronald Jones' comment was that he is not interested in writing for a general audience. He would not expect to understand very much at a seminar on nuclear physics, so why should a non-informed visitor make demands on understanding everything when it comes to art?

According to Webster's Dictionary, the definition of 'criticism' (concerning art and literature) is an activity that "attempts to understand the aesthetic object in depth". In politics, for instance, the word 'criticism' almost exclusively refers to disagreement, while in an academic, artistic, or literary context it usually refers to the activity of interpretation or analysis. Thus, interpretation in depth is the lexicon definition of criticism in the arts. So, this is the ideal. What about everyday reality?

Naturally the editor of a daily newspaper wants as many readers as possible to understand what the articles are about without too much background knowledge. The question is therefore: what level should the

writer aim for? One level could be the critic in conversation with art and artists, another is to teach and explain to a wider general public what is worth seeing. For, the panel settled, they would not mention exhibitions not worth visiting. The choice is itself an appraisal. What the paper chooses to report is a hint of what culturally interested people should go and see. The critic mostly informs about what is first-rate – whereas if a show is bad, it gets, in the majority of cases, no review. Mårten Arndtzén, though, told the audience that he finds it important also to write about art that is not necessarily good, which is done when it comes to movies, books etc. But of course, one of the problems is the limited space.

In the rich flora of artists and artistic expressions, there should be an equally abundant vegetation of art critics. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The music festival Stockholm New Music 2006, was a fantastic programme. Many of the most interesting practitioners in their respective fields presented dialogues of works that moved across borders of what could be defined as music and art. But in spite of the plethora of advance information – press releases and an extensive catalogue, I saw hardly any comments by art critics on the festival (except for occasional reviews of Janet Cardiff's work), which was shown in co-arrangement with Stockholm New Music. A pity in the light of the distinction of what was being shown by world stars who visited Stockholm for this event (or who actually live and work here).

There is a problem that very few critics cover both experimental music and art scenes. Who is the critic who can provide clever analyses of all hybrid forms that are included in the family term 'art'? Biology, physics, traffic systematizing, computing, film, video, internet – the list is endless in the areas tangential to what art wants to extend into. Art is simply very much about re-defining what art itself is – thus moving in adjacent zones of non-art, turning it into art. If art is about reformulating borders between art and life, there is certainly a need for many more critics to comment on this. And there is, not least in Sweden, also a need for a deeper and more varied discussion about art in the daily press. Maybe this could become the case if it were easier for people not working regularly for the daily newspapers to get their articles published. When art is multifaceted, the criticism and the critics also need to be.

Another issue is that art is not necessarily something we see with our eyes or music something we listen to with our ears – the experiences are not that clear-cut. Many of these questions are certainly not new, but have been posed for a hundred years or more. If art, criticism and music move out from the parameters they 'should' stay within – the institutions – this is nothing new either. "Art should go out onto the streets and squares", said Mayakovsky almost 100 years ago. He wanted to get "out from stale museums" and use the streets as his brushes and the squares as his palette. Other examples are the early

cubist painters Gleizes and Metzinger who wrote tracts themselves on their painting in connection with Einstein's Law of Relativity, and the fourth dimension as time and space – partly probably to understand themselves what they were trying to do. The positive side-effect was that they communicated with their potential audience. Simply a win-win situation. One could also mention the famous *Blaue Reiter Almanach* (1912), edited by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc including collected essays where painters wrote on music and stage art, and composers showed paintings. Their issue was that they did not trust the critics, who did not understand what these pioneers wanted to do. They had to write about their art themselves – as so many artists have done since then.

Maybe, as the panel discussed, the art critic of today is simply pursuing her job in other places than in the daily paper. On blogs, on the net or in non-written situations. Or, I would like to add, by people who do not present themselves as 'art critics' on their business cards. In many countries, especially in former eastern Europe and in Russia, it is not unusual to be 'artist and critic', 'art historian and artist' or 'curator, critic, artist'. To be an artist *and* critic, artist *and* curator seems to be less usual in Sweden and by artists from western countries. So to return to our concern: "Who drives the car?", Ronald Jones cleverly formulated the problem, "is it the artist or the critic?".

A lot of the art that is being produced is in itself

some kind of art criticism, expressed in its own medium – that is to say from inside art’s own domain. I see what postmodernism in visual arts has been doing for a long time, as a form of criticism – in the sense of commenting upon, quoting etc. I do not say this in order to threaten the role of the art critic, because in spite of all curators, authors of catalogue texts and well-written press releases, it seems to me that the art critical analysis, the verbal arguments – questioning, explaining and contextualising – is more necessary than ever.

To sum up: The new circumstances in the art scene alter the conditions for how art critique looks and can be conducted. Judged by the public debate that has been going on over the last few years we can see that this issue is very topical indeed. There have been numerous articles lately in Swedish daily newspapers, commentaries in blogs and open seminars – angry, indignant, committed – everything but indifferent. Is art criticism dead? Certainly not.

From My Personal Point of View

Lars Nittve

This is quite a central issue which has partly to do with my own experience. Thinking through my professional life, one third of it roughly was spent as an art critic; another third I worked, roughly, as a curator, and another third as a director of major institutions. Therefore, I have had quite different roles and relationships to the issues of art criticism. I've also worked in different parts of Europe and in the U.S. as well. Naturally I noticed the striking differences between the positions of art criticism, especially in the daily newspapers in the different countries. In Denmark, for example, there is still quite a cosy relationship between institutions, artists and art critics. Most art critics, until recently, had important positions in the newspapers, having been there for quite a while. This is changing now just as it is in most parts of Europe, but it was still the case only a few years ago. It was very seldom that anything dramatic happened. There were hardly any discussions about art criticism for example. You seldom read an article in the newspaper by an art critic that made you raise your eyebrows for whatever reason.

Then working in London, the situation was naturally quite different. There you have seven or eight daily newspapers that are all competing and they do it with everything they have, in a sense. That partly creates, along with different aspects of British culture, a different type of art criticism. Some of the critics can be extremely vitriolic and there is an entertainment value. If you buy the Evening Standard

on a Friday, you will read Brian Sewell, an elderly gentleman who writes with a very sharp pen. He basically hates everything from the 20th century onwards, writing in a rich, amusing and very witty way. Others follow him and, actually, I think that the Evening Standard produces 70,000 more copies when he writes, showing that he has a wide readership. If you go to have a haircut, you get to discuss Brian Sewell and his latest article at the same time.

The fact is that he has set an example which might change the landscape of art criticism in the U.K. Another critic who we were hoping would come to this conference actually, Waldemar Januszczak, who writes for the Sunday Times has taken up Brian Sewell's position a bit, though in a more contemporary style. He is very entertaining, albeit writing a sort of entertaining violence. Violence as entertainment that I'm not sure is necessarily healthy for the artists or for art criticism or for the institutions. Another thing playing a part in this was that when a big exhibition was due to open in London, like the Brancusi exhibition for example, you knew that at least one of the critics would go out and take on a totally mindblowing opposite position to everything expected, for example, like claiming that Brancusi is a sort of art deco figure who has never done anything serious. The critic would take a very harsh position and wouldn't argue for it in a particularly refined way. This was always called a 'career article' and was a way to be seen among all those who were positive to

the exhibition. He stood out as someone who became the talk of the town the next day, possibly because he had done this outrageous thing which led to a better salary and a better negotiating position with the newspaper for the future. One thing in England though, is that you can be sued and be made to pay enormous fines if you get your facts wrong or if you actually accuse somebody of something that is 'liable', as it's called. Sometimes I miss that tradition in Sweden. It is less witty in style here and has a little bit more of Big Brother than Oxford about it. I'm not sure that's good either. Maybe it's worse than the British situation. On the other hand, in Britain and Denmark and here, as well as in the U.S. of course, there are many amazing art critics writing in the daily newspapers. And I think that whatever we say about the magazines, it's important to remember that the daily newspapers are really the spaces where opinions are formed, where the real public discussion about contemporary art and contemporary life takes place.

Though I should finally make a remark on my experience in working for Artforum in the first half of the eighties and I have a feeling that it's not that different now either. I think that it has to do with the question of integrity. I think I can claim – though you may disagree, which is fine – that there is one art magazine that has managed for about 40 years now to keep its position as a credible arena for discussions about contemporary art, and that is Artforum.

It has lasted for a very long time, and it's still being read with a certain amount of seriousness, which is not the case with all international art magazines. One of the reasons is that they have been extremely firm on keeping certain borders clear so that you don't transgress them. For example, when I became a curator at Moderna Museet I immediately had to stop writing reviews for Artforum. There was no discussion. Whether it was about Swedish art, foreign art, about private commercial galleries or institutions: it totally stopped. The only thing you could write was essays about artists, or you could possibly write about Documenta as one of many voices. They were extremely firm and I think keeping these borderlines clear is indeed very important. This is in order to sustain the credibility of the art critic and, in a sense, the discussion about art in the public sphere.

At Your Service

Sabine Vogel

What keeps me going? Working as a journalist and editor on a Berlin daily newspaper in the cultural section, less on visual arts than literature (sometimes movies and political commentaries), I can only offer you a small insight into my everyday working process. I will give you a kind of diary: I have daily office hours and production shifts – the usual newsroom speed defines us. So I am no lawyer defending the interests of art critics.

My position is normally rather opposed to the interests of art critics (and of opera, pop etc. critics). My concern is rather, that we – as mediators of cultural affairs – don't have enough to say: not much of real weight to add to the understanding of the world. To cut it short: I cannot supply you with arguments for defending the need of more art criticism. If, somewhere, art critics are being repressed, I will have to find out about that here. In my opinion they/we have plenty of privileges and open spaces. From my possibly arrogant point of view as an editor – fully employed – there are not enough good, outstanding and individual art critics, and too many who are simply boring. In my talk I intend to mention and question some of the contexts and criteria. Let me tell you about my last working week.

Thursday: I was busy putting the very last touches on a story about the Roma in Slovakia. The Roma are gypsies and Slovakia is in the far east of Europe, bordering the Ukraine. Together with Hungary and the Czech Republic, the Roma population is around

one million, and one of the biggest ethnic minorities in the new Europe. They live well below European standards – nearly 100% are unemployed. The children are placed in schools for the handicapped, beyond any understanding of humane conditions.

A recent UN report spoke about “islands of the third world in the first world”. They suffered ethnic cleansing during the Nazi era. Thousands died in Auschwitz. Women were forcibly sterilised even in 1972 under the communist regime. Precisely that year a scientific journal said that the Roma are of Indian descent and moved westwards 8–900 years ago to escape the Moslem occupation of India. It’s no joke: the research is based on comparisons of genetic materials, which indicate a disease they have in common. We, that is a photographer friend and I, wanted to see them, their living conditions, their beauty and their slums, their ghettos in flourishing nature. We saw it. The photographer took pictures. Portraits of Hell. He called it “concerned photography”, in the classical tradition of the eyewitness. Testimony of the evidence of something neglected, denied. That is the ease of legitimizing our hunt for sensations. (Vanishing cultures he used to say!) How close can you get to the misery, without being infected by the fleas? How close do you need to go, to document a truth? At what distance does the obscenity of watching, of voyeurism, start? How can you translate, if you don’t have an interpreter of foreign cultures? How different do you have to be, to focus, to have a

point of view? The “exoticism of poverty” is the last “zone of imagination” for the Westerner in his cocoon of comfort in his city of glass, said the French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle in the catalogue of the recent exhibition Africa Remix.

You may well ask, “What does all that social research have to do with art criticism?” Not much, not enough maybe, but for me as an art historian it is the starting point of political aesthetics and the ethics of voyeurism. The point here, the reason why I dare to bother you with that story, is in perception and representation, documenting and transforming reality. It’s about the production of pictures and seeing them and representing them in another way in the art context.

Close to these islands of otherness, in the same region of eastern Slovakia, in the village Medzilaborce, you will find the only museum of western Europe with a permanent Warhol collection. The local minority here call themselves Ruthenians. Warhol (the father of Pop Culture) donated some originals to the little town where his parents came from. But more interesting are the artefacts, found objects, blown-up copies of faked importance and meaningfulness, and their stage set – i.e. their presentation. The Velvet Underground is being played on a really old-fashioned tape-recorder on the floor. Stunningly morbid. This authenticity of the poor object, which wasn’t supposed to be stylish as a piece of *arte povera*, has at least a funny connotation in the context of that little far-out Warhol museum. The dubious ‘original’

transformed ordinary objects like a tin box camera, a ridiculous archaic Walkman into fetishes or His camera, His sunglasses – shabby and sweet like the collection of blazers. Special torture like vicious revenge for something we didn't do is the entrance hall where you have to pass a big exhibition with works by Paul Warhola, the brother of Andy, who imitated him shamelessly and even had a show in their American birthplace Pennsylvania, after Andy died. The model of one of Warhol's series is St. Apollonia, well-known amongst believers, as the martyr of toothache, iconographically identified by a pair of barbaric tongs for pulling out teeth. We saw that holy lady only a few hours earlier, wood-carved and 500 years old in the Gothic cathedral of a nearby village. Does it mean they have something in common? Has any art historian collected information about Andy Warhol's affinity with the holy patron saint of toothache? Baking hot outside. There is no poverty to be seen. Summer is bad light for documenting hard facts. Must we hope for rain in order to catch the atmosphere of the forgotten? We slide into the ethics of representation. In journalism, travel writing and pure documentation photography, you don't look for the 'behind'. The good caption – image or text – is good, if it, at least on the surface, captures the whole. You see, you show, you listen, you tell.

Friday: Afternoon. Breaking news. The TV channels show pictures from the disastrous ending of the liberation of the besieged school in Beslan. We know

the procedure now, but it has still preserved its attraction: Live, real-time effect, reality-TV as it is so beautifully called. Endlessly repeated takes of the battlefield in high resolution pans, blurred, the effects of digital zooming, close-ups by chance, the greenish pixel grain spoils the illusion of nearness. Two reporters have died. The first information about 100 dead bodies in the gym hall came from a BBC journalist. Strangely enough he watched the whole thing with his camera off. He didn't film or tape, he filmed with his eyes.

