

**Made  
To Act by Many Others**

**A score  
by Joël Verwimp**

**Extending the work of  
John Latham and Barbara Stevini**

The Idea to connect artists to organizations which are situated outside the traditional art context aims at a politically active encounter between institutions, individuals, and art practices that address the public sphere on a civic level. In order to extend my research to some of the central organizations of the city's infrastructure, this score looks at the 'invisible' poetics of publicness. For me, the manager's decision to title the program *Dis-Placement* points to the transformative potential that issues of negation hold for artistic research. The prefix 'dis' not only allows us to look back at APG and begin to understand the unmarked aesthetic and organisational ideologies that structure our art making, it also leads us forward, helping us imagine a new outside. Although contemporary art often refutes the idealization of knowledge, my research is nonetheless bound to the framing of art as a discourse about locating the interior.

## Prelude

A short dialogue between Nina, Joël and Anja



**J:** *Is this your first time at the library on a Sunday?*

**N:** *No, I came once before to the AGB for a conceptual writing workshop and really enjoyed meeting the woman who was conducting that interactive writing session.*

**J:** *So you actually came here because of the program that was put on by the sonntagsbureau team. This is very different from most people who come here to work, read, or just enjoy spending time inside the building. The cultural program which is curated by the sonntagsbureau is above all a political statement directed at a need for libraries to be open on Sundays.*

*A: Maybe you could host a workshop here one of the next weeks and engage yourself even more?*

*J: The utopian vision of the Sunday program is to open the library to the people who actually use the library and see how far that usage can be stretched into levels of engagement and responsibility for a common space.*

*N: Yes, that's a beautiful vision. I can see that the people at the AGB feel very at home here. Although there isn't any feeling of community or ownership, most people feel extremely welcome.*

*A: I believe that people need to be pushed a little bit to open their eyes and feel addressed. A big part of what I do here is to point out the potential of individual agency.*

*J: One of the central questions is what makes this library a public library? The simple answer is the fact that the doors are open for anybody to walk in and read all the books without registration or any other form of legitimization.*

*N: This also explains the diversity.*

*A: It's very powerful to experience a sense of inclusion within the exclusive setting of a library.*



**Made  
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Score for a Real-Time Sculpture

Six iterations of a score by Joël Verwimp, fellow of ZK/U in the Artist Dis-Placement program as part of the Creative Europe *Artecitya* Project in cooperation with the sonntagsbureau at the Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek AGB/ZLB

**General opening statements** that introduce a score to a potential addressee set the stage and clear the air. In the case of this score, I say: the work exists to make visible and show off the concept of commoning/commons both on the macro and micro scale, as hyper-object as well as nano-object. The score does so by following the organistic autopoiesis and by building extensions into and through public/non-public space. The word *commoning* brings to life the essential social element of *the commons*. The *Here* - the commons - of this score for commoning is the place of the public library, as exemplified by the Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek AGB/ZLB

The act of commoning draws on a network of relationships made under the expectation that we will each take care of one another and with a shared understanding that some things belong to all of us—which is the essence of the commons itself. This score intends to make visible the commons of the library, which already exists. This score does so from a position already being enacted by others. This score thus displaces the artist and extends into the library as real-time sculpture. Surprisingly, the first draft of this score enforces an act of withdrawal. Six addressees are to be confronted with a proposal of profound intimacy, particularity, and solidity. Like the particular situation of the library itself, the score speaks to a general condition, but does so privately. Its readers in the library thus address that privacy - accepting and interpreting what they can, rejecting that which they cannot understand or accept. As with any commons, the negotiation of intimacy and the particularity of what is shared requires the contours of both *Yes* and *No*.

**Everything already exists.** In our daily life, for example, we all enact a vast number of actions and activities that lay outside of capitalist ideology. We all already express the anarchistic, communistic, and altruistic in our daily lives, but we generally fail to acknowledge these behaviours as such. Commons (still) exists - of course not in the sense of organisations like Uber or Airbnb - but rather, for example, in the sharing of language and how language, by nature belonging to us all, only develops through our use of it.

