

For a Good Time

dilettantin produktionsbüro: Transitory Spaces of Art Production, Presentation and Distribution

Paola Bonino

The compound name *dilettantin produktionsbüro* [dilettante production bureau] embodies the multi-layered artistic procedures and questions posed by the eponymous artistic collective and the development its practice has undergone over the years. “Dilettante”, a word originated during the Italian Renaissance and then translated almost unchanged into other languages, originally designated the artist as a well-respected researcher who wants to affirm the autonomy of art in opposition to artisans who depend on outside commissions and from whom he wants to distance himself.¹ A little later, with the birth of academies, the difference between dilettante and professionals (trained artists) arose and the word came to indicate someone “who does something because he or she loves it. The actions are driven by passion, not by skill or craftsmanship.”² Goethe and Schiller coined the binary value system around the concepts of the virtuoso and the dilettante, with the latter becoming the outsider of academic and artistic virtues. Dilettante thus places us in the realm of leisure and free time, of an activity not undertaken for income or profit and not recognized by any institutions, laws or contemporaries: everybody can be, at any time and in any field, a dilettante, it is his or her own decision!

Unlike this, “produktionsbüro” brings to mind a well-structured office, where professionals meet and take decisions, manage things, receive clients who recognize and trust them thanks to their certified education, to their fame in professional circles, and, last but not least, to the presence of the office itself. The bureau – borrowed from French “bureau”, which becomes “Büro” in German – has been conceived for material and/or immaterial productivity, which must generate some profit. It also recalls the studio/atelier of many international renowned contemporary artists, whose role has become the one of the manager and entrepreneur, hiring a

1 | See Perniola, M. (2015): *L'arte espansa*, Turin.

2 | Anneli Käsmayr quoted by Elke Bippus in Käsmayr: 2012, p. 33.

number of assistants and collaborators, all deeply involved in the artwork's production process.

Acting along the fluid borders between art and everyday life, trying to catch the sleeping moment when the one dissolves into the other, the *dilettantin produktionsbüro* collective nimbly moves between amateurism, professionalism in art and gastronomy, the production of art objects and art as consumer service, making the ambivalences and contradictions among these realms its field of investigation.

Although one could easily recognize the artist and musician Anneli Käsmayr as the heart and soul of the group, she has always rejected any claim to main authorship or leadership. *dilettantin produktionsbüro* is, in fact, an elastic group, which expands the ranks of its participants depending on the project; each artwork is thus the outcome of a collective working process, involving also collaborations with other artists, designers, and subjects external to the collective.

Starting from this premise, I shall examine two projects by the collective: the artist-run restaurant *dreijahre dining room project* (2007–2010) and the dinner experience *Eating the Forest* (2015). I shall then conclude with some thoughts on possible, future developments. Some historical references, considered of interest in relation to *dilettantin produktionsbüro's* practice and to the present publication, will be made. This is obviously not intended as an extensive overview of the artistic procedures which, starting from the early 20th-century avant-garde, have focused on food, hospitality and ephemeral situations of conviviality.

ART AND BUSINESS – DREIJAHRE DINING ROOM PROJECT, BREMEN 2007–2010

"A. Käsmayr: So what makes a restaurant into art for you?

R. Block: I don't know, but I think it all starts with a claim. It must first be declared a work of art by the person operating it. Then you need a public, some people who are willing to share this concept. Naturally, some guests might feel disturbed by the idea and ignore being part of a work of art."³

While still in a master class at the University of the Arts in Bremen and after some projects which engaged in the production, presentation and shared consumption of food as artistic activity,⁴ *dilettantin produktionsbüro*

3 | René Block, Anna Bromley, Anneli Käsmayr in conversation in Käsmayr: 2012, p. 117.