In the evening the German-French cultural TV channel Arte broadcast a preview of a movie about the history of Palestine directed by the Egyptian filmmaker Yousry Nasrallah after a novel by the Palestinian writer Elias Khoury. Not a documentary, but fiction with all sorts of illusions and emotions. The brutal expulsion of Palestinian peasants from Galilee in 1948 was shown in the form of a largescale, colourful, epic movie with blood, silence, chaos, a gunshot, violence, an opera of images, music, masses, biblical landscapes, love and tears. There is no second of denial in taking sides for a single second. Some left-wing critics complain about that: but what do you expect? The coming Frankfurt Book Fair is going to celebrate literature and writers from Arab countries. Despite many hurdles, Arabs hope their guest-of-honour presentation at the Frankfurt Book Fair next month will succeed in changing post-9/11 misconceptions about their culture. Visions of the

future is the title chosen for the official part of the presentation.

Yet the Arab League is not exactly famous for its democratic decision-making procedures. The authors sent by them will always be supportive of their nation – they are state clerks, state artists offering prayers, propagandists. He who wants to criticise the system would be better off doing it from the outside. That is not an easy starting point for a dissident. There will also be Arab writers living in European exile who will demonstrate their diverging political position – but we as journalists have to try to see if, beyond the politics there is a significant difference in the cultural production of the various artists. “This [*Visions of the future*], the most visible part of a collective Arab presentation that includes independent, fringe and individual as well as German-initiated contributions will feature over 200 writers, publishers and literary figures and some 10,000 titles, intended to represent the full spectrum of a thoroughly variegated ethnic and cultural identity at this high-profile event. As agreed with the organisers of the fair, the focus will be not only on the Arab world but Islamic culture as well – a fact reflected in the choice of titles and authors.”¹ This is not my English, it is distinguished propaganda prose. What does it mean – not only to the Arab world but Islam-

¹ Dina Ezzat, Last stretch to Frankfurt, Al-Ahram Weekly Online, 2–8 September 2004, issue No. 706, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/706/b01.htm>, 2008–03–02

ic culture as well? Isn't the Arab world enough? It will be nearly impossible to enter that hermetic culture and society from the outside. The failure of the critical public seems already decided upon. So what do people like me do? We conduct interviews, we try to listen to a few Arab voices, we avoid making statements ourselves, and we hope, that the event quickly passes quietly and fast.

Maybe we could learn about the difference with our own reality. In Germany many former dissidents now have leading positions in the government and in institutions. I don't know about you, but my friends and I have participated in many juries and advisory boards. We decide about government money, funds and projects. And there is not a big difference between East and West. In doing something rather than criticising, like producing media, exhibitions, projects etc., we are already part of the corruption which we thought we were fighting.

Saturday: The hostage drama in Chechnya develops into something worse than expected. At the same moment we got the numbers right enough, the issue disappears swiftly from the media again. Shocking pictures of little kids cover the first 3–5 pages on Saturday, but will move to the back pages on Monday. That will be the moment for interpretations, the time of political background articles. How did the history of war and the independence of Chechnya start? What was Tolstoy writing about the terrorists? What was the story of the expulsion of the

Chechnians to Asia, to the gulags of Kazakhstan under Stalin? Was the award-winning writer Anna Politkovskaya really poisoned on the plane on her way to the location, or does the conspiracy start here? That will also be the time for popular cultural authors, like us art historians and media specialists, to step in. Is there an iconography of attacked and trapped children in our memory of images?

As I try to read some of the new Berlin or German art magazines, to prepare for the talk today, I fail. I remember the hypochondriacal disease: after finishing one of the more theoretically loaded magazines like *Kunstforum* or even *Texte zur Kunst*. I felt dizzy for days, as if my mind had been sedated by useless thoughts. In the evening a colleague gives a party, he's celebrating his 40th birthday. Yes, at least we are growing up. A lot of art critics from different papers and some artists are there. Most of the men are gay and look the same – clean-shaven and muscular. If something is sick or rotten in this world, it is not evident. No one is screaming. The food and drinks are exquisite; the atmosphere in that Berlin in-crowd is light and polite. Nobody talks about problems, nobody seems to be affected too much by politics, TV-images, terrorists or Beslan. Belonging seems to be enough in order not to disturb the peace of the evening. On Monday I will get a call, an invitation to another panel discussion or talk at the art fair. It is just enough to be in the right social context, to drink with the right in-crowd, to get a job, to be a voice.

Nothing is new about those market laws of the 'right connections', new might be only for us, that it goes without any confessions, without any ideology. Here at this party a young art critic talks about her astonishment that she could get her foot in a new art magazine with a text about a Mexican artist, Minerva Cueva, who is doing straight and simply anti-capitalist polit-performances. But why is she surprised? She is employed to do the page on the 'art-market' in a liberal daily newspaper and has not yet understood how it functions? Meanwhile, doesn't every art critic writer know that art magazines live off ads? That every portrait or gallery show review is nothing other than an ad? I remember that I only once wrote for *Flash Art* – in those days I was as naive as that girl I just took as an example. The artist was a friend of mine and so I wrote a bad critique, but nevertheless I was paid by the gallery of the artist, not by the magazine.

On Sunday, the Monday newspaper has to be produced. Sundays are my favourite office day. As usual there is not enough space for all the events of that first September weekend. What's important to us? The starting season in the theatres, the galleries, the concert halls? Two minor earthquakes have taken place in Japan. Does it touch us, because of the global context of climate and economy? In Chechnya they start to bury their victims. On the executive floor of the newspaper, the editors are excited about the results of the regional election of Saarland.

In Switzerland the biggest newspaper, the Baseler Zeitung, where the big traditional art fair is held, totally outsourced its cultural pages. The reader now gets so called service-information in small pieces instead of reflections – forget long, detailed or critical. The culture editors have been fired for writing entertainment tips. People like us are not needed, we are too old, slow and over-qualified, to put it politely.

Monday: Berlin's art world is confronted with spectacular news: the long asleep, provincial capital of the decade celebrated the sensation of the first millionth visitor to the Museum of Modern Art exhibition. That has never happened before. Except perhaps in the zoo. The art critics gulped. People waited up to eight hours to be allowed in, they waited without complaining, without rebelling. Instead the MoMA queue achieved cult status. Fashion shootings happened there. Queuing entertainers made a name for themselves. The mayor of Berlin himself, otherwise a sympathetic gay person, declared that the museums of Berlin should together do a 'Best of Berlin' show, to maintain that stream of popular interest. Again the mayor tells the museums what they should show to be successful; this is a new political gambit.

Now the city is preparing for the prestigious opening of the Flick collection: Flick? Who the hell is that? Germans know Flick. Flick is a fine example for the continuity of history, for softened cultural corruption. Mick Flick is the grandson of Friedrich

Flick, who was Hitler's Reich's biggest producer of arms. He, the old one, employed some 40,000 forced labourers in the concentration camps and was sentenced to death in the war criminal courts of Nuremberg. The collector will open his collection – supposedly bought with Opas (grandfather's) 'blood money' – dignified and in the company of Chancellor Schröder on 21 September. The collection of an estimated 2,500 works of modern art, amongst others the biggest block of Bruce Nauman. Flick lent money to the city for seven years. An old factory next to the National Gallery, was restored with his money, seven million, the maintenance is left to the grateful, but bankrupt, town. The case was a real challenge for art critics: sure, all possible speculations about the increase of value of the pieces of art were raised. People said Flick was using the presentation to whitewash the family name. Yes, nevertheless, it worked even in advance: the playboyish Mick Flick was even invited to attend the celebration of the 100th anniversary of a Jewish synagogue in Berlin. Only after some well-known old Jews with a history as former forced labour convicts protested, did he review his indelicate decision. A crucial point of Flick's reputation was always whether he paid for the guilt of his grandfather with a small percentage of the money he got from him. *Bon vivant* and artists' friend Mick had refused to pay compensation to the forced labourers, he also escaped German taxes by settling in Switzerland. After Zurich, his

new place of residence, refused to appreciate the donation of his collection including a paid-off museum for it, Mick Flick came back to Berlin and was highly welcomed (by the same Social Democratic gay mayor we are so proud of).

The question has to be broken down now to: can we talk about a collection of unquestionably high art, without considering the circumstances in which it has been achieved? How innocent is the art at the end of that circle? Simply: can art be beyond the money system it has been paid with? In this case, even more complex: Is the modern – politically correct, critical etc. piece of art immune to the money it wants to be worth? More insidious: the art-loving collector Mick Flick has done nothing, he is not guilty of doing anything. He has not even worked all his life. He just inherited some millions of dirty money and collected art with it. Duchamp, Richter, Nauman, even Pipilotti Rist and so on. The architect Rem Koolhaas agreed to do Flick's Museum in Zurich, the Swiss anarchist 'pyromantic' Roman Signer had no problem with doing a decorative performance for Flick's mountain resort and Dan Graham didn't hesitate to design the jacuzzi for the collector's private villa. Artists are obviously free to be prostitutes. It's their job. Artists are allowed to be corrupted by power, glamour and money.

But can the art critic be more honest than the artists themselves? Art exists without art criticism. And art criticism can be much worse than the art it is talking about.

The bad smell comes less from Flick who is not a criminal and who has his own foundations for social research etc. It comes from us, the art critics, who flirt with the aura of money. It's a bit disgusting to see how all of my colleagues are keen to get an invitation for the opening cocktail of Flick. My newspaper will now for example do a special issue on the occasion of that questionable art-event, sure, without questioning it at all. A bit of critical decoration is chic, even wanted like the subsidised protest art event, which puts up billboards with anti-Flick-slogans just in the neighbourhood. Nobody lives there, no one has to be convinced, it is only for the clientele of the Flick Collection – the visitor who might be interested in this chic art too. Decisions like this are not made by us art critics. We deliver only the embroidery for the decisions of the 'business floor'. Nothing new. But ironically the majority of our target group is defined by readers from the former East, meaning the communist part of the town. And they simply don't like rich Flicks. They don't like capitalists. They want to be confirmed in their socially based opinion, not to be agitated for the opposite. We, as employees of that special newspaper and publishing house, make our living from them. How free are we now from the hand which feeds us? Is that still a reasonable question today? Aren't we fed by a multinational enterprise? We critics seem to have a need to believe in our independence. Every dinner that is offered to us is meant to buy a review

cheaply. (And believe me, publishing houses and literary agents are very good at bribery.)

Tuesday: More pictures of naked children, bloody bodies, are shown in the media – they are still pre-occupying our minds. The cultural section of the newspaper, traditionally responsible for the interpretation of phenomena, is finally forced to write a fake philosophical or moral comparison between all the young naked girls. We try to refuse, we argue that it is too obscene, which is normally never an excuse for people like us. The famous image of the Vietnamese girl running away from napalm bombings from 1972 was imitated just recently by the Polish artist Zbigniew Libera. He entitled the series *Positives*. In it he faked famous images of decisive historic moments – of death and murder – with cynical laughter and really bad taste. The media artist born in 1959 is notorious for his cynical affirmation of visual and mental icons. (You may remember his set of *Corrective Devices*, which included a prison from the Stalin era and a Bosnian concentration camp using LEGO, which I think caused a scandal at the Venice Biennale a while ago.) In searching for that image, I go through the little catalogue of the exhibition where it was shown lately in Berlin, and I find masses of naked people in the artworks included there: the slim and shaved Tanja Ostojic born in 1972, advertising herself “Looking for a Husband with EU Passport” (send your applications to hot-tanja@hotmail.com – meanwhile she found one).

Further: bloody bruised soldiers dogfucking each other desperately (by Svetlana Baskova from Moscow), videotaped prisoners in Kazakhstan by Vladimir Tyulkin, born in Semipalatinsk, where the USSR had their atomic play-ground, the heartbreaking beauty of two naked men dancing, one handi-capped (one-legged) – by the other Polish artist Artur Zmijewski. Is there something like a post-social realism? No doubt, there is. That was the main thesis at a conference on post-communist conditions held in Berlin in June, and it was literarily more visible in the exhibition, curated by Boris Groys. Postmodernism is a dogma used to fill the void, the vacuum after the decomposition of socialism, my friend from Kazakhstan tried to explain. And that was one of the more easy-to-understand ideas. The postmodernism of post-socialist countries is in a very straight way political – you might believe what you see there: guns and roses and naked bodies. It is what makes the East interesting for us. It's like coming home, to the very old-fashioned simple values of meaning and purpose. We are really happy to discover a political purpose in an art piece and we are keen to promote that, all of a sudden believing in innocence again, often not even realizing that we are only following the market trend. In New York, we heard, there is already a new class of art clients and customers. Fashionable young collectors, with a lot of money and interest in political art. And for them we have to write, if we want a piece of the money cake.

Wednesday: For days now I carried the selection of new Berlin-produced art magazines in my handbag, from office to home and back, in the metro, on the bicycle, without looking at them. There is still some resistance, a kind of physical repulsion. But my reaction is not fair, I will have to realize that because art magazines of today are much more entertaining and easier to consume than the ones of the nineties. Meanwhile, everybody on the scene knows that you can sell hard theory even better if you present it in a nice décor. Today for instance we should think about a text which makes connections between the massacre of schoolchildren in Beslan and the terror attack of 9/11. That isn't much different from what Putin was saying: "terror is global". "The world will not be the same", it was said in September 2001. Let alone the recession and the new wars. We have accumulated a lot more knowledge on Islamic countries and culture; Arab literature is waiting to be discovered by us now; a few artists from oriental countries have entered the circle of non-commercial shows and biennales. I myself, working earlier in the House of World Cultures, lately did a show about Central Asian contemporary art. Friends from that region are visiting more often. Samarkand and Bukhara are no longer far-away dream locations. We can travel there, we can see with our own eyes, we are informed by various media, movies and festivals, on what life is like there. Has anything changed apart from the widening of perspectives and possibilities

for us? Is the art market, except for some clowns, more open to artists from that kind of non-western context?