In order to conduct its research, this score employs the notion of object only in the states of *hyper* and *nano* and only within an understanding of the object as counter to itself. The produced gaze toward ‘counter-object’ is the process of turning the investigation of object toward its actions.. Such a shift further demands that the artist-researcher operates in multiple 'forums', or spaces of publicness, engaging not only with representational processes but also with local citizen offices, park officials, housing agencies, and the media. All these are, in the end, also the addressees of this draft. While administrative and organisational bodies *are addressed* in person, through emails, physical meetings, and talks; simultaneously, these “participants in context”, *address* in turn: they build up a record of events using cameras, computers, smartphones, and other recording devices (such as my memory). These devices

and their produced records inadvertently capture vast amounts of spatial information about the immediate environment. The commons and its performance is thus expressed in the hyper and nano, in the general and particular, networked through bodies and objects into a complex of site/meeting/person/device/record/ organisation. The commons records into itself from all angles, its intersections provide layered and multiplicit information about the depth and volume of that particular site/meeting/person/device/record/organisation. The resultant architectural models built from this data are the basis for reflectively re-materializing the nano-objects andre-connecting the multiple layers of the score.

**An extension** presupposes that any finished work of architecture is nonetheless there to be expanded upon. The art of *extending practice* perceives of artistic works and methods of creation as only tentatively finished. Here, any artwork is an invitation for extension, and extension, rather than override or circumscribe an artwork, seeks to exist in relation. An extension, in the simplest sense, is a method of creating network, discourse, co-creation, and mutuality in artistic processes by tremulously disregarding the ways that artists mostly seek to frame and thus close and finish their works. Here, I am most interested in how extension exists in art as a practice toward historical and collaborative relations between artists and the social environment. *I extend upon your work* is a statement fundamental to the ways that artists reconstruct or respond to the works of previous artists, as well as engage in co-creative practices within society. It is particularly the act of extending the practice of another - by relating performatively to them - that I wish to engage through this score at the AGB.

Extensions are built on site at the library without reliance on the simplistic differentiations that generally isolate books from other objects in the library, or administrative tasks from visitor activity. The organisation, structure, atmosphere and the physical building of the library itself are perceived in their togetherness in order to construct extensions that might expose dichotomies of public/non-public.. The score for extending thus proposes a way to conceive of artistic practice in architectural terms which conceive of the structural in terms of how the sociological is interlaced with the material.

The extension, though it builds on something external to itself, enters into that external thing, and becomes a part of it. By being such, it changes the very nature of the thing which it extends by so extending. Most interestingly, extension does not change the nature of its grounding through direct intervention. The intervention of extension is the creation of an excess layer, an accoutrement, an add-on or supplement. Core to the practice of extending is thus the idea that there is a value in adding on. What can so easily be perceived as excess, for example, might instead give us new eyes upon the heart of the matter. Yet further, the practice of extending is undertaken always with the realization that the ‘source’ is elsewhere than where one is working; it gives no apology for its referential, derivative nature. The



practice of extending is thus a means by which an artist de-centers their own work from themselves and toward what is already there..

As a practice, extending can carry within it the capacity to further foreground the conversational capacities of artworks. This is because a practice of extending, by nature, foregrounds artworks as forms of interaction and responsiveness (because that is how it would treat them). Most importantly, the practice of extending can provide a means by which artists can consider how their relationships to their works, to one another, and between ‘fields of art,’ are related to, and inexorable from, the publicness of artworks. One who extends the practice of another will, by necessity, come up against questions of authorship and ownership as they seek to first draw upon and expand upon the work of another, and then further show it to others. This is not simply to say, in a Confucian manner, that artists should ethically model the open-access collaborative benevolence amongst themselves that they wish to see reflected in society itself. It is instead to say that the publicness of an artwork is in part determined by the nature of the conversations it is able to have. Through practices of extending, this score seeks to actively converse with artistic practices and artworks (examples extend from the open letters of Marcel Broodthaers to my own *When is a House*), and to through that, consider the larger questions as to how artworks and art practices connect with audiences, the ‘public at large’ and wider nets of discourse.

