(In)Visibility

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The dynamic of contemporary culture is dominated by the diktat of visibility. The degree of visibility of social, political, economic and cultural events, of things and people, in public imagery, is considered a prime indicator of a society's democratic credentials and of the quality of the public domain. Visibility is associated with openness and communication, and is taken as prima facie evidence of the orderliness of society and its political makeup. Invisibility is in this logic the uncontrolled, the repellent or the repressed; but it is also that which still awaits disclosure. From this viewpoint, the reality of the invisible plays no explicit part in the sociocultural and political debate, but the longing to reveal is all the stronger – to the point of explosiveness.

Within the regime of visibility, the visual media generate an incessant stream of images while members of the public are also constantly visualizing their experiences. However, this plethora of images does not confirm the success of the ideology of visibility; on the contrary, it exposes the decline of that ideology. There is a growing scepticism towards images, manifesting itself as public doubts about their authenticity and evidential status. These doubts can apparently only be countered by yet more images, without a point of satisfaction ever being reached.

In this baffling situation, any visual message or social agenda is out of the question. What position does art take in this situation? What contribution can artists, designers and architects make, with all their commitment and legitimizations, in this 'lost' public domain? And what specific developments in today's visual culture are relevant here? *Open* 8 explores these questions with the help of a guest editorial panel consisting of Jan van Grunsven, artist, and Willem van Weelden, artist and researcher/commentator in the domain of new media. Both are directly and explicitly occupied with issues relating to public space and the public domain, and both support taking a critical, defiant attitude in practice. In the introduction, 'Viewing: Seeing: Looking Away' the guest editors expand their views on the problems of visibility and invisibility.

In a condensed version of Chapter 1 of his new book *The Regime of Visibility*, to be published this autumn, Camiel van Winkel offers examples from fashion, art and design to demonstrate that today's culture suffers not so much from an excess of images as a deficit. This is followed by a visual contribution from Pascale Gatzen, a designer operating on the borderline of fashion on art whose work places a critical accent on the treatment of fashion in photography. In his essay 'The Post-Monumental Image', Jouke Kleerebezem argues for strategies in this mediatized, computerized culture that will lead to 'enduring visibility'. In 'Transparency & Exodus', the British culture critic and activist Brian Holmes explains how experimental art has stamped its signature on contemporary social protest movements. In 'Wild Images', I myself describe the increasing influence of amateur images on news and opinion. In 'Empire and Design', the Belgian philosopher Dieter Lesage contends that the stress placed by architects, artists and designers on the visual identity of territories is actually a concession to a postpolitical situation; he strives for a form of resistance that avoids this pitfall. Henk Oosterling, in 'The Public Existence of Homo Informans', reflects on events surrounding the American artist Steve Kurtz of the Critical Art Ensemble, who was arrested on suspicion of wire and mailfraud. The architectural theorist Wouter Davids contributes a column on a work of art by Santiago Sierra made for Museum Dhondt-

Dhaenens in Deurle, Belgium.

Further, *Open* 8 reports on a discussion conducted by Jan van Grunsven and Willem van Weelden with Arno van der Mark from the multidisciplinary design group DRFTWD Office Associates about a design attitude in which visibility and autonomy are secondary. Willem van Weelden interviewed the French conceptualist group Bureau d'Études, that produces maps intended to make 'the organization of capitalism' visible; one such map, titled *The System*, is included as an insert in *Open* 8. This issue of *Open* also documents a private discussion on the present-day legitimization of art school courses for art in public space, starting from the assumption that the Netherlands lacks a politically engaged practice or tradition regarding public space art; the participants were Jeanne van Heeswijk, Henk Slager, Jouke Kleerebezem and Jan van Grunsven, Henk Oosterling took the chair.

Jorinde Seijdel is an independent writer, editor and lecturer on subjects concerning art and media in our changing society and the public sphere. She is editor-in-chief of *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain* (formerly known as *Open. Cahier on Art & the Public Domain*). In 2010 she published *De waarde van de amateur* [The Value of the Amateur] (Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam), about the rise of the amateur in digital culture and the notion of amateurism in contemporary art and culture. Currently, she is theory tutor at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and Head of the Studium Generale Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. With Open!, she is a partner of the Dutch Art Institute MA Art Praxis in Arnhem.

Tags

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