Thursday: Let's finally have a look at the art magazines. "No money for homeless people? But you let them die in the cold", says a seller of newspapers for the homeless, while I am sitting in the scorching sun, enjoying expensive water and coffee. We have at least two serious new glossy art magazines in Berlin, both in three issues out now this year. The daily newspapers enlarged their cultural pages and staff in the nineties, then, after 2001 or was it in connection with the terror or the growing online-market-competition, we don't know, but we had to cut down again. Now all of a sudden there is new media on the market. No money for travels, we have to do budget control, perhaps the most important here: nearly no money for freelancers. Amazingly, parallel to that economic development of shrinking resources in the newspaper sections, there are again new types of art magazines coming out. At a first glance, what seems to be new is their post-political ethics, the absence of any ideology. 'Have fun and a good life insurance', seems to be the motto. U-Spot and Monopol are especially and only about visual arts. Cicero is focused on political culture – the magazine with a difference. The summer issues of the two straight art magazines incidentally look very similar: Both covers have a photo of a young girl looking frontal and direct. Needless to say, that was done long before Beslan.

U-Spot is a quarterly magazine produced by a small team of art critics and designers who come from the left corner – the legendary alternative newspaper taz is the home of the chief editor Harald Fricke. If you believe what they declare, they print around 10,000 copies. Nobody makes money; they have some ads, which only just bring in enough to pay the production. The writers and photographers are paid very badly and it makes you wonder where that idea of self-exploitation has come from now.

The other, Monopol, bi-monthly, is directed by Florian Illies, a young best-seller author, I think he's a millionaire, of German pop-literature – he created the Generation Golf. Rumour had it that he got 200,000 Euros for his second little book. He runs the new life-stylish art-magazine together with his girlfriend, Amélie von Heydebreck, who is the daughter of the director of the Deutsche Bank, which might explain the money in the background, and could be the cushion for the investors. The fact is that Monopol has already so many and such big adverts to place, from Boss to art fairs, that they have to expand their next issue. The target group is shamelessly openly defined: the rich ones and the ones who want to be rich – with a grain of cultural snobbishness. That is a normal trick of all the Lady Di yellow press papers and so on, upgraded with the part of distinction by culture and a bit of old-fashioned class and style.

We find portraits of the most important art collec-

tors of Germany, put in a frame, posing with the furniture of an English family of aristocrats. You will be informed in a really long piece of the most snobbish place to take a holiday, if you are a well-educated millionaire and appreciate being neighbours with old-age movie-stars or novelists. Nick Hornby tells you about the books on naughtiness, you have to know – not to read, and a straight hit list of shows announces what you must see. The concept is easy. But it is interesting that there is obviously a clientele for that product: 65,000 copies, it is said, are on the market. Is it appropriate to ask for ethics when you are successful? Monopol, what a bold title, Monopol is not featuring stale conservative art, it's the opposite. In Monopol we don't only have the new flavour of the season, the chic lit girls from upper Manhattan, the latest hip hype of the art market, like the new East-German boom of fat paintings. No, the most exciting and quite radical artists are also presented who are not fit (yet?) for living rooms, prestigious banks, or avant-garde galleries – like the Berlin artist Mathilde ter Heijne, of Dutch descent, who creates life-size dolls with her own image, then blows them up in her research on Suicide Bomb. To be commercially successful with a life-style guide for the rich, you have to decorate your product with an aura of the new, the non-commercial, the camouflage of the radical chic.

It should not come as a surprise: the more lefty magazine U-Spot, where the contributors have to

pay for being printed in sweat, blood and tears, is the more conventional one. The more boring one. But, that is what the young art critic whom I met at the party has to understand. Even with agitprop performances, with so called anti-capitalist actions you are part of the system. Don't worry: the market will find you, the collector is waiting for you. You oppose, you criticise, you attack. You are still part of it, and you are still supporting the system: But that should not stop you from having an opinion. And, it was always easier to make a statement when you had an ideology.

Friday: Is it corrupt to accept an invitation to a conference where you will miss the point? Why I am here? I get paid, I stay in a wonderful hotel. What do I know about the context the event is placed in? In the plane I read a Czech art magazine: it's so fresh, playful and funny, that the solid German art magazines look like bad attempts at being even more boring than the establishment they want to address. The editorial of the Czech art magazine says they have lost their pornographic dirty look that the Western readers appreciate so much. Maybe it's the art shown in this publication – a lot of naked people again, Siberian radical performers and Mexican art and all arts from the fringe. Indeed for me that is looking more interesting than the German art I am bored with. I like their art and the need for expression.

Questions to Sabine Vogel

Henrik Andersson: Can you please tell me something about the Rote Armee Fraktion exhibition at Kunst-Werke in Berlin?

SV: This upcoming exhibition? I'm not even sure whether it's been done or not. It's postponed all the time. They had to do some new research and they were actually forced to give back the money which they had got from the government. They had to rewrite the concept. I guess they will do it but they are still working on the concept. And as I know Kunst-Werke quite well I think they like the scandal because they are in a position to say with the Rote Armee Fraktion, we don't have to be politically correct. We want to do the pop culture within it.

HA: I think it's interesting in the perspective of art criticism that the Springer Press for instance has been against this from the beginning. Isn't that so?

SV: Springer, oh yes, they are against it, there's no doubt but they are against it whether it's pop or not pop. They are against anybody dealing seriously with the Rote Armee Fraktion and not saying that they're simply terrorists. If anyone tries to understand what's behind terror, that's them for sure. I think it's more interesting to see how the liberal media is dealing with it. Like us, we think it's catchy sensations – doing terrorists together with pop culture. It's a cheap way to get attention one of us

would say: another would say it's necessary to attract with provocations like this.

Lene Crone Jensen: You sketched in your talk the problems of being a critic, the ethics you encounter in the work and also being part of the whole market system. So there's a certain kind of cynicism implied in the work and always has been, but still to begin with you said you didn't feel the pressures, and perhaps we're talking about other kinds of pressures of being an art critic. I guess you still believe in criticism as there are possibilities for actually saying things through critics and art critics.

SV: I think there's a necessity, for sure. We shouldn't make it too easy for ourselves. Nowadays I don't like to complain too much about the situation, but for sure we have to cut down on budgets. But when we started to work 20 years ago, when we were poor, we didn't ask for too much money for travels. We hitchhiked if we wanted to see a show. Yes, if you had an intention to see or do it, you could manage and we were poorer actually than today. I'm fed up with this complaining actually.

**Art Criticism in the
Netherlands at the Beginning
of the 21st Century:
A Personal Observation**

Janneke Wesseling

Independent art criticism does not exist. I believe it never has existed. For the simple reason that the art critic by definition is dependent on the medium that will publish his writings. No matter how famous and well-established the art critic may be, if his newspaper or magazine refuses, for whatever reason, to publish his article, it will not be published. So far, fortunately, this has never happened to me, but I am always aware of the tension. Until the end of his days, the critic will be dependent on his medium; and he owes his reputation to the medium he writes for. Ideally, the dependency between the critic and his medium is reciprocal.

Art criticism depends on much more. It is by nature dependent on art. The critic's writings will only be relevant to the public if the art that he writes about is exhibited somewhere, if it has been seen by a fair number of people or if it can be seen somewhere in case he has discovered something new. The art critic is largely dependent on the quality of what is offered to him by museums and art institutions, and on the quality of the art of his day. As is often said, all art gets the criticism it deserves. Here too, ideally, the dependency of art and art criticism is reciprocal.

All of this may seem pretty evident, but I don't experience it that way. In fact, the longer I write about art (about 22 years now), the less evident all this seems to me. This may have to do with the fact that museums and art institutions, unlike what I thought

when I started out writing on art, turn out to be extremely vulnerable. Whenever I return to Amsterdam at the beginning of the season (I spend my summers in France), I am in keen expectation of what I will find, what the new season is going to bring me. By now I know that I will probably succeed in more or less creating my own discourse with the subjects at hand. But these subjects are usually not decided on by me.

Of course, the art critic may initiate his own debate. But even here he remains dependent on many circumstances. He may also, as is common practice today, curate his own show. There he will find many new kinds of dependency (money, in the first place). This is why, personally, I won't curate exhibitions. In my opinion and experience, writing on art and exhibiting art are two entirely different things. I do feel that curating a show would be a threat to my hard-won, be it only relative, independent position as an art critic. I would lose my independence versus the sponsors, versus the institution that provides the grants and versus the institution that hosts my exhibition.

Last, but not least, the art critic is directly or indirectly dependent on the art market. In the Netherlands, this is not an urgent issue, for the simple reason that our art market is small and relatively quiet. Dutch artists who do very well abroad usually leave their Dutch gallery because their prices very quickly become too high for the Dutch market.

So this is the field of tension I find myself working in: the medium I write for; my public (which is fairly broad); and the art world, consisting of art institutions, artists and others writing on art.

To begin with, the art world: in the Netherlands the museums have undergone enormous changes over the past 15 years. Until the beginning of the nineties it was common practice in Dutch museums to give space to contemporary art. This meant giving space to living artists to define what they wanted to do with the space that was given them and to install their own exhibitions. To achieve this, artists can do very well without the vision of a curator, or without the context of a thematic exhibition. Installing one's own exhibition for many artists is an essential part of their artistic practice. However, one-man shows of contemporary artists have become very rare in Dutch museums over the past ten years. Contemporary art is still shown in many places, but almost always as part of a thematic exhibition or of some festivity or other, and no longer for the sake of the artworks themselves. Evidently most museum directors believe that a one-man show of a contemporary artist is no longer relevant. There are only a few exceptions to this: het Van Abbe in Eindhoven, De Pont in Tilburg, and, recently De Hallen in Haarlem. This development has everything to do with growing consumerism since the beginning of the nineties, and *laissez-faire* politics by the Dutch government. Nowadays museums have to justify their existence

by great quantities of visitors. The fact that museums are also responsible for protecting our cultural heritage has been entirely subordinated to the quantification of numbers of visitors. Everything is about profit; culture and economics have become one and the same thing. This development in Dutch politics and culture follows the Anglo-American model of economics. Until the nineties however, a different model was followed in our culture, the Rheinland model of guided capitalism and economy.

In a society that is defined by commercial culture the position of art is marginalized. This not only goes for the visual arts, but for all arts, as well as for literature, philosophy and all sciences (mostly the humanities) that do not yield a prompt and demonstrable profit. The Dutch museums are trying to prevent being marginalized by going along with this commercialization. So they organize blockbusters with banal themes such as *Flowers of Desire*, *Three Centuries of Fish in Painting* and *Mummies: Monsters and Horror*. Now we have an exhibition entitled *The Vikings are Coming*. Contemporary artists are invited to send in artworks to illustrate these themes. In a recent interview, Jan Willem Sieburgh, financial director since 2002 of the Rijksmuseum (before that, he had a career in advertising), described the museum as “an aesthetic gas-station with a moral carwash installation”. He explained that people visit the museums for an aesthetic experience, but that art offers more than this: an artwork offers also mental,

or moral, values, such as authenticity, identity, meaning (in Sieburgh’s words). The director obviously felt very pleased with his definition of the art museum. He added that Madonna serves as a good example. She used to be a material girl, then a sexual girl, and presently she is a spiritual girl. People are in need of spiritual values, as Madonna makes clear; like no one else, she understands the spirit of an age (all in Sieburgh’s words). This is certainly the first time that a pop star serves as a guideline for museum policy.

No one in Dutch museums still seems to believe that it might be possible to make an attractive exhibition with the oeuvre of an artist. They have fallen prey to the fear that guides cultural politics in general: the fear of being called elitist. High culture has become synonymous with elitism and arrogance. Art that is slightly difficult, art for which the slightest bit of knowledge is required or that demands a certain amount of effort, has become suspect. By defining themselves as part of the entertainment industry, by estranging their *real* public from themselves, that is to say the public that is truly interested in art, by denying, in short, their own *raison d’être*, the museums are undermining their position and their credibility. They are threatening their own existence.

What can an art critic do? Analyze the situation, get very angry, never give up, and visit exhibitions in other countries to keep his spirits up. There are very good reasons not to give up – for one thing because

good art is still being produced in the Netherlands. There is much to defend and to fight for.

Now, something about the newspaper I write for, NRC Handelsblad. It is what is called a quality newspaper, with one or two pages on art each day, and a cultural supplement on Fridays which offers space for longer articles and essays. I have been writing two or three articles per month for this newspaper, for the past 22 years on a freelance contract. This may seem like a long time, but I don't experience it that way. In fact, I think that for most critics it takes a long time to develop a voice of one's own and to create a position of authority. Unfortunately, many critics use their articles only as a way of starting a career in a museum or elsewhere in the art world. This is a pity, because it means that art criticism as a discipline may not develop as well as it should. Newspapers in Holland in general are not doing so well, I believe this is the same situation as everywhere else. Our population has grown steadily over the past 25 years, but the number of subscriptions to NRC Handelsblad has stayed roughly the same (which means it's doing relatively well). In other words, fewer and fewer people read the newspaper. There is also much less advertising – meaning fewer pages, and less space for art. This past spring, the publishing firm that my newspaper belongs to was sold to a British investment company, Apax (owning 52.5%). Seven important Dutch daily newspapers and a big publishing company (Meulen-

hoff) are now in British hands. (AD, Volkskrant, NRC H., Trouw, Rotterdams Dagblad, Rijn & Gouwe, de Dord-tenaar, Thieme/Meulenhoff, and a whole series of literary and non-fiction publishing companies, from A.W. Bruna to Vassalucci.) Within the next five years, Apax will introduce the newspaper onto the stock exchange. This is a revolution in the Dutch publishing and newspaper world. You will understand why when I tell you that up till this spring, PCM was owned by the Foundation for Democracy and Media. This is an idealistic foundation whose aim was to make newspapers and books with money. Apax on the other hand wants to make money with money, through means of newspapers and books. Of course it has been emphasized by Apax that the journalistic independence of the several newspapers will be guaranteed. We will just have to wait and see. Now all of this is quite depressing. And although the subject (of the threat to journalistic and critical independency, the influence of the market on newspapers and museums alike, etc.) is important, which is why we are here today, the whole issue has actually not so much to do with my daily practice as a critic and writer. Not directly, anyway.

I am not independent, but I am certainly autonomous. I am an observer, an outsider, and that is precisely what I want to be. I represent the values that I myself have decided upon. Nobody has ever told me where, what or how I should write, and much less what I should think about things. For me,

the main reason for continuing my work is the freedom that I enjoy, and my love of art. So I think it is important to expand a bit on the subject of what I believe art criticism really is about.