**The library as a hyper-object** is not very true to Object Oriented Ontology’s [OOO] original conceptions. Usually, hyper-objects refer to things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans. The concept of the exorbitant hyper-object is mobilized in OOO to address not only real-world problems such as global warming but also the underlying thought processes wrought by the gridlock of post-Kantian phenomenological legacies. It is in this sense that the notion of the hyper-object can be said to be a contribution to an understanding of organisational behaviours of institutions such as a library. More important, however, is the fact that hyper-objects always withdraw. They are real entities whose primordial reality is withdrawn from humans, saying *No*. Global warming comprises the sun, the biosphere, fossil fuels, cars, and so on. This means that hyper-objects refuse to be fully described as a singularity, just as a single photograph can never capture the complexity of the subject it portrays. However, institutions are usually forced to exist in a singular spacetime - like that mythologically captured in photographs - and to acquiesce, consent, (or simply say ‘yes’) to the purpose as defined by or made through that singularity. By extending the library as a hyper-object, the score withdraws the institution from its supposed reality and its assumed purpose, and into new expressions of its “real time” and its “multiplicity”.

There's a lot of talk, and a lot to be said, for the power of *Yes*. *Yes* supports risk-taking, courage, and an open-hearted approach to life whose grace cannot be minimized. But *No*—a

metal grate that slams shut the opening between one's self and the influence of others—is rarely celebrated. It's a hidden power because it is both easily misunderstood and resists the engagement necessary to understanding. And yet, the agency of a community is grounded in its ability to say no. Here comes a moment when you return the charming gift because you forced yourself to acknowledge its invisible strings; when you turn down the colleague's plea for immediate advice, even the teenage son's expectation that dinner will appear before him—all because you have goals of your own from which you refuse to be deflected. Whether trivial or tormenting, each of these moments is an exercise in that poorly understood power, namely, the power of *No*. *No* recognizes that we are the agents of our own limits, and that such limits, alongside what we consent to, compose the contours of publicness. It is both the tool and the barrier by which we establish and maintain the distinct perimeter of the self, as well as the border between public and non-public. This score thus consciously cultivates *No* to tap the power of the affective terrain in which we perform.

**The nano-object** stands for and materializes the history of saying *No* by the representative bodies of the six public/non-public organisations which have each been addressed with a very particular offering. Narrated by the six protagonists of this draft, every single nano-object tells the story of its proper history. Each offering and its present *No* is listed below in its order of appearance in the score as a nano-object:

1.

*Büro für Bürgerbeteiligung, Bezirksamt Mitte* has been offered a thorough artistic monitoring of citizen engagement based on several local meetings entirely free of charge and without any required work involvement from their part. Their capacity to say *No* has been brought about by the absence of active citizens within the newly set-up office.

2.

*BIM Berliner Immobilienmanagement GmbH* has been offered a full partnership in an effort to renovate and protect an abandoned chapel in the Prenzlauer Berg district. The historical Leichenhalle that has remained in disrepair for years now continues to fall apart. The present *No* demonstrates the organisation's capability to ignore all external pressure to act.

3.

The straightforward proposal to remove the fence surrounding the *Centre for Art and Urbanistics (ZK/U)* has been answered with plain disbelief by one of the centre's directors, calling the proposal "absolutely radical" and exemplifying my "inability to cooperate."

4.

*Straßen- und Grünflächenamt Moabit* has been offered the opportunity to inventory its various architectural structures. Due to the recent merging of the city park agency and the cultural department, the decision against artistic interference was made on the basis of its being unpredictable.

5.

A *group of nine peer to peer artistic researchers* has been offered to engage with each other's notions of sanctuary if they all agree upon a 90 euro payment. "I literally can't" is the dramatic reason behind the group's present *NO*.

6.

*Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin (ZLB)* has been offered a six month/one day a week, free artistic engagement with its organisation. The simple absence of a positive, intersubjective chemistry between the proposing body and the organisation's representatives sufficed for an intuitive rebuff.