4 | See, for example, dilettantin menu, which marks the very beginning of *dilettantin produktionsbüro* dinner settings when still in the Art Academy. The project was a response to people questioning if a dinner could be an art work at all and was developed following the idea of a social sculpture, pinpointing specific marks in *dilettantin produktionsbüro's* artistic attitude, e. g. white linen napkins that were printed on with statements such as: "Aesthetic experience as context dependent

opened a restaurant in the year 2007 – involving management consultants and business partners – right in the middle of Bremen’s Viertel district, the most popular, hipster and alternative area of the town. As the name of the project seems to suggest, its duration was strictly fixed to a period of three years (“drei Jahre” in German).

“Before we had done a café project for several weeks and a hotel installation for three days, which were perceived very clearly as artworks. There was no question whether they were art or not. It was in a certain sense not satisfying since we were more interested in the question when art becomes art. So, extending this kind of timeframe, even three months is still a typical exhibition length. But three years are something severely different. Three years are not easily consumed as art. They are much more radical in that sense and since we were looking for this boundary where the thing might actually tip, it felt right.”⁵

Due to the pre-fixed timespan of the project, the necessary condition for its existence was to make the business successful, enabling the work to reach its completion. And the business ran quite well, dishing up a genuine regional cuisine, with fresh and seasonal ingredients. *dilettantin produktionsbüro* was responsible for managing the venture and the cuisine, as well as for the design of the place, aimed at creating a welcoming and relaxing atmosphere, encouraging people not just to have a meal, but to spend time chatting, reading, exchanging opinions and experiences. The staff was made up in part by students from the Bremen University of the Arts, on hire as regular waitresses.⁶

Not too openly advertised as an art project, the restaurant attracted a heterogeneous clientele: artists, people from theater and creative fields as well as grandmothers on Sundays, families, lovers, business people and the young crowd at nights. The artists took advantage of this situation, observing from a protected position how such an artistic operation was perceived by the guests/users of the work, who were aware or unaware of what lay behind the normal restaurant. Although probably not evident for the guests, distracted by the usual activities of the place, the conventional relationship between artist and observer was overturned and the procedures of art production and distribution affected.

As noted by Boris Groys, the traditional understanding of creative work wants it to take place beyond public control and, usually, beyond the con-

embodied experience. Directing life onto art and directing art onto life. The inevitable disaster of not understanding. To see what has not been shown.” The dinners were held in different spaces – a gallery, a restaurant, an industrial space, a private home – and were aimed to explore how the perception of the events was influenced by the space itself, the setting, the people and the intention.

5 | Anneli Käsmaier in conversation with the author, February 2016.

6 | For a detailed description of the restaurant and its activity see Käsmaier: 2012, in particular, the texts by Elke Bippus, Michael Glasmeier, Rolf Thiele and the conversation between René Block, Anna Bromley and Anneli Käsmaier.

scious control of the artist himself; creative work happens in a separate phase of seclusion, in secret, marking a desynchronization of the time of work from the time when the result is revealed.⁷ In the case of *dreijahre*, any secrets are denied: Here, art production, presentation and distribution coincide; the artwork is not only produced in the public eye, but the spectator/guest also takes an active part in this process, and in the profit it generates. *dilettantin produktionsbüro* successfully established a self-sustaining structure that skipped any need for its institutional recognition as a work of art and was independent of the art market; it made a profit without delivering anything finished and ready to be sold, and rather solely through the process of the artwork production.⁸

This brings us to a key issue. If the artwork is a business, but the business is not aimed at virtuous growth, and instead aligned to a pre-fixed end and was stopped the very moment it took off (after three years), can we still consider the project *dreijahre* a real business? The role of the artist as entrepreneur is denied in the very moment when it is affirmed. On the edge between professionalism and amateurism, *dilettantin produktionsbüro* decided to follow neither the rational rules of the enterprise, nor those of the art system:

“Thus *dreijahre* radically treads that narrow line between everyday life and art, since it no longer looks anything like art and is only opened up to the potential space within art as a result of the artist’s own assertions. It is not merely pretending to be a restaurant, it IS a restaurant. Nor is it otherwise described as art, as it would be in the larger context of an art exhibition or based upon a museum setting, for example. It therefore completely sidesteps the obvious criteria according to which one could distinct identify it as art.”⁹

dreijahre situates itself in a long tradition of artist-run restaurants and cafés which, starting from the avant-gardes of the early 20th century (for instance, the Futurist “Taverna del Santo Palato” [Restaurant of the Holy Palate]) shared the common goal of seeking to shorten the distance between art and life, doing it through the most basic human need: nutrition.