The task of the critic. Exactly what an art critic does is impossible to define. There are many different forms of art criticism. A critic must convince his readers and the way he does so depends on his own particular strengths: his skills as an advocate, his style, expertise, powers of analysis and literary talent. The critic creates himself. There are, of course, certain rules. The critic's autonomy is crucial, for example, and he must be willing to discriminate, to make distinctions. There are choices to be made: one work of art rather than another, one artist rather than the next. The critic takes sides, embracing one work and disregarding another. If a critic is not willing to say what he regards as good or valuable, then any negative verdict he arrives at will be meaningless. A critic must find a range of arguments to support the choices he makes. As he writes he tries to form some judgement about what the art of his time, and therefore the world of his time, looks like. As he writes about a work he gives it a place in the world. It is his job to initiate a debate about art. A piece of criticism must offer not only a well-founded assessment but also information about the artwork or artist. Art criticism must be lucidly written. These are the rules that govern the method or practice of art criticism.

But what does the art critic actually do? A critic is a well-informed observer who offers a commentary on his encounters with art, testing the waters on behalf of a broader public. In fact he tries to do the impossible, to translate a visual image into words. An image can never be captured in words, which is not to deny that language can do a great deal. Indeed, language is a powerful instrument. As Joseph Brodsky exclaims in *Watermark* (1992), "Ah, the good old suggestive power of language! Ah, this legendary ability of words to imply more than reality can provide!" Language can suggest more than concrete reality or, in this case the work of art, actually comprises. As Brodsky puts it, "One never knows what engenders what: an experience a language or a language an experience. Both are capable of quite a lot." Does experience generate language or does language generate experience? Language and a work of art complement each other.

Language is one of the instruments at the art critic's disposal, the other is sight. Our eyes are our primary source of information and it is by looking that we orientate ourselves in the world. The eye, claims Brodsky, is the most autonomous of organs, because the object of its attention is inevitably located outside it. The eye can never see itself (except in a mirror). Sight is our most direct sense, a fact that led the painter Francis Bacon to believe that images have the power to circumvent consciousness (or thought) and go directly to the nervous system. This is a painter's

wishful thinking. Where is the eye without thought? No work of art can exist without language.

The encounter between the observer and the work of art (the subject of art criticism) is a very specific event. Unlike other artistic disciplines, visual art is a relatively static form. A theatrical performance, a ballet, a film, a piece of music or a novel takes place by definition over a period of time. A work of visual art, by contrast, generally has no beginning, no ending, no climax or *dénouement*. An artwork usually only relates to a length of time in the sense that the observer spends time looking at it. There are works of art that 'involve' time in ways other than the time spent looking. Think of the 'process art' of the sixties, which is all about decay, continuity, or duration (a work in mould by Dieter Roth, for example), or art that involves a distortion or compression of our experience of time such as the video art of Douglas Gordon and Doug Aitken, or performance art and various forms of interactive art. But a work of art always sets itself apart from the world around it by its visual composition. Otherwise the artwork disappears into its environment. When a conceptual artist like Ian Wilson decides that his work will henceforth consist of a conversation with the public about the Absolute, he has to develop a visual form that will differentiate this conversation from all the other conversations in the world (he has indeed found such a form). The visibility of an artwork is a *sine qua non*.

All works of art are at odds with chronological

time. They remind us again and again that chronological time is an artificial construct that does not do justice to our experience of temporality. We do not experience time as a straight line or a steady development; it is perpetually changing, compacting and then accelerating again.

A work of art is essentially an image that consists of a number of simultaneous experiences. All aspects of the artwork exist concurrently. This illustrates one of the problems faced by the critic: how to do justice to this simultaneity. He can only explain or describe the work by talking about context, cause and effect and history, in other words in terms of development and chronology. Language involves chronology; words follow each other in linear progression, characterised by duration.

All works of art depend upon language, although no work ever completely corresponds to anything written or said. A work of art unfolds before the observer in the time he spends looking at it. The 'story' that emerges is that of an interaction between the involved observer and the artwork. The work only reveals itself after some effort on the part of the viewer, who is always required to take the first step. The aim of his efforts is to penetrate the work and discover its significance. Ideally the observer feels so close to the work as he looks at it that he understands exactly why the artist created it the way he did, in a mental as well as a material sense.

Occasionally something even more significant oc-

curs. The observer reaches the point where a revelation takes place, so that the external manifestation of the work entirely corresponds with its significance. The viewer experiences a sense of unity with something visible outside himself: the work as such. He is absorbed by it, he loses himself in it. (This is not less likely to happen with a work by Tracey Emin than one by Barnett Newman.) The meaning he discovers in the process may be larger and more far-reaching than the creator of the work ever suspected. An artist often experiences his own work in this way and if the work is successful, he too will arrive at a moment of revelation. This should not surprise us, since the artist is the first viewer of his own work.

In this sense there is no real difference between the art of the past and modern art. It is the moment of looking, the 'being at a certain place at a certain time' that is 'contemporary'. Any great work of art a person comes across will be topical. The term 'contemporary relevance' has taken on a meaning in the context of modern art that strips it of any ambiguity. It has become synonymous with 'new' and this newness – which usually turns out to be far from new – has become, on the modern art scene, the most important reason for valuing a work. Understood in this way, contemporary relevance becomes an impoverished concept with a stultifying effect on the perception of art. Novelty is, after all, inevitably short-lived.

It is not easy to summon the level of concentration required to become an involved viewer of a work of art. The observer must be prepared to surrender himself to whatever the work has to offer, to step into another world. It is an *éducation permanente*.

Different forms of art allow the viewer to discover or recognise different ways of life. He must abandon all preconceptions. This requires silence and concentration and in this respect the visual arts have the times against them. This, I believe, is in fact the biggest pressure on art criticism. Change occurs faster than ever; under the influence of new media the images that surround us are increasingly short-lived and our experiences more and more fleeting. Impermanence is the most significant constant in our lives. An artwork exists at the centre of this incessant flux. To be able to experience the work, the viewer must find peace and 'carve out' stillness in the midst of events. It is a contemplative activity.

A work of art is distinct from ordinary life in terms of place as well as time. It exists within certain physical boundaries, but the mental space it offers is unbounded. When a work of art is viewed, a form of movement occurs that is free and unfathomable, an interplay between the viewer and the work. Once seen, the artwork remains behind as a spiritual creation in the mind of the viewer. From then on it will form part of the way he sees the world. For this purpose there is no need physically to possess the work; it becomes a spiritual possession.¹ Art criticism en-

tails reporting on this complex process of looking and discovering meaning, which means the art critic has the most wonderful job in the world. His task is to report on a never-ending journey to the farthest reaches of the creative imagination.

Questions to Janneke Wesseling

¹ This passage paraphrases the description of games provided by Johan Huizinga in his book *Homo Ludens*, *Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*, 1938 (*Homo Ludens*, *A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*).

Anne-Marie Ericsson: I hope that the one-man-show will come back again. Because I think that it is the best way of showing art. In Sweden there is a tendency to make group exhibitions rather than one-man exhibitions. The museums can't pay for a book for a one-man show; they have to cram the books and publications with information on different things. How can one make them less expensive?

JW: I think catalogues and books are often superfluous. In the seventies and eighties there were excellent shows and one Dutch museum had a series of publications which was just a tiny brochure and it was perfectly fine. It's also an art market thing that these books have to be very posh with lots of colour illustrations. I think it's crucial to have one-man shows. Art work never comes out of thin air; it comes out of a world experienced by the artist. I think to have a really good view of what it is all about you absolutely need these shows to make the right assessment on what this work is about. There is one example: a show organised in Japan a year ago called Happiness. The curator called Marlene Dumas, one of our star artists in the Netherlands and asked her to provide a work for this show and she answered: "Well, no I don't want to be in a show about happiness". So what the curator did was simply to borrow a work of hers and include it in the show. So she was both in the show and in the catalogue. It was a lie and had nothing to do with the work that was shown. Shows

like these are all over the place, all the time.

Lars O Ericsson: You said something about being threatened, going back and forth between writing art criticism and curating. Maybe I misunderstood you but I thought you said, “I don’t want to do any curating”.

JW: That’s right. I know many people do it, but I decided that it’s not a thing for me, nor will I be on government subsidy committees and all these things, nor will I write about an artist that I know personally.

LOE: On the present art scene those are roles that we can take turns with, even if *you* don’t want to do that. We can work as art critics, we can be artists, we can be curators and many people alternate. Of course you can have different opinions about it. But what surprised me in what you said, maybe you could elucidate that, is that you started out saying that there is no independent art critic. But then your argument against curating was that it threatened your independence.

JW: My autonomy. I am not independent, because I work for a medium. I need the medium, without it I wouldn’t exist. An artist may be autonomous but not independent. I think a comparison can be made there.

LOE: That’s my second question: What is the distinction that you’re making between autonomy and independence?

JW: I have complete freedom to express my views on anything. This, to me is the main value of what I do, it’s my ‘capital’. And I think that’s what my work is based on, but to do this I need the newspaper. So in that sense it’s untrue to say that I’m completely independent because I’m not my own publisher, I need a medium and I need a few other things which I mentioned.

LOE: For my part, I don’t see such a big difference between what a curator does and what the critic does. There are many similarities. I would even say that the curatorial act is a critical act.

JW: Yes, there are many critical acts that one can think of. But for me, the thing I do is through using language. Holland is very small. If I had to curate an exhibition, it would have to be curated somewhere, some place. It would need money from the government. I would need sponsors and I don’t want that because then I would feel a personal loss of freedom. But that’s a personal thing as I said. Others do it, but I won’t.

Lars Nittve: I found your speech thought-provoking and would like to pose not questions, but observa-

tions that you may reflect on. It is very clear that whoever you are in the art system there are going to be interdependencies. We can't get away from that but on the other hand there is not full transparency. This means that the readers of art criticism don't know all the other roles that you may play as an art critic. Therefore it's quite important to stick to some roles and to keep certain lines clear, for instance when writing an essay for a commercial gallery. For an artist's show in a commercial gallery, you get 1–2,000 Euros and then another time you write about that gallery or about that artist somewhere else.

JW: I never write for galleries.

LN: But that's the sort of problem that arises and it is not transparent.

JW: It could be transparent.

LN: It should be, but it's very hard, because the reader of the newspaper does not necessarily read this catalogue. Therefore there is a reason for the rules and for the distinctions that you talked about. And I would argue for them to a large extent. We have them for the curators at the museum here. My second observation has to do with group exhibitions and thematic exhibitions, because it's quite interesting: I've been back in Sweden for three years now. There's a pressure on this museum to show more

group exhibitions, from the critics in general. I'm sure many would disagree but I feel a pressure that it's sort of un-hip to make monographic exhibitions. On the other hand I would also like to argue in favour of the thematic exhibition. It can be a way to ask questions about a contemporary situation that you haven't a clear view of yet, but if you put things together maybe you'll understand more. I think it is a valid means of investigation in a sense. So I would like to argue for the thematic exhibition as well, if it is intelligent.

JW: It is certainly possible and there are some good examples. But it demands a lot of the curator: a lot of time for research and intelligence and a real vision of art and inspiration. I think that's very rare.

Örjan Wallert: I'm an artist. Do you express in your writings your critical stance towards the institutions and museums in Holland?

JW: Absolutely, all the time.

ÖW: In what way do you do it and what are the consequences?

JW: I do it in all kind of ways. What are the consequences? I don't know. I have argued for a female museum director not because I'm an aggressive feminist, which I'm not, but we don't have a single mu-

seum in Holland with a female director and I find that very odd. But now, all the new positions are taken by men. It means that there is some kind of power game going on and I'm very critical of that. In my opinion it has a very negative effect on the museum culture. I write about all these things and about politics as well. Whenever we have a new state secretary of art I try to follow the cultural politics and read the proposals and then comment on them in the newspaper. I see it as part of my job to do that as well, although it's not the most enticing part of the job. I really want to be involved with art but I can't always be.

Robert Stasinski: I was a bit surprised when you said that Marlene Dumas did not consent to being in the exhibition [*Happiness*]. I want to agree with what Lars O Ericsson said, that curating could be a critical act and I don't know if you agree with that. If you do, why is it that the artist, or you as a critic, may criticize an artist, or interpret the work in a certain manner, 'autonomously' as you put it, while the curator can't?

JW: That could very well be so but then it has to be presented as such and be very, very clear that that is the intention. But it was presented as a theme in Marlene Dumas' work – which is completely untrue according to what she says herself. It was presented as if she had consented to being in the show because

it had something to do with her work. And that was untrue. So if the show was meant as criticism, potentially interesting, then it should be presented as such and not as something else.

RS: But, you don't in general see consent as a prerequisite for an artist to be in an exhibition? Do you think that the artist has to agree?

JW: No, it depends on the intentions of the curator. You can do either thing but the curator must be entirely clear on what he chooses to do. I think there's an enormous lack of clarity in the curating world as well, not only in museum politics. I find that instead of being clear, proposing a good plan and making a statement of intent, what happens is exactly the contrary because all these cloudy writings, texts, arguments and inter-discussions between curators are totally superfluous. I feel very strongly about that.

Christian Chambert: You said that when you came back from France you tried to cover the institutions and the commercial art galleries in the Netherlands. My question is: what about your newspaper and its interest in covering other parts of the world? I think there's a tendency in Sweden and everywhere, not only to try to cover the biennales but to see what is going on 'out there'. We're also talking about economics, being paid for things. We talked about hitchhiking, you can be a nomad, and if you really

want to do something, you can. Are the readers interested in getting information about things that aren't happening locally, regionally or even in their own country?

JW: Yes, but there is a certain tension there because I think that it's not useful for my readers if I travel to Basle, for instance, where there may be an exhibition that I find totally uninteresting so that I write a negative piece of criticism. That's not useful if the discourse doesn't concern the Dutch public. But when I think that there's an important show going on somewhere, within a certain distance from the Netherlands – that covers Germany, Switzerland, France and Belgium – yes, then I'll go there. And, I'm going to Liverpool next week with EasyJet because the travel budgets are being reduced.

What Does the Artist Have to Say about Art Criticism?

Carlos Capelán and Ann-Sofi Noring

Talk in connection with Carlos Capelán's exhibition *Ceci n'est pas une vidéo* at Moderna Museet.