These offerings have thus all been rejected based on more or less logical and reasonable grounds. The score in its current draft investigates feelings of inability and ineffectualness to engage in the political sphere and its shaping of urban contexts. Here, the score draws from those very feelings and diverts its pursuit into plausible artworks and transforms the visions for a commons into other models of artistic engagement. This document seeks to express the fundamental means by which failures to materialize very particular offerings turn the score toward dreamspaces that thus open up newly envisioned alternative venues. In such dream-acts - the powerful operation of the feeling of powerlessness, and the ways that performance art is rooted in transforming it - the score circumvents political conditions of publicness as expressed by the particular offerings by reinventing the very notion of venue elsewhere. Here (in the elsewhere), performance art seeks to exemplify possible futures through particular actions that - though they are not the imagined future itself - nonetheless delineate a place for it. The score further challenges the simplistic notion of the symbolic act by questioning how such an act nonetheless seeks to call upon a possible future, and to thus eradicate the supposed symbolism of the act that beckoned it into existence.

This document, for example, might only be a manifestation of the fact that, when the desire to relate doesn't become materialized, it falls into the rhetorical. This is fine because it's a period of both reflexion and development. Learning from what you've already done, talking about that which has already been said, doing what has already been done, is a means toward making an educated projection into possible future models. But, such a period cannot last forever, it is useless to endlessly circle the rhetorical space. The formulation of very particular, solid propositions can bring people to push back, forced into the position to say *No*. This *Score for a Real-Time Sculpture* thus deals with the ethics, not of giving space but of how to respond when somebody or something clarifies the limits of their already extant space by saying *No*, and thus maintains it.

***Made to Act by Many Others*** refers, by its title, to representational democracy and Marcel Broodthaers' Open Letter to Richard Wagner as prime examples for T.J. Demos'

understanding of “multiple time”. Within this score, polyphony is thus applied as an extension to the notion of the “dialogical principle”, talking in “one time” to maintain the multitude. Against so much multiplicity, one could claim: *There is no public!* And there is no clear translation device between public/non-public zones of differentiation anyway. Politics is personal, public is private. Maybe the public is nothing more than *us* as we already are, or maybe it is already dead. One could say no to protect oneself against the extension that publicness might impose upon the intactness of one’s self or one’s work. Nevertheless, in all cases, a body has been addressed and a response was to be expected.

*The six nano-objects of No* have now been integrated in the physical structure of the AGB. They are commented on by short video snippets which were produced along the writing time of this score and published on you tube. The journey of the *real time sculptural extension* of the library, including the six nano-objects, is subsequently staged as a musical for a live audience in the front garden, recreating the journey that brought them there. The combined footage from these events is then reinserted into the score, narrating the borders of publicness. As a written text, the score also documents its own existence and functions as the background for the open letter that eventually will conclude it as a final draft of the score. The work gestures towards human and non-human entanglements and a chronopolitics that acknowledge multiple temporalities of being public, coexisting alongside one another. *Made to Act by Many Others* therefore presents in its current draft, an artwork that already evolves over a considerable temporal duration, across multiple platforms of presentation, involving different media, materials and locations. Its execution also involves a range of people in its realisation, combining human and non-human, organisational structures and urbanistics.

**In 500 characters (or rather 913),** on a civic level,  
the prefix “dis” allows us to look back and locate the interior  
by building extensions into public/non-public space.

*I extend upon your work, this score,  
already being enacted by others,  
requires the contours of both Yes and No.*

Here, in the hyper and nano - a complex of site/person/device/organisation - the score withdraws the library from its supposed reality, into new expressions of its “real time.” An exercise in the power of *No*, the power of the affective locates that which we perform.

A body has been addressed and a response was to be expected - the ethics of how to respond when somebody clarifies the limits of their already extant space by saying *No*. The *real-time sculptural extension* of the library is the journey that brought it here: a written text, documenting its own existence as background for the open letter that will eventually conclude it.