Specifically in the revolutionary climate of the late 1960s and the 1970s, various artists experimented with restaurant projects as attempts to escape from the formal, commercial and institutional structures of the art

7 | Groys, B. (2013): Art workers: Between Utopia and the Archive, in: *e-flux journal* #45, May 2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-workers-between-utopia-and-the-archive/> (last accessed March 15, 2016).

8 | “The art market and the industry as we perceive it is very brutal and in a way oppressive and exploitative, the more we were confronted with how it works, who gets paid or not paid, the more frustrated we became with our choice to do this as our profession. It seemed so fake and pathogenic.” Anneli Käsmayr in conversation with the author, February 2016.

9 | Anneli Käsmayr quoted by Elke Bippus in Käsmayr: 2012, p. 35.

world, doing it in good company, encouraged by food and drinks, in spaces designed and authorized by the artists themselves.¹⁰

For the purposes of this essay, and by virtue of the pseudo-business components they involved, I shall focus on projects by conceptual artists Allen Ruppersberg and Gordon Matta-Clark.¹¹ In 1969, Allen Ruppersberg installed a temporary restaurant called Al's Café in downtown Los Angeles, which opened once a week for three months. The interior resembled an all-American coffee shop with hyper-familiar decor. Alongside coffee and beer, clients could order conceptual dishes from the menu; they were based on those one would buy from a coffee shop and cost the same. "Bubble gums and raisins", "Double decker", "Pally Melt – Patty Page Photo (or Reasonable Facsimile) Covered with Toasted Marshmallows" were all assemblage artworks, nominally edible, available for convenient prices. This allowed the artist to achieve a double by-pass, both of the institution (as the place that legitimated the art work) and the market (as the platform for its distribution). But the café was not just an environment installation artwork, it also functioned as a gathering place, and was intended to fill the lack of opportunities to hang out for L. A.'s art community at that time, in opposition to the liveliness of New York and the East Coast. Ruppersberg ran it by himself, doing everything behind the counter (as cook, service manager, bottle washer) and hired waitresses to serve at the tables.

As the name of the place spread, the number of customers grew immensely, forcing the artist to do extra work to get all the necessities for the preparation of the dinners and luckily allowing him to make some money. According to Ruppersberg, "the idea was to set up a situation where anybody was welcome",¹² without great concern for who the clients were or whether they grasped the project as an artwork and the activities inside as performances. Suspicious about the activities going on at Al's Café, located in a slightly seedy area of the town, the police started to investigate the place and finally closed it down; the artist and the staff were arrested officially for having served beer without a license.

In 1971, Ruppersberg extended the concept behind Al's Café to a further project: Al's Grand Hotel, a two-story house in Hollywood, which he converted into a fully-functioning hotel for a period of six weeks. Before its opening, Ruppersberg sent out a brochure advertising the hotel's uniquely decorated and named rooms, such as the Jesus Room and the Bridal Suite, inviting guests to reserve them for rates of 15–30 dollars a night.

10 | See Introduction in Smith: 2013.

11 | A key reference for both artists is the work of Daniel Spoerri. Before opening his well-known Eat Art Gallery (1970), Spoerri turned the Allan Stone Gallery in New York into a three days restaurant (1964) and his room at the Chelsea Hotel into an exhibition (1965). Once back to Europe, he started the Restaurant Spoerri, a serious culinary establishment and a convivial artwork, in which hosts and guests experimented together with the blurring boundaries between art and life.

12 | Allen Ruppersberg interviewed by Constance Lewallen at the Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco, September 21, 2011, in Smith: 2013, p. 120.