Ann-Sofi Noring: Carlos, you are invited to this seminar about art criticism because you are an intellectual, an artist and you have done some thinking on the theme of pressure on art critics and artists. We have used the word 'pressure' for this seminar and we ask ourselves "What is an independent art critic today?" What's your opinion? What is or could be an independent artist? Are there any such artists?

Carlos Capelán: Well, I have to confess that I haven't given the notion of 'pressure' much thought. The art critic is this little devil that all people who are related to art have inside them. We go out and see shows and we comment on them and try to classify them, categorize them and try to understand them. Of course we do not publish our opinions, but everyone who is in contact with art has exercised this profession in a way. You cannot go round and tell people that you are the least understood art critic that nobody wants to publish. You can play that game as an artist: "I'm a good artist but nobody understands me". You can't say: "I'm a good art critic but nobody understands me". I don't know much about pressure though. I think it happens when we have symbiotic relationships, when the art critic gets too close to an institution, an artist or a gallery. Then symbiosis can take over. You are bound to be loyal

or to use your emotions rather than your eyes. I'm not addressing the issue of power games, it's too obvious. We're all under the pressure of power games. We deal with art and we exercise power: artists, art critics, curators and everybody.

A-SN: So you don't agree with this myth that critics and artists should not interact?

CC: But we do. We have opinions, we talk to people, there's a symbiosis. I talk to curators but I don't love my curators, I don't love you.

[*Laughter*]

A-SN: You're an artist but you also teach young students in Bergen where you are a professor. There are a lot of art schools today. But there are less and less critics, I assume at least. Do you have anything to say about that relationship: art students and critics?

CC: To be honest, I'm surprised by the fact that the audience here is very young. Because I don't see so many young people interested in art criticism, not among my students anyway. I think it's a shame. They are very much into curating, they want to become curators; they are very much into flirting with curators.

A-SN: Your background is in South America and you studied in Sweden. For quite a long time you

were our most unknown international artist in Sweden. But that has changed a bit lately. Have critics had anything to do with that?

CC: Honestly I don't know. I've been in and out of Sweden for the past ten years. I come here for holidays in the summer and at Christmas. But I do not read Swedish art critics. I read six or seven papers daily through the internet and honestly I don't have time to read the cultural pages. I'm sorry! I just can't handle it. Lately I've been reading more about art criticism in Spain, mostly as an anthropologist, because it's an interesting phenomenon. I like reading art critics when I haven't seen the show! I don't care so much about the show, but I care a lot about how art is being presented by art critics. It's like this ongoing self-portrait of culture, and art criticism is a part of that. I'm still romantic. I still believe that contemporary art is created by culture in society. So I'm interested in art criticism when it becomes pure literature, an anthropological/sociological description of society. It is not interesting as an evaluation of the actual show the article is referring to.

A-SN: When you talk about criticism being a portrait of the art or the artists, what is your impression of the portrait of you? The way you are described or the way your work is handled?

CC: I love that question. I cannot control the image

of me that other people may have. I never interfere between me and the art critic or me and the writer or me and the cultural critic who is writing about my work. I only changed my work once.

A-SN: What was that?

CC: The critic suddenly used the word ‘macho’ and I said “Sorry, I refuse, I’m not going to live up to that concept. You can use it but I don’t want a discussion with you.” That was the only time. This is a public tattoo. This is my way of answering back to the social identity that I get. I know I’m the big outsider, unknown in Sweden, born in South America: go ahead, put more tattoos on my body. I don’t care. I’m not controlling that, you know.

A-SN: I understand that you don’t read critics that much as you just stated. But if you could dream of some criticism that would be good and rewarding, how would that be?

CC: An art critic should be like any other intellectual: making sense, providing tools for analyses, taking a position, it depends on the context – no general rules here. If they live in a major town or a little town, the responsibility is different. It’s always very concrete. I don’t like to generalize.

Panel Discussion

Moderator

John Peter Nilsson

Former art critic at the Swedish daily newspaper Aftonbladet and editor of the art journal NU: The Nordic Art Review. (JPN)

Mårten Arndtzén

Art critic at the daily newspaper Expressen and the Swedish public service radio station P1. (MA)

Lars O Ericsson

Art critic at the Swedish daily paper Dagens Nyheter. (LOE)

Ronald Jones

Critic at Artforum and Frieze, lives in Stockholm. (RJ)

Sabine Vogel

Editor-in-Chief for literature at the Berliner Zeitung. (SV)

Janneke Wesseling

Art critic at the NRC Handelsblad, Netherlands. (JW)

JPN: The presentations by Sabine Vogel and Janneke Wesseling were very interesting, as you both addressed problems from different angles but also ideals and visions on how art criticism could be. I could sense that art criticism isn't always what it should be – there are other pressures. I want to start this discussion from a local Swedish point of view and then move over to an international level.

In Sweden for the past 18 months, there has been renewed interest in art criticism, in criticism in general, and there have been discussions and debates in the media, and also among artists and critics. Lars O Ericsson here was actually suspended for a period of time from Dagens Nyheter, stopping him from writing about art for certain reasons, which I think is quite remarkable. I would like to start, Lars, by asking you to describe to the audience what happened. What caused your suspension?

LOE: Robert Stasinski, who is here somewhere and who represented the magazine NU-E, called me in Paris, where I live part time, and asked me what I thought about the fact that three young people were taking over Tensta konsthall. That was the first time I heard about it, because I was on the plane to Paris when they released the press release saying that “We are taking over Tensta konsthall”. I was really shocked, amazed, angry and also very sad because I had thought very highly of these people. I thought that they had done good things and that they had

created some credibility for themselves. As a critic I had written positively about them. There were no quarrels between us at all. So, I was shocked. Why? Because as we all know here in Sweden, the creators of Tensta konsthall, Gregor Wroblewski and Celia Prado, had been thrown out of there, in my opinion, in a very scandalous way. They were deprived of what they had created over 15 years. So not only had we in Sweden lost one of the most important scenes for contemporary art, which in itself is sad, but even worse, they were thrown out of their jobs by, in my view, an extraordinary abuse of power. I was shocked because I thought highly of these people and thought that they knew better and I didn't expect them to be so career-hungry as they turned out to be. They wanted to take this occasion to do this and what I held them accountable for was that they were helping to erase and delete the traces of this scandalous abuse of power by their takeover: they are opening their first show today at Tensta, as we all know. And they were not ashamed to keep the name of Tensta konsthall, a name that also meant something internationally. It really meant something, it stood for something, it represented a cultural value. But they just kept the name and they also collaborated with the board. They didn't say, "OK, we'll do this if the board leaves", the same board that had thrown out the creators of Tensta konsthall. They just wanted it. That was the background. So what did I do? Well, I was in Paris and Robert asked

me what I thought about this. Robert is here to confirm it, though he didn't dare to put it out on the web, which has made some people doubt that I ever said something to a magazine. Then I sent an email to Rodrigo Mallea Lira¹ saying, "How the hell could you do this?", which is what you say to someone in whom you are really disappointed. "You will ruin the credibility that you have created for yourself". If I had had his phone number, I would have phoned him. One of the things I said in the email was that I would never ever cooperate with them. And I won't.

Rodrigo took the email to Dagens Nyheter saying: "What will happen to us now that Dagens Nyheter doesn't want to write about us?" To my surprise I received an email from Dagens Nyheter saying "URGENT" and then I had to call the cultural editor who was in Italy. She was really angry. I got suspended. I was surprised that they could have any objections to my sending an email to someone I knew and previously respected. They said, "We should have a meeting immediately about this" and I thought, "Well, send me a ticket and I will come to Stockholm". I was under no obligation to go to Stockholm to talk to them. So we had a long email conversation and cleared certain things up. This was in May and I was suspended until I came back to Stockholm. I returned to Stockholm late August. We

¹ One of the curators who took over Tensta konsthall.
Editor's comment.

sorted things up at a meeting then.

JPN: What kind of pressures are we talking about here?

LOE: Well, what they blamed me for was that I sent an email to Rodrigo. But I didn't only do that. I wrote a petition that I sent out to a lot of people in the cultural world. There are lists containing about 1,500 names – from the cultural world in Sweden – protesting against what had happened at Tensta konsthall. So I was far from alone. The petition said “This is blameworthy and they shouldn't have done it. They shouldn't have kept the name and they should have refused to work with this board that had thrown out the creators of Tensta konsthall through abuse of power”. But what I was blamed for was having sent an email?!

JPN: Janneke and Sabine, from your points of view, this is a clear scenario: here we have a critic [...]

SV: It's not clear at all. What was your engagement, Lars? What was your position in Tensta konsthall?

LOE: No position at all. Like most critics in this country I had written about them because they showed very, very good work. And I think all the critics in Sweden agree on that. That was my involvement. But my criticism was sort of ethical: I

thought what they did was morally wrong. That's the simple explanation. And I still believe that.

SV: But you say that the board has suspended the directors. Is that true?

LOE: Not only suspended, they fired them.²

SV: But the board is independent – can they do this or not and can you criticize that or not?

LOE: Of course I can criticize it – it's part of my job. I think that the role of a critic, and I'm sure you'll agree, is not only reviewing shows. I agree with you that it's not the fun part of our job to go into cultural politics and criticize institutions that don't work, directors who aren't functioning. I've done all that.

SV: But it's still not clear why anyone should have any interest in shutting you up.

LOE: That's a question you should ask someone else, not me. Ask the people who suspended me.

SV: Did you ask them?

² Gregor Wroblewski was fired, nobody else. The other staff members (a curator and the person responsible for the pedagogic programme) could not stay in the terrible situation and resigned. Editor's comment.

LOE: Yeah!

SV: What was their explanation?

LOE: The explanation was that they blamed me for sending this email. What they didn't know was that I had tried to write this in the paper, but I wasn't allowed to write it. And I'm still not allowed to write about this.

JW: Why not?

LOE: Don't ask me, ask them!

Voice from the audience: Have they been invited?

LOE: Yes, someone should be here anyway.

JPN: Janneke, how would you react? Would this be possible in Holland?

JW: You mean being suspended?

JPN: Yes, for sending a private email.

JW: The whole story sounds very strange to me. I can't understand it. I can't understand how they can suspend you for having sent a personal email. It seems to me it's not their business. Secondly, I don't understand why you can't publish anything on this

in the newspaper. Perhaps my first move would have been: is this a good issue for the newspaper and then I'd ring them and say, look I'm going to publish something on this. So, I don't understand any of this. But the people from the newspaper should be here to explain the whole thing. I can't understand it.

LOE: I'm taking a risk saying this: I might be suspended or fired again. But I will take it standing.

JW: But maybe you should leave and go to another paper?
[*Laughter in the audience*]

LOE: Yeah [...] Maybe I will.
[*More laughter and applause*]

JPN: Ronald, you have been writing for Artforum and for Frieze. You lived in the States and New York for a long time. You've listened to this story from an American point of view, and we earlier heard Lars Nittve talking about his time at Artforum and that they had very strict rules. What kind of pressure have you felt? What is your immediate reaction to a scenario like this?

RJ: Well, strictly from the American point of view, if you send it from the company's email that you work for, it belongs to them and you can be fired. If you send it from your private email, it's a different story.

I couldn't imagine it under any circumstances and a parallel example would be when Jerry Saltz called for the resignation of the entire Guggenheim board in the pages of Village Voice, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize. This is a kind of insistence for boards being held to task in the press and I'm not a journalist in that sense. I did try to write for a newspaper but I failed miserably. But I think that the ability to hold a board or any organisation or critics to task is one that is really an issue of freedom of speech, freedom of the press.

JPN: I can see that there is some kind of editorial pressure here. When you represent a newspaper or media, if you are freelance or fully employed – how much do you need to work for a particular medium to be connected to this medium, and when can you write for other media?

JW: I can write for other media but not for another newspaper. I find that normal because I have a contract with my newspaper. But there are journalists who write for several newspapers at the same time. For me that would be kind of odd. But I do write for magazines and other media and there's no problem at all.

JPN: Sabine, do you feel any pressure from your newspaper that has an old communist background, based in East Germany? Are you pressured in your

selection and, when you write, do you think about your target group?

SV: Sure, I was fired once because I wasn't politically correct at that time. So, yes, I know my limits. And for 15 years I worked as a freelancer – then I chose for whom I could write what. I was fired because I wrote in a way that was not in keeping with the policy of the chief editor. It was not politically correct. OK, everybody knows that cultural pages make other jokes than the political pages do. There's another language even. I also write political commentaries on the front pages and then, sure, I use another language than I do on my pages. This is normal. But this story is really unbelievable for me and I don't know how you can live with this. I would run amok. I would knock at every door to discover the political background. Why can't this be published in my newspaper? I would go to the competitors. I wouldn't be loyal. I don't know how you manage to do this.

LOE: The honourable gentleman to my left here [*meaning Mårten Arndtzén*] accused me in Expressen of being a mafioso using gangster methods and said that I was corrupt.

MA: For me, as a journalist, it's embarrassing when critics can't differentiate between publishing their views in the paper, publicly, and working with private emails and semi-private petitions within the art

world, saying that we should freeze out people who have committed this abominable act. I have the greatest respect for your opinion.

LOE: Oh, I'm glad to hear that!

MA: But I'm a little embarrassed that you can't see the difference.

LOE: But I do see the difference! Why can't you do different things?

MA: You can't, in your position as a major critic at Dagens Nyheter, send private email to independent curators and people in the art world telling them what to do and what not to do.

LOE: Why not?

MA: That's something you can do in the paper. When it's public.

LOE: But I can't write it in the paper. You should get your facts right. You accuse me of not publishing it in Dagens Nyheter – I wasn't allowed to. So you should have checked the facts first.

MA: What are the facts?

LOE: I'm still not allowed to publish it!

MA: Yes, but now you're not allowed to address that issue in Dagens Nyheter because they're embarrassed that you've sent these emails. So that's another question. Why in the first place weren't you allowed to publish it?

LOE: I made several proposals and once again it's not I who should answer that question, I can't answer it.

JPN: Mårten, what does art criticism legitimize in your view? This morning we heard about the difficulties with the market, the collectors and the history.

MA: To me this whole incident is just a sad example of a bigger thing. I would actually like to begin by quoting a catalogue from Tensta konsthall, by the Turkish writer Erden Kosova. Here are the opening lines: "Writing on art has to face the bitter incommensurability between the art practice it relates to and the language it employs, the danger of killing the affectual side of the art practice by attempting to pull the unspeakable into the terrain of words. The art practice may easily collapse into an illustrative device to reinforce the theoretical coherency. The worst case scenario is perhaps the case in which the theoretical framework is constituted by received ideas, instrumentalised, pre-set concepts in the hope of attaining academic authority. Suggestive and telling concepts as they are, words as 'heterotopia', 'third

space', 'hybridisation', 'relational aesthetics' can be turned into easy, celebratory tools to be applied on any art work, any case, any context." This is a very promising opening in contrast to much of what is being done in contemporary art criticism. The thing with theory today is that it is more essential to the production of legitimacy than it is to any discussion on what art's really about. Since art today can be just about anything [...]. And as a consequence, theory is always already there when the critic arrives on site. What remains for him or her to do is basically to pass judgement. This, however, is something that contemporary art critics are not very keen on doing today. Recent studies in the States as well as in Sweden make this clear. Judgements based on values are very low on the agenda. Instead the critic tends to describe, to quote and to copy. And judgement instead is part of an editorial selection. By definition, anything that reaches the pages is good, because it's been selected. A kind of curating. The text becomes a sample of excellence, a piece in the machinery that provides art with legitimacy. So the critic becomes a representative of the art system in the public sphere, which is problematic for two reasons: first, in relation to the readers who might be informed but seldom spoken to and therefore bored. Secondly, in relation to an art practice that is very expansive today, expanding into new fields of research. Instead of accompanying art on that journey, criticism keeps up the atomized business of reviewing exhibitions, delivering its standards of excellence, represent-

ing the art world instead of addressing the work. I think more critics should follow Sabine to Slovakia, it's necessary if we want to justify our spot in the sun.

JPN: You were saying, that art criticism should speak more to the world, to the public. Do you think that a newspaper has its own values as we heard earlier in Lars Nittve's introduction? That English tabloids and newspapers are creating sensationalism using the public as an excuse? There's a difference there to what you, Sabine, were talking about in bringing the world in from the other side into the media.

MA: I think that it has to be a two-way thing. Why would you use the media at all if you didn't want to address a wider audience and a public space? That must be the core of what we do, at least if we're engaged in writing pieces in the newspapers as opposed to writing catalogues.

JPN: I think the role of the critic has changed during the seventies, eighties and the beginning of the nineties from being a judge to being almost an educator. The critic as evaluator has been absent. But am I right in thinking that this is now changing? How is it in New York, for example?

RJ: I have an enormous respect for journalists. But I'm not interested in talking to the general public, be-

cause I'm probably not very good at it and I also think that the kinds of issues that I want to raise are highly specialised for the art world. That's my audience and I don't expect to go outside of that. I think that art like almost any other discipline these days is so highly specialised. I wouldn't expect to be able to go to a seminar like this on nuclear physics and understand anything. I think the context of this is open to the public but I wouldn't expect it to be general material for consumption.

JPN: I know you write for a specialised audience, but if you would take a statement and bring it into a public newspaper, would you write differently?

RJ: Yeah, well as I said, I did try doing that and was miserable at it. But I don't think that, even in newspapers early on, art criticism has done anything other than establish the cultural agenda of the critic. If your interests are to explain or educate or do other kinds of things in other kinds of media, God bless you.

JPN: Lars, you come from a background as philosopher. When you started writing for Dagens Nyheter, did you think in terms of having to adjust?

LOE: I've been working as a critic for 18 years and when I started in the late eighties the situation was such that there was an enormous credibility gap

between the younger artists and older critics, partly because some of the more interesting artists had a very different approach and basis for what they did. That basis was in part philosophical or theoretical. So for me it was not too difficult to start working as a critic at that time. But of course writing for a daily paper is not like lecturing at the university. Writing in a daily paper is always a question of balance between, on the one hand, not trivialising the artist or the art work, and, on the other hand, to be comprehensible to the non-specialist.

JPN: What do you feel you are responsible for when someone gives you public space and you have readers? The readers, your own thoughts, what you see, the artist, cultural politics?

JW: I do feel very responsible and we were talking about pressure from the newspaper. Apart from the constant pressure of deadlines to which I've become addicted, I feel there is a pressure to write very clearly. That is something I experience as good pressure because I want to write for a broader public and I like the aesthetic part of a well-written text. It's my personal conviction no matter how complicated the issue is, and in visual art it is very complicated. If I'm going to write about it I have to be able to make a clear statement about it. If I can't do that then I don't understand it myself and I won't write about it. But I believe that the most difficult and complicated things can be put into

words in a clear and convincing manner.

JPN: How much freedom do you have?

JW: I've never experienced what Sabine has experienced. We have representatives of different opinions in the newspaper, which I think is a good thing. It's not a matter of being right. It's about taking positions. You want to engage in a debate, you want to challenge others to make their position clear. That is what it's about. It's not about claiming truth or being dogmatic. So I can be very clear about what I think is right but I would never claim that it's the truth. And I'm always happy if we succeed in creating a debate to make room for all these different and contrasting opinions.

JPN: But we've also seen that this room for debate turns out to be more and more of an entertainment arena these days.

JW: Yes, that's true.

SV: What's wrong with entertainment? People go to the cinema, to art, concerts – why don't they go to school? I'm sorry to go back to the classics, "We enjoy first and then learn". We can't convey difficult theories by killing people first. They shouldn't have to go to university before they can read our paper.

JW: But of course the word 'entertainment' implies that.

SV: You put it very nicely this morning, Lars Nittve, when you talked about "vitriolic" [...] "entertainment".

JW: That's the big thing when making a newspaper, that's how you make your name. That's how you become famous, and I don't believe you if you say you don't want to please: I want to please my first editor, my first reader who happens to be my neighbour or my colleague. That's how far I look, I don't look any further.

RJ: I couldn't agree more and the example I like to use is the summer that the new Hayden Planetarium opened in New York. Right across the park was a Nam June Paik exhibition at the Guggenheim. Nam June Paik is a technologically sophisticated futuristic artist. So on the day that the planetarium opened the audience could go and take a ride through the cosmos in the most accurate model of the universe ever created, narrated by Tom Hanks, who warned everybody that this was not an artist's conception, or they could go over and look at Nam June Paik's worn-out visual muzak, under the heading of difficult, complicated leading-edge art. And of course the Hayden Planetarium beat the Guggenheim – I think only the Yankees got more of an audience that particular

weekend. There you see hard science renegotiating its relationship to entertainment. I think art and art criticism are also going to have to renegotiate their relationship to entertainment if they want to continue to have an audience. You may wish it to be another way. But I think it's inevitable especially as people are reading the paper on the web. Newspaper business has a fairly short life. Once it transfers onto the web, there's going to be much more opportunity for entertainment and I think people who need to will want to be there.

MA: Entertainment is presented as a great threat to seriousness. I think that it's a sign of cultural wealth and that the spectrum is bigger today than it was a couple of years ago in Sweden. I'm very happy there are critics who are entertainers and butchers and that there are also critics who talk in a completely different way.

LOE: I don't have any problems with entertainment, but the problem is that both of you are simplifying a little bit, and maybe consciously so. Sometimes, fortunately not too seldom, contemporary art deals with very difficult, painful subjects and problems and you, Sabine, gave some examples yourself. The problem is not entertainment in itself, but how do we go about it as critics when we are confronted with artworks that deal with these painful, difficult problems? I mean, we can't just laugh at them. Do

you see my point there?

RJ: I do think to maintain your audience you're going to have to realise where your audience is.

MA: Writing about the really painful stuff is perhaps the easiest thing to do, as you have a subject that in itself is problematic. So I don't think the problem lies there.

Voice in the audience: What is the role and function of criticism? I thought it would be a good thing to define that, before discussing whether it should be entertaining, informative, educational or whatever. What role does criticism have today? One of the points of criticism is that it can make a difference on various levels for various people.

JPN: That's a good question: can criticism make a difference?

LOE: For whom?

MA: Why write, why occupy public space and demand people's attention if you don't want to make a difference, if you don't want to change something, if you don't have an agenda?

JW: Well, I do feel like some kind of missionary sometimes. I really want to convince people to go to

this show that I think is very good and important and I try with all my might to lure people into reading my text and to shake people up and wake them up. I almost feel like I have a mission without being melodramatic about it.

LOE: I totally agree.

SV: We're all missionaries, yes. And if we are war reporters, we have to do it well. If we do a BBC piece about Rwanda, it has to be touching, exciting and well done. We can't do it with a bleeding heart and do some boring shit so that the viewers zap to another programme. Whatever message we want to bring, we have to do it well in a professional way, meaning it has to be entertaining and catch the interest of the viewer.

JW: Yeah, you have to grab them.

SV: The thing is where does it become trivial, where do we make the virtual entertainment out of it? This is important.

LOE: I hope that entertainment is not the only way to grab the audience.

JW: You may also call it seduction.

JPN: Sometimes it seems that in this arena we work

in – on TV and in magazines, everything has to be fast. Aren't you scared that it's just going faster and faster? A critic goes to an exhibition that an artist has been working on for maybe a whole year. The critic comes in, looks at it for 15 minutes and writes very quickly.

SV: Do I have to look another year to understand the work of the artist? Only the artist needs a year to produce it, I don't need a year to understand it. The audience doesn't need a year to read my text.

MA: This applies to every form of criticism and journalism. The context and the work behind a piece is always lengthier than the time it takes to write about it.

JPN: But you, Ronald, both as an artist and a critic, are you clear on your roles?

RJ: Yes I am/No he's not [*laughter in the audience*]. Yeah, I got my first writing job with Betsy Baker on Art in America because I complained that she wasn't writing about the most interesting artists and she said: "Fine. Give it a shot!" And so I know the artists. But I think the value of a review to the commercial success of an artist hovers somewhere close to zero. Those frenzies take place before the reviews appear. If there is a clear cultural agenda at stake then there are artists that you want to promote because their ideas happen to coincide with my own

ideas as an artist. So they are areas that feather together very easily and neatly. I wouldn't say I'm a missionary but I'm an evangelist.

JPN: Is it a problem being an artist, curator and doing this and that?

JW: It wouldn't work for me. I have no problems with artists writing on art. I mean there are so many examples of artists doing that very well and being very important critics, so that's something else. But maybe it's also because I have become very critical of this whole inflation of curating and I see a kind of muddiness of mixed interests all over the place. So I have decided to stay out of that completely and I enjoy being an outsider and an observer and that's what works best for me. And you asked us if we were scared. I'm not scared, but I am often nervous asking myself if I will succeed this time with this particular piece. There's always a tension, but I sometimes worry that the values that I cherish and my conception of art – perhaps I'm defending something that won't exist anymore in 10 years. That's very possible. Everything changes all the time, we change. So, it's not so much fear, but you have to be alert.

MA: I'm pretty sure that I wouldn't be able to write the way I do if I had gone into curating, if I hadn't had some safe employers in the media world – if I'd had to rely on the art system for my income at a

higher degree. I'm sure that this would have affected my writing in a way that I would perceive of as negative today. I don't think that my integrity is any weaker than anybody else's. I think it's a problem if we want to have a discussion about art that is open and clear, where people take the stand they feel they want to, and where people have the courage to go against what is currently politically correct. This mix-up of roles can be very dangerous.

LOE: No, I don't agree at all. I think you have to have very weak integrity to be scared. If your integrity is weak, you shouldn't be an art critic at all. And if your integrity is strong, working as a curator or as an artist is no problem. This is not a new phenomenon; some of you may think so, but it's not. Take Donald Judd for instance: he was an important art critic. He was, as we all know, an extremely important artist and he was also a curator. Where's the problem? I even think it's fruitful, nourishing to do this. I respect your view, I really do, but being an observer is only one position you can take. There are other positions that also are respectable.

SV: I see the problems of being a curator and an art critic, because I'm both, but I'm not both at the same time. If I work as a curator, I'm no longer a critic, I have to play a different role. I change sides. I've worked in an institution, I was a curator, I created shows. I don't have a problem changing roles. But

we have to make it transparent. If I'm a writer, I'm not involved in institutions, I have to make that clear. If I work in an institution and I write, then the first thing I have to say is: "I am involved". I write from the position of somebody being paid. I have to make my production sphere open, if I get the roles mixed up. They are two different things. I know how institutions work and what people earn. I know which one has which connections: it's important knowledge for us as writers. To know that such and such is, sorry, fucking with such and such. It's very important to understand what's going on in the art business.

LOE: Yes, but I think the remedy for that is transparency. And that is very important, whether you work as a curator or as an art critic.

JPN: How can you do that?

LOE: If you are curating a show, you have to make it very clear with whom you're working, why you're doing it and in what conditions you are doing it.

JW: But does the public know all this?

LOE: Yes, I think so. At Dagens Nyheter, one of the self-evident things is that, if you are one fraction of a millimetre involved in a show or a manifestation of any kind you can't write about it. But in Sweden it's

very difficult to live up to this because everybody is connected to everybody somehow, it's a small population, but we try, we really try.

RJ: There's a practical side to this curating business. It's not like you seek those jobs out, it's because you have written this piece of criticism that you're asked to curate this show. You're on that show and then suddenly you're invited to teach. I think it has to do with the integrity of your work and one thing naturally follows from the other. There is no secret handshake. No smoke-filled room where all the decisions are made. I think we're pretty good at self-regulating and there are Letters to the Editor pages and they've been used more or less beneficially. The greatest self-regulator is the cocktail party so I think we do take care of ourselves in that way. I don't find too many dark hearts – otherwise you would not be in the business of being in the art world, if you wanted to grab a whole lot of power and money.

LOE: We know that certain magazines or writers are corrupt. I mean we know that Flash Art is corrupt so we don't expect anything else from it – we read it with open eyes.

RJ: I wrote a review about a colleague at the university I used to teach at. How many times have you heard "I like this person, have you seen the show? It's terrible". I wrote, not a bad review but I wrote a

review wondering why her work had got so bad recently. I didn't get fired but she wouldn't talk to me for a while in the lunchroom and then it all passed. I think if everyone keeps most of their cards on the table and I think they do, it's not such a corrupt system after all.