Fig. 1: Allen Ruppersberg, Al's Grand Hotel, 1971



Fig. 2: Allen Ruppersberg, Al's Grand Hotel, 1971



Fig. 3: Gordon Matta-Clark, Food



Fig. 4: Gordon Matta-Clark, Food



Fig. 5: Rirkrit Tiravanija, Untitled 1994 (angst essen Seele auf)

“It will be, like Al’s Café, in all respects a full operational hotel, including a bar, a comfortable, relaxing lobby, music, continental breakfast, daily maid service, souvenirs and adjusted rooms for your sleeping comforts [...] The rooms will be open for inspection until midnight, however, everyone is welcome to come, have a drink, and enjoy the luxurious atmosphere whether or not you stay the night.”¹³

While both projects – Al’s Café and Al’s Hotel – claimed they were inclusive and open to anyone who felt comfortable and enjoyed the time spent there, they ironically suggest that “perhaps art is a service industry like any other”¹⁴ and that the artist, who tries to act independently of the institutions and the market in fact can be judged by the same criteria in terms of public acceptance and satisfaction.

During the same years, in New York, on the opposite coast of the USA, young artist Gordon Matta-Clark, fascinated by the alchemical proprieties of food-related processes, was creating, through the selection, preparation and cooking of food, some major artworks, anticipating his famous building cuts and splitting.¹⁵ In early 1971, Matta-Clark thus involved a number of fellow artists in starting the restaurant FOOD, which opened in SoHo thanks to an investment by dancer Caroline Goodden. In order to fully understand the significance of the project, one should consider it in the context of the creative early-1970s SoHo and as part of a cooperative community network which included, alongside FOOD, *Avalanche* magazine, the performance and exhibition space 112 Green Street and the artists’ collaborative Anarchitecture Group. FOOD was less than a business and more than a restaurant, it was an art piece, the place where Gordon Matta-Clark organized special Sunday night guest artist dinners, where artists were invited to design and cook a meal, where performances, food theater and fashion shows were staged (featuring, for instance, edible clothes by fashion designer Robert Kushner) and films shot, alongside many other things which happened on a daily basis. It created also a sort of welfare state for artists, who could earn quick and unproblematic money waiting tables.

“I wanted to show off my/our cooking to ‘the world’. I wanted to have a place to eat with food that I liked that was open when I needed it to be, and I wanted to create

13 | <http://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/archives/i46/> (last access March 15, 2016).

14 | Smith: 2013, p. 118.

15 | “Consider a complete set of nutrient (culinary) operations – [excess delights though simplicity is more convincing].

Selection (the ingredients in their natural forms are separated from the landscape). Preparation (each substance is cut, soaked, mixed in short undergoes a variety of imaginative alterations).

Cooking (here the flame, time and the elements are one’s palette – moisture versus dryness, charring, sautéing, all the degrees of exposure to heat).”

Text from Matta-Clark notebook (1969) quoted in Morris, C. (ed.) (1999): *FOOD: An exhibition by White Columns*, New York/Münster, p. 23.

a work place for artists that had no restrictions on how many hours a day or days a week the artist worked so that they could be free to suddenly drop out as needed to produce their show and still have a job when they're through."¹⁶

The business part was dismissed in the name of art experimentation and an attempt to support artists; Matta-Clark started to lose interest in the project during fall 1972 and, after some years during which Goodden managed the restaurant with some collaborators, it was finally sold.

"Though we consumed food, *Food* consumed us. It was a free enterprise which gave food away much too freely. *Food* (me) was much more concerned with how it looked than how economically it ran and it (Gordon) was much more concerned about how charming, stimulating and friendly it was than how much customers and workers followed the rules."¹⁷

While redesigning the space before the opening of the restaurant, Matta-Clark used his cutting process in a pragmatic way, underlying how for him, as well for his peers, operations with food, architecture, art, fashion and other media were all related in a common attempt to occupy, transform, envelope, consume, digest new spaces and to deconstruct existing structure, anything they were. FOOD and its parallel projects stressed the rules and boundaries of the art system, effecting radical changes in the way and the where art is conceived, created and presented.

The conceptual operations by Ruppertsberg and Matta-Clark have formed a strong reference point for a group of artists who, starting from the 1990s, placed immaterial work, conceptual think-tanks, information, encounters and the critique of institutions at the center of their practices. Although many of them created situations of exchange and conviviality involving edible material,¹⁸ I have decided to focus here on *Untitled* 1994

16 | Caroline Goodden in *Gordon Matta-Clark*, exh. cat. IVAM Centro Julio Gonzalez, Valencia, 1992, p. 370.

17 | From a Letter from Caroline Goodden to Corinne Diserens, September 5, 1992, published in Morris, C. (ed.) (1999): *FOOD: An exhibition by White Columns*, New York/Münster, p. 47.

18 | There are ample names and occurrences to cite, here just a few, mainly taken by Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics: Angela Bulloch set up a café where, as a certain number of visitors sat down, the seats broadcast a piece of music by Kraftwerk (CCC Tours, 1993); Bulloch, together with fellow artist Liam Gillick, offered whiskey to help participants of the performance *An Old Song and A New Drink* to enter a state of trance while the song Ten Commandments of a Man Given to a Woman by Prince Buster played over the sound system (Café Beaubourg, Paris, 1993); Georgina Starr performed lonely and paranoid meal for one, distributing topic-related texts (Restaurant exhibition, La Bocca, Paris, 1993); Philippe Parreno decided to organize a party "occupying two hours of time, rather than square meters of space" (Le Consortium, Dijon, 1995); Rirkrit Tiravanija set up a relaxation area for artists, equipped with a table football game and a full fridge

(*angst essen Seele auf*), a bar that Rirkrit Tiravanija opened at Friesenwall in Cologne in 1994. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's movie *Angst essen Seele auf* [Fear eats the Soul] was broadcast on a television set inside the bar, where, as a reference to the film, just beer and Coke were served. The artist refused to reinforce the event by adding his presence, spending basically all nights outside, watching people coming and going and occasionally pulling beers from the fridge or rewinding tapes, remaining simultaneously "involved and disengaged."

"Anyone arriving to 'watch' or 'view' was immediately absorbed, and became complicit in a social/cultural interchange that offered new models for passing the time and asked new questions about facile separations between art and everything else. Those who passed by were neither included nor excluded. They became partial participants and had no choice but to overhear precise discussions. 'The big other' of Lacan was exposed and something real revealed."¹⁹

The hidden authorship creates an ambiguous situation, which remains suspended, without a precise scope, definition, temporality and location (art or life?). Eluding strategies of control and unwritten rules of fruition, the artist occupied a fractured time and space, in which the unpredictability of what came next enabled the possibility of new and parallel scenarios to happen.

To return to the *dreijahre* project, one can observe a hybrid attitude towards authorship and artists' statements: As noted above, *dilettantin produktionsbüro* acted literally under the eyes of its guests, without loudly claiming the restaurant was an art project (i. e. there were no signs above the entrance door, just a couple of lines on the back of the menu, indicating that the restaurant was an art project for the duration of three years). This created an unclear situation in which the guests of the restaurant (the users of the work) unconsciously contributed to the production and development of the project, while allowing the artist collective to observe its audience and question its own practices. This structure was able to work quite well as long as the traditional protocol of the restaurant was respected.

However, on the last night of *dreijahre*, coming unexpectedly for many of the guests,²⁰ something happened which reversed the rules and the routine of the place. A pompous banquet in the form of a still life was served on the tables in the dining room, but no staff was around. Art was suddenly revealing itself through one of its most traditional forms. At first confused and even annoyed, some guests left the place complaining loudly about the lack of service. After a while, though, people started to

(Exhibition *Surfaces de reparation*, Dijon, 1994). He is also well-known for cooking and distributing Thai Soup inside art galleries and institutions.