JPN: There seems to be a change in conditions for the critic over the last 15–20 years. The critic doesn't just have to face paintings or sculptures anymore, nowadays it's also film, sound, performance, theatre – art has expanded and the exhibitions have become different. We have post-productive artists, we have the relation with aesthetics and we may have a situation in which the exhibition itself changes daily. How does the critic face that? Maybe he/she thinks, “Do I need to write about an exhibition that will only last a month and that changes all the time? Yesterday I was at an opening and suddenly I realized that: oh, there are two other shows that are going to open within this exhibition further on in one or two weeks and the pressure from the newspaper is that they want it reviewed now. But I can't review the whole show, because I can't see the whole show!” Do these changing conditions also exist within the media structure? What is the media pressure on the critic? To be catchy, concise, approach things from a certain angle? Lars, you've given this some thought.

LOE: Well, I think it's changing on many levels and

in many ways, and it's changing rapidly. What you talked about first was the art that we're supposed to write about and that, as we all know, varies extremely, from well-defined genres like drawing, sculpture, paintings and so forth to a situation today where the art that we should write about is hybrid. If we are self-critical, and we should be, I think that we are far from changing our way of writing about this new situation. We are still stuck in this review format and maybe that is what has to be discussed or changed. For instance, as you mentioned yourself: you go to a show and you find that there are several shows over several days. So what should you review? There are many problems there. But I still think that the review format is dominant, and that's what we should ask ourselves: is that how we should work today and tomorrow? I doubt it very much. Another change is that, in a pessimistic scenario, I think that art criticism as it used to be is about to be faded out. I don't know what it will be replaced by. Today you have to write miniatures. You can't develop your thoughts and follow through a form of reasoning the way you could 20 years ago. You're expected to write concisely.

JPN: Is it the same in Amsterdam or in Berlin?

JW: Speaking for myself: I have more space than I used to have. There's a range of different formats that I can choose, whether it be a short critique in a

classical sense, a longer essay or an interview. There are all kinds of different forms so personally I don't feel at all restricted. When I started out as an art critic, I had this model in my head. We all know these very famous men, like Clement Greenberg and Pierre Restany. These critics were the medium for a particular movement and I thought that was the thing to do. And in fact, in the beginning I looked for that especially among artists of my own generation. I never succeeded in finding this kind of movement that I could 'adhere' to. For a long time I thought this was a shortcoming of mine, but after a long time, perhaps ten years, I discovered that this type of criticism doesn't exist anymore. It's not possible to single out one movement and then to propagate that. Art has become so diverse that that kind of idea is lost. But it's not only a loss, it's also a liberation because it also means that the dogmatism that went along with it is gone. Now I experience it as a freedom. You can't pretend to cover the whole thing, it's impossible.

JPN: What is your selection vehicle then?

JW: There are shows that I cover because they're important but I must say, it's very much a matter of intuition and knowledge and I don't say this to avoid the subject. For me intuition is a combination of the knowledge and experience that I have. But somebody else might make different choices. Again it's not a matter of truth or dogma.

JPN: Sabine, do you recognize this scenario?

SV: I do see the tendency in the daily newspaper to go faster and faster and pieces having to be shorter and shorter. There is no room for long reviews in the newspaper. And actually, there are no readers who have the time to read long pieces. It's just the wrong place. As I pointed out earlier, we have three new magazines in Berlin created this year during a recession! Where do they come from and why are they successful? So there are new spaces for all these essay-length pieces, where you can promote one artist, that doesn't fit into the daily papers anymore. For my part, I have always tried to get past this concept of a review, for me it has always been a conservative style. Now, I've moved to the opposite: I'm the literature editor, I fight for my page like a mother and fill it with reviews because this is the only nest, the only ghetto I have where I can get these five books reviewed. I don't want interviews, there's room for those on other pages. I want the object to be observed and reviewed. Very classical, reactionary I would have called it before, but now I'm protecting it.

LOE: If you woke Balzac in his grave and took a book that was published in 2004 he could still read the novel and understand that it is a novel, but if you woke up Cézanne, who died in 1906, and took him to a contemporary show he wouldn't even understand that it was art.

RJ: I want to actually pick up on that, in terms of two great changes and I think this is whether it's journalism in a mass media market or a specialised market. Just in recent history and I would pin it on Warhol's career, not Warhol himself, but that time period and it's a point that Arthur Danto made over and over again: we have arrived at a period where it is very easy to mistake a Brillo box for what it is if the theory did not precede the experience. And before, the artists (Cézanne) drove the car for a while. Now the car has stopped and the critics are driving. That's also when you see artists having a new interest in writing criticism, because the power of the written word within a media and information culture is bigger and they would be seen by a much larger audience than through any single painting. In that sense the theory has to precede the experience for the experience to mean anything (i.e. Cézanne). The critic has not only more responsibility, but also another kind of power that I think is very interesting. It's also a tremendous opportunity. And just to add to that the diversity that you were talking about. After the 'pictures' generation an academy of multiculturalism was produced. Now this is very difficult to say if you are pale, male and stale but I think it's time to begin to disassemble that as well. And it's the job of the critics to do that.

JPN: Mårten, do you identify with these changing conditions?

MA: There are a number of dogmas and it's definitely the critic's job to disassemble them. I don't agree that it is the critic who drives the car though. I think the curator is driving, the institution is driving the car by producing theory, producing thoughts that generally get recycled in the mass media. I think that's a big challenge for the years to come.

JPN: But what should we have instead of reviews?

MA: The problem, as far as relational aesthetics are concerned, is that it's much easier to address it as a journalist by doing an interview, than it is writing a review or a comment on it. A colleague of mine was recently 'bashed' in public because he had been writing about the venues of relational aesthetics in Stockholm without attending each and every project. He wrote a 'tendency article' and this was seen as very unfair. But I think that's the sort of risk we have to take. The important thing has to be: there is a comment, there is an opinion, and that opinion can be met and then there can be a discussion.

JPN: But that sounds like a review in a way.

MA: Well, a review in the sense that it is a comment but it can be a short text of three lines and it can also be longer. A review is a genre, with all that comes with that, and that's what has to be broken up.

LOE: I think that I agree with you a little bit. What we are lacking today is a new young generation of art critics really fighting for something. And I don't agree that it's impossible to do it. The importance of Nicolas Bourriaud for instance, apart from his writing of course, is that he has been a promoter of a group of artists that he has worked together with. It's his concept of relational aesthetics that we have been talking about for years now. In this book Post-production he takes a stand and that's what I want to see a younger generation of critics do. But I don't see that. It's so quiet now and lukewarm. And I want it hot! That change must come from the young people, not from me.

JPN: Is it lukewarm in Holland as well?

JW: I think art gets the criticism it deserves. For myself, I don't know at what age you should stop fighting but I find that there is a whole lot to fight for and defend and that's why I continue writing.

JPN: You also mentioned that you are interested in cultural politics. Do you think that now art has become more political and more social, that the critics' role is also to discuss these topics?

JW: Yes, I think so and I think that the review format is still very valuable. I don't have trouble with it at all. It's an excellent form, among others. It's a way of trying to

initiate a debate, if you manage to be really sharp.

MA: The problem is, if we look at the situation in Sweden, where people write predominantly reviews and predominantly positive ones, that makes the cultural page boring and pretty stale. I think the tepid feel very much comes from that and from the editorial principle – that we only write about what's good and interesting.

LOE: But since there are no clear front lines, this feeling of half-heartedness is there as well.

JW: You can create your own front line, right?

LOE: That's what you didn't want to do, if I understood you correctly.

MA: The problem is at the base there. When you started to write, there was a front line: modernism and post-modernism. Today it doesn't exist.

LOE: It was a big fight.

MA: Yes, and there hasn't been a big fight about aesthetics since then. Those paradigm shifts don't come every year.

JPN: But isn't there a front line today around post-colonialism?

MA: But everyone agrees with each other. The political correctness around it is very strong.

SV: I don't think we should overestimate our role – we can't create the front line: we describe it, mediate it, talk about it, try to take a position but we're not creating it. If the artist isn't raising the temperature, we can't go in and do it.

RJ: That may be true in newspapers but I think other critics can, by pointing out that the art is not doing it. And taking that stand, I really do think that criticism is in a much more powerful position, thanks to Mr. Warhol and others. And I think we can make that stand. I like your comment that art gets the review it deserves or it doesn't get any review at all which is the most condemning sort of thing (like the tree that falls in the woods and nobody hears it). I think we can use our silence, but I also think we can use a voice to write about how uninteresting a number of exhibitions have been that it almost caused me not to write the review.

MA: Yes, I mean that's the kind of articles we should write more often.

JW: But that's what I mean by creating your own frontline. If you create your own discussion and you put forward the values that you think are important – what else can you do? It's the whole reason for

doing this job.

JPN: Janneke, you created your own front line when you were sued by an artist.

JW: Oh yes. Well, that was not a very interesting frontline. He is a painter, Marc Mulders, and he is exhibited in many places in Holland. I don't know about other countries. He sued me for “murder of character”.

RJ: Defamation of character.

JW: Defamation of character. It was interesting because the reasoning that he followed was to prove that this was not a review but a personal piece about him. He lost.

JPN: It was a very interesting example because of what we are talking about here. We have the review format, and you won because it was a review.

JW: This incident, which happened four years ago, was quite interesting. Had he won it would have meant that you could impose rules on this format. So I was very, very happy that he didn't win the case, because it would have been an infringement on freedom of speech. That would have become a big issue.

JPN: I interpret this example as a defence of criticism.

JW: I think it is. You have to want to be critical and it's not always a nice thing to be. But a critic isn't supposed to be nice. I can't want to be liked! It wouldn't work.

JPN: We have many people in the audience who are all eager with questions. Let us start up there:

Carlos Capelán: I have lots of questions and comments actually. I lived part of my life in Central America. I've lived in Spain, in Norway, in the south of Sweden. The power of the young generation in Central America amazes me. 70% of the population is under the age of 25. If you compare it demographically to Europe, it's extreme. The European population is dominated by the older generation and there are fewer and fewer young people. So in order for a young person to make it into the system here, whatever it may be, an old guy has to go. There is a certain status quo that sort of forms and shapes our relation to social structures, but particularly to the artistic structures. The new generation has no frontal line, no avant-garde, not even a desire of avant-garde, but the fight is about being here and now, making sense in the present. And I feel that the younger generation is making sense. I like what is going on with the younger generation, particularly here in Sweden and I see them do lots of things. Not dramatic or heroic things, but they make sense. As I said before, I'm amazed to see so many young people

here. Because boys and girls, there aren't any jobs for you now! Old people have to go before you can get any jobs. So, welcome.

JPN: Any comments?

LOE: There is this problem that I tried to approach before. We need more, younger critics. Every generation of artists needs its critics. If you look at it from an historical point of view something is missing. I agree with you Carlos, but you don't describe the critics, you describe the artists but that generation needs its critics. If we don't get a renewal of the corpus of critics, what will happen?

RJ: The old farts will continue to write.

JW: But there are younger critics, aren't there? In Germany and everywhere, right?

MA: Maybe it's a local problem then.

SV: That's actually why I went into literature. I'm not up to going to openings every Friday evening. I let 25-year-olds take care of that while I read my books at home.

JPN: I think it's quite an interesting remark – the existing critical discourse has been very much embracing since post-modernism. Do you see that the

solution might be: bring in the new kids on the block and this will heat things up? Maybe they are immediately embraced by a certain type of mentality. And this is why there are new ways for a critical generation to be anti-heroic, evasive. Do you identify with this?

JW: Maybe in the meantime I could just say something. There's this anti-global cliché which I still like very much: think globally, act locally. And I really believe in that. You have to try to be open to things happening in different places. You have to be informed and at the same time be aware of the limits of what you can do. But the important thing is to become engaged in the local issues. If you can't inspire, then the rest will be in vain as well. That's how I feel about it.

Lars Nittve: I just want to comment on the idea of tepid ideas and youth or age. First of all, I think that if you talk to young artists in the art schools or just out of art schools I don't think it's a problem at all for them. They are really on their toes and I think they see the climate they're in as quite lively. And they create their own scenes and their own platforms that may not look the way they look to us. It might be that if you feel that it's lukewarm then you're a little bit too old and you're not in touch any more with that. Sometimes one has to accept that. I think you can only bridge so many artistic generations. Sec-

ondly, if you look at the Swedish critics I think the median age is probably 40, which is not that old, from my perspective at least. Probably about 80% are about 40 and actually they're not all old farts. It's a relatively young group of writers. And some of them are definitely ten years younger than that also. So we should put this into perspective.

MA: I agree. There are a few younger critics born in the seventies. But as you say there's a very large group born at the end of the sixties. And that might be a problem. I'm one of them. The problem with the tepidity has nothing to do with art but everything to do with art criticism. And that might be the reason why younger people do not look to criticism as a potential career, as something interesting that they want to get involved with. Which is to say they prefer to become artists or curators.

JPN: How do you see your target group as a critic?

MA: My public is the general audience that I would like to be as broad as possible.

Voice in the audience: I want to go back to subjects discussed earlier on: to the role of the art critic. You mentioned that because art forms are changing or exhibition forms are changing, that should also reflect upon art criticism. Do art critics have to change the format and abandon the review form? You also

said that “the curator is driving the car”. The role of the curator has been discussed a lot during the last decades and as a consequence we also have to discuss institutions and art critics. Perhaps it could be interesting to discuss how the relationship between the artist and the curator should be. Could you elaborate on that?

MA: For me the problem begins when the critic starts copying the press release. I sometimes recognize entire sentences from the press release in the reviews. That’s extreme but it’s also a mirror of a general condition where theory is no longer a tool in the hand of the critic as a doctor who diagnoses and is the only one who has those tools. Today, art is very self-aware in a theoretical sense and often the production of knowledge, of thought and of ideas, happens in the galleries or in the institutions and it gets ‘replicated’ in criticism more than commented on.

JW: I don’t know whether it has always been this way. You have critics who look with their ears instead of their eyes and others who really have a vision about what art is. When I started out, press releases didn’t exist for exhibitions and there were no press people in museums, so one wasn’t so easily tempted to copy sentences. But I remember from then, just as now, that there were only a few people who had a real vision of art and who were capable of creating a new view of things. So I don’t know if

what you describe is specifically new.

MA: I think that the theoretical self-awareness in the production line has increased during the last decade.

JPN: You have the artists, a curator selecting the artists and you have a critic. Is the critic reviewing the curator or is the artist reviewing art?