19 | Liam Gillick: *Outsiding*. Rirkrit Tiravanija's Places, in: Gillick, L. (2006:) *Proxemics. Selected Writings (1988-2006)*, Zürich/Dijon, p. 269.

20 | *dilettantin produktionsbüro* anticipated on purpose the closing date of *dreijahre* little before the forecast 1095 days. This emphasizes the idea of *dreijahre* as a vanishing place.



Fig. 6: Finissage dreijahre dining room project, 2010



Fig. 7: Invitation to the Finissage, 2010

help themselves and take advantage of the buffet, without looking for many explanations. As night came, a huge party unfolded. The senses were stimulated, an interaction between body and mind was triggered, the tortuous question of the intellect: “So where is the art here”²¹ and “Is this art? Or

21 | Käsmayr: 2012, p. 117.

life? Or something in between?” finally dissolved in the enjoyment of food, music and good company.

A DINNER EXPERIENCE – *EATING THE FOREST*, MILAN 2015

Five years have since passed and during that time much of the work by *dilettantin produktionsbüro* has been dedicated towards creating special temporary atmospheres and conceptual dinners or hospitality settings that respond to a specific context and invitation. Leaving the business aspect to one side for a while, the central question became: “What does it do good for you?” in terms of material nourishment and immaterial fulfilment.²² The focus has been on taste and sensory stimulation, exploring how people’s behavior, discourses and decision-making processes are affected by the shared enjoyment of food, good company and relaxation. In order to create the appropriate atmosphere, the projects often entail a number of disciplines and are developed in cooperation with professionals from different fields.²³

Eating the Forest was a conceptual dinner experience in which I participated together with an exclusive round of seven other invited guests, all women from the art world, in October 2015 at the archive of DOCVA Fabbrica del Vapore in Milan. It was the first in a series of dinners, which, at the moment I write this, are going to happen in various spaces around Europe and the United States.

“The series *Eating the Forest* is about the creation of an atmosphere for one night, it is more of a pompous magical painting that you can sit in, breathe in and perceive with all of your senses.”²⁴

For the event in Milan, Karin Laansoo, Director of the Estonian Contemporary Art Development Center in New York, invited *dilettantin produktions-*

22 | The project *SLOE* (2014) marks the beginning of the series *Tu dir Gutes [do thee good]*. For a public art exhibition in Paderborn, *dilettantin produktionsbüro* created a food truck that moved around the town, offering a heterogeneous audience nourishing food: green juices, tea mixes, herbal spice lemonades and energy cookies made with the recipe of naturalist St. Hildegard von Bingen. As usual in their work, the food served to invite people to stay and engage, have a moment of slowing down or a good conversation, between art and everyday life. <http://www.dilettantin.com/sloe-do-thee-good/> (last accessed March 15, 2016).

23 | See, for example, the performances *Swinging Plasticine* (Errant Bodies, Berlin, 2011) and *Swinging Plasticine Shifted Two* (Note On, Berlin, 2012), in collaboration with artist Michael Fesca. Both performances featured Plasticine dishes by Fesca and the live cooking of food conceived for the occasion by *dilettantin produktionsbüro*. <http://www.dilettantin.com/en-swinging-plasticine/>; <http://www.dilettantin.com/en-swinging-plasticine-shifted-two/> (last accessed March 15, 2016).

24 | Anneli Käsmayr in conversation with the author, February 2016.

büro to conceive a performative dinner space, inspired by the Estonian Forest, featuring the work of artists Kris Lemsalu and Adeline de Monseignat, whom she had worked with before. During the development of the project, fashion designer Julia Heuer and the wood designers Malin Workshop also came on board. *dilettantin produktionsbüro* then created a setting that included an eating experience to allow a different approach to the artworks; for the occasion, the extraordinariness that is art was translated into a very daily use, and the ordinary act of eating was raised to the status of aesthetic experience.