RJ: It depends on whether you have 200 words or 2,000 words to work with. But in a sense the curator is at least as creative as the artist. And the critic can also be at least as creative as the curator or the artist and there are plenty of examples of that – the Medici collection tells us much more about the Renaissance than the unparalleled brilliance of Michelangelo as a single figure. So collectors, critics, curators can be at least as, and sometimes even more, creative than artists and it is ultimately the responsibility of the critics to pass judgement or comment on the curators because they’re the ones mixing the cocktail.

JPN: Comments?

LOE: Why is the curator looked upon as such a bad figure in the Swedish debate? I don’t know how it is in Holland but we’ve had this discussion for years. Why is he bad? Because he stifles the original meaning of a piece of art – it’s like a harness that you put on the work. But that starts from a deep misunder-

standing of the meaning of a piece of art. There is no fixed meaning to a work of art. We art critics don't discover the meaning of a piece of art. We are co-producers, sometimes even producers of the meaning.

SV: No. I think there's quite a lot of art that has a fixed meaning and the artist knows about the meaning and does all he can to bring out the meaning, to show it or to transport it. I understand we are mediators of this meaning and we try translating it to the public. To be honest: most of our job is really to explain to normal people who have not studied history of art, who do not have time to read theory in art magazines, and to tell them what the show is about. And the curator is part of this business. You mentioned earlier, Janneke, that there was no press personnel in museums before, but exhibitions and shows didn't have the same impact as they do now.

LOE: But do you believe in an original fixed meaning of art?

SV: Sometimes, of course!

LOE: Oh, well that's your problem.
[*Laughter in the audience*]

RJ: I just want to jump in and say two things about the institutional theory of art. Doctors and lawyers and physicists are too busy to pay attention to what's

going on in the art world, so our job is in part to inform them about that. And whether a piece of art has a fixed meaning in history or not, whatever meaning we lend to it, actually it's not going to matter. And whatever meaning the historians lend to it is finally not going to matter because that guy right there [*meaning Lars Nittve*] is going to decide what goes into museums and what story it tells. Not Lars himself, but the museum as institution and the committee on acquisitions. Those are the ones who are ultimately going to tell the tale and ultimately what we may or may not have to say is window-dressing on what's right upstairs. So if you want to find out what the art means, go upstairs, don't talk to art critics. But the best we can do is write a first draft and urge meanings in certain directions, but we're going to be pushing up oak trees by the time it's decided whether our passions or interests are ever going to be a part of the historical chorus.

MA: As a critic you should use art as a partner with whom you discuss the world and the state of the world in front of an audience.

RJ: I think that's about the best we can do. I hope that there could be a domino effect here and Clement Greenberg and Charles Baudelaire are good examples of this – that we could push a certain agenda, because there are only so many square metres of wall space. There are certain artists who I think

should be there and some whom I deeply believe should not be there. And if I could have some effect on making sure the group I'm interested in is there, then I've done my job as a critic.

LOE: Back to curating. If you deny what I've just said, then you have to deny that an intelligent curator puts together a constellation of works that has never been together before. A good curator is a sort of catalyst for new meanings that the artist didn't see or couldn't produce on his or her own.

RJ: I would say that for criticism too. The last person I want to talk to is the artist when I'm sitting down to write a review. They've had their chance, now it's my opportunity.

LOE: It's an underestimation of what the curators do. If you don't understand this, you've missed a very important part of what a curator does.

MA: I think that the debate has died out. The hatred towards the curators. I think they are normalized in the business today.

LOE: It's quieter now, but a few years back, the curator was a nasty figure who stifled the works of art. Voice in the audience: I was going to ask about the role of beauty in art. In the history of art, beauty has been very important. For a long time now it hasn't

had such an important role. Do you think it might be coming back into fashion again?

MA: Well, I've heard that it is – in the States.

SV: I also heard about a project taking place next year about beauty.

RJ: There was an exhibition maybe three or four years ago at the Hirshhorn called Beauty and Dave Hickey has written passionately about that issue. And I'm afraid you're on the tail end of the wave. You missed your beauty opportunity. [*Laughter*]

JPN: Any more comments?

Voice in audience: I have one question for Lars and one for Mårten. Lars, you spoke about the importance of integrity and I wonder if the newspaper doesn't let you speak about something you feel is very important, then where's your integrity? And Mårten, what is the problem when you have the general public as your audience – doesn't that mean that your cultural pages are some kind of 'light' version of your text? If everybody is your audience you have to speak in a very simple way to make them understand what you're saying. How can you expect everybody to make an effort?

MA: I can't expect everybody to read my articles.

That would be naïve of me. The general public is the wrong word, I mean a wider audience. By making clear that art isn't a segment of society, completely isolated in itself, I have an important role to make it part of a wider public debate.

JW: I agree.

LOE: Your question was about my integrity wasn't it? Well, Dagens Nyheter won't allow me to speak about it or write about it. On the other hand, I don't own the paper I'm working for. It's their property, I can't decide for them. I can resent or dislike that I don't have the opportunity to speak about what I want to speak about.

JW: Isn't your credibility at stake?

LOE: Yes, it could be. We're in the middle of this process. I don't know where it will end because it's ongoing.

JW: If everybody knows there's a subject you're not supposed to write about, who knows how many other subjects [...]?

LOE: There are many subjects I can't write about: I don't write film reviews or [...].

JW: No, I mean that they prohibit you to write

about. That's what we're talking about now, right?

LOE: Yes, but there are many things I can't write about. I can't write about theatre, I can't write about many things. I guess it's the same with you. You can't review everything, can you?

JW: No, but we're talking about the fact that you were prohibited to write about a certain subject, that was what the issue was. So if everybody knows that this is the case, then your credibility is at stake.

LOE: Do you have any suggestions as to what I should do?

JW: No, I'm just asking a question.

LOE: But do you have any suggestions?

JW: Well if it's really so, then it seems to me that your position as an art critic at this particular newspaper has become difficult. That's how I would feel about it.

LOE: Yes, I do feel it's difficult, that's what I tried to explain before.

JPN: I don't think we'll get any further with this subject. One last question from the audience before we conclude. Carlos.

CC: I would like to go back to the administration of meaning. It's up to the artist to redefine, or define, or handle the very issue of aesthetics: is this art or why is this art. But that gives both the art critics and the curators other chances. The bi-product of art has also become a part of the formal repertoire of the contemporary artist. But then I was thinking that maybe art criticism is not an essence: it is always related to a very concrete social and cultural context. So maybe art criticism is not only a bi-product of art but maybe also a bi-product of journalism in many cases.

JPN: The difference between journalism and criticism, how do you envisage that line?

SV: Review and analysis. A journalist has to report what there is, a critic has to analyse and reflect on it.

JW: The word critique means distinction. You distinguish between things.

SV: A journalist has to try to be objective.

JPN: In the discussion we have had today, I could sense a wish to try to change the style of reviewing the arts because of the changing conditions on the art scene. Some of you mentioned that we were heading towards journalism.

MA: I think that's risky. The value in criticism lies in its subjectivity. For my part, that's what I want to keep doing.

LOE: Reflection, commentary, analysis and interpretation – that's not journalism.

JPN: If there is a pressure from our present-day media structure it looks like things are going in that direction. But it seems that you don't want that to happen. So concretely, in what way can the art critic change this evolution? What means are there today? We know there is the specialised media. But the big media exist and they still have a large audience.

JW: Perhaps things will change. It's possible that this whole debate will become much less important. It probably already has. So be it. It will be taken over by museums doing their own propaganda and their own advertising.

CC: The reporter has to be objective and has to inform. The journal doesn't. A journal has an agenda. A journal is very much about all things contemporary. So the role of journalism is something else, and I was talking about journalism in that sense.

MA: You're speaking about committed journalism? I suppose art criticism might have something to learn from journalism with an agenda.

CC: I don't mind the connection.

JW: But I don't quite understand. I think art criticism for a newspaper is very personal. The most important instrument that you have is your power of conviction. Your personal commitment. That's it. I find that an important thing to do but of course, yes, I see developments where museums have their own ways of getting information across.

LOE: Yes, but there is also another aspect to it, namely, when Ronald spoke earlier about the specialisation, contemporary art is a highly specialised area and another role for the art critic is that of a teacher. You talked about convincing and trying to explain to a non-expert audience who are interested in contemporary art. They want to know what's going on, what issues are on the table and what the agenda is.

JW: Yes, but nowadays if the public wants to know what is going on it's just to look it up on the internet where you can find all sorts of things. This is a new way to spread information that didn't exist 20 years ago. So maybe the public will decide that they can do without the critic.

LOE: But someone has to write the text that you find on the internet.

SV: That's taken care of by the press officer at the museum.

JPN: That was a good way to end this seminar. Blame it on the press officer.

To conclude: First we talked about the different roles of the critic, and the participants in the panel advocated different standpoints. We traced two kinds of ideal critics: on the one hand the multi-functional critic who can be a curator, a writer of essays in journals and articles in daily newspapers. Here the different fields provide mutual nourishment, and as long as there are clear borders and the audience knows what role the critic is playing, this position was agreed upon as being acceptable. The other position is a pure, idealistic position, where the critic gets his or her income from a newspaper or an organisation outside the art world. You don't get involved too much with the art world, you are a little bit of an outsider and you see art from this position. Then we talked about the changing conditions in art and the art world and we could see differences there too. Because of the abundant access to information, the critic can't be this old teacher and educator that he was before. He has to take on a new attitude. And it might be that the critic can go in and make more judgements today than he did before.

Participants

Mårten Arndtzén (b. 1968) has worked as an art critic and arts journalist for radio, television and the press since 1992. He has been a contributor to the arts department of Sveriges Radio (Swedish Radio, national public radio) since 1993, and to the Swedish daily newspaper Expressen since 1999 (editorially responsible since 2001). (MA)

Carlos Capelán (b. 1948 in Montevideo, Uruguay) is an artist and a professor at the Bergen National Academy of the Arts, Norway. In 2004 he showed *Ceci n'est pas une vidéo* at Moderna Museet, Stockholm. He has recently participated in the Photo Biennale, Berlin and has also shown at Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales, Montevideo, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Galería Metropolitana and Fundación Atlántica TransArt, in Santiago, Chile, 2005. Carlos Capelán divides his time between Santiago de Compostela, Spain, Lund, Sweden, and Moravia, Costa Rica. (CC)

Lars O Ericsson (b. 1944) has been Associate Professor of Philosophy, Stockholm University, since 1977 where he currently teaches art theory. From 1987–2004 he was art critic at the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter and from 1989–1994 a regular contributor to Artforum. He published *Mordet på Tensta konsthall* (Murder of Tensta Art Gallery), 2005. Lars O Ericsson lives and works in Stockholm and Paris. (LOE)

Ronald Jones, American artist and critic, is currently Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Konstfack, University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, and is on the visiting faculty at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Städelschule Frankfurt am Main, Germany. He has also taught at The Royal Danish Academy of Art, Copenhagen, Yale University and Columbia University in New York. He has been a contributor to Artforum and Frieze. Ronald Jones lives in Stockholm. (RJ)

John Peter Nilsson (b. 1957) has been a curator at Moderna Museet in Stockholm since 2004. From 1999–2002 he was Editor-in-Chief for NU: The Nordic Art Review, and 1996–1999 for Siksi, The Nordic Art Review. Besides being a freelance art critic for the Swedish daily Aftonbladet from 1986–2004, he organised several exhibitions as an independent curator, among others The Nordic Pavilion at The Venice Biennale, 1999. He co-curated (with Magdalena Malm) The Moderna Exhibition 2006 at the Moderna Museet in 2006, a survey of Swedish contemporary art. John Peter Nilsson is Vice President of Swedish AICA. (JPN)

Lars Nitvø (b. 1953) taught art history at Stockholm University from 1978–1985. He has been an art critic for Svenska Dagbladet, Stockholm, and Artforum. In 1986 he was appointed Chief Curator at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm after which he

served as Director of Rooseum – Centre for Contemporary Art in Malmö, Sweden 1990–1995. In 1995, he became Director of Louisiana Museum for Moderne Kunst in Humlebæk, Denmark. From 1998–2001 he was Director of Tate Modern in London and in 2001 he became Director for Moderna Museet. (LN)

Ann-Sofi Noring (b. 1955) has a BA in art history and the history of literature from Uppsala University. She was Curator for the Art Department in Solna, Sweden, from 1980–1986, Curator for the Swedish Travelling Exhibitions, 1986–1992, Head of Information at The National Public Art Council 1992–2001 and Head of Education and Programmes, Moderna Museet, Stockholm 2001–2003. She has been Head of Exhibitions and Collections, Moderna Museet since 2003. (A-SN)

Margareta Tillberg is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. She has a PhD in art history from Stockholm University. She has lived in the Soviet Union/Russia for extended periods and has published on a wide range of aspects on Russian culture and art. Based on extensive research in Russian archives her Coloured Universe and the Russian Avant-Garde. Matiushin on Colour Vision in Stalin's Russia 1932, Stockholm 2003. Her present project deals with design and cybernetics in the Soviet Union during the

Cold War. Margareta Tillberg was a board member of Swedish AICA 2003–2006. (MT)

Sabine Vogel (b. 1955 in Künzelsau/Baden-Württemberg, Germany) has a PhD in art history, and was an editor for the daily newspaper taz (die tageszeitung) and the journal neue bildende kunst. She has curated exhibitions in Johannesburg, Istanbul and Berlin and worked as curator and programme coordinator at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of Cultures of the World) in Berlin. Since 2000, Sabine Vogel is Editor-in-Chief for literature at the Berliner Zeitung. (SV)

Janneke Wesseling has been an art critic at the NRC Handelsblad, Amsterdam for the last 20 years. She teaches art theory and art criticism at the Royal Academy of Art in the Hague and at the University of Leiden, Netherlands. Her numerous publications include books on the artist Jan Schoonhoven, 1990 and Het museum dat niet bestond (The museum that didn't exist), 2004 a collection of essays on the role of the museum and contemporary artistic practice. Since 2002 she has chaired the Dutch branch of the AICA. In 2003 Janneke Wesseling was awarded the Jan Bart Klaster Prize for art criticism, a prestigious biennial prize for the advancement of Dutch art criticism. (JW)