Fig. 8: Eating the Forest, 2015, DOCVA, Milan



Fig. 9: Eating the Forest, 2015, DOCVA, Milan

As guests entered the DOCVA archive, lit up with candles for the occasion, they were welcomed by a long table, decked out solely with artworks: the tablecloth designed by Julia Heuer, the sock cups by Kris Lemsalu, the various plates (wooden trees and utensils by Malin Workshop, glass bowls by Adeline de Monseignat, underwear plates by Kris Lemsalu), the food itself.

Each course (seven in total), accompanied by a specific drink and served on a dedicated artwork/plate, was introduced by *dilettantin produktionsbüro*, who shortly presented the concept and the ingredients of what was about to be eaten, strictly by hand as no cutlery was provided. Dishes such as Cream Cheese & Young Radishes, Mackerel, lactic acid & cabbage, Mushrooms, moss & leaves broth, Cod, kama, lichen savory cabbage, Moose, sea buckthorn & chervil tuber, Apple, beetroot, sour cream & spruces followed one another. The artists worked to one side, cooking on an open kitchenette, where guests could walk around, have a glimpse and ask questions. Once between courses, participants were asked to stand up, wash their hands and approach the kitchen station, where a sensual mix of hyssop anise foam with caviar, fennel and bread crumbs was served right on the back of their hands, to be eaten at once, like a spicy kiss.

Involved in a 360-degree experience, eating the flavors of the Estonian forest with their hands and chatting with the other guests, it was hard to clearly define what was happening: Was it a networking night for women in the art field? An exclusive, highbrow event to promote Estonian culture and to present new creations by the participating artists (we were exceptionally allowed to drink and eat *from* and *on* artworks, which were simultaneously part of an installation and, on request, on sale)? Did any borders exist between the dinner, the performance and the art piece? Which role did we have, that of viewers, witnesses, guests or parts of the production of the work?

Framed just by its duration – the time of a dinner – and by the shared act of eating, the night left the same feeling of excitement and fulfillment of a successful party, when one has deeply enjoyed the hours spent in a parallel, ephemeral dimension, which vanishes the moment you walk out the door. The act of eating by hand and the use of ingredients such as berries, leaves, dried moss, roots revoked ancestral memories, turning the experience into something primordial and extremely physical.

In this context, the fact that one of the artists, Kris Lemsalu, who made the sock cups and the underwear dishes, joined the dinner via Skype from an artist residency in Japan, seems to me if not problematic then at least open to question. We saw her, projected on the wall, performing and dressed up as a Japanese doll, but she could not see us; the communication ran via Skype chat, with her not knowing the identity of the person writing. Although her “absent presence” enabled an extension of the dinner’s spatial and temporal framework, it appeared slightly detached from the context of a site- and time-specific project, where all the focus is on the interaction between bodies (and minds) sensually stimulated.

Starting from this episode, I would like now to broaden the current analysis to a further level: In what is today a hyper-stimulated, multidimen-

sional and over-connected reality, where everything is intended to nullify distance and dematerialize interactions, what is the significance of artistic practices such as that of *dilettantin produktionsbüro*, focused on the surrounding environment, participations and the pleasure of being together?

DANCING BODIES – ON THE POSSIBILITY OF OPENING A CLUB

An interesting element of the *dreijahre* project, which I did not mention before, was the hidden club hosted in the basement of the restaurant. Without any precise program and opening time, guests who wanted to party could discover it simply by following the music or drawn by their companions. It was an important extension of the restaurant, a separate dimension dedicated to night life, which enabled a further level of involvement, triggered by music, some drinks, dance.



Fig. 10: The Secret Club in the Basement of *dreijahre*, 2008

Fantasizing about future, (im)possible projects, Anneli Käsmayr told me about her idea of starting a two-function place, half club and half restaurant. Through a multidisciplinary approach to the work, involving architecture, design, the choice of the staff and decisions regarding the music, food and beverages, *dilettantin produktionsbüro* would create a unique environment with a bar in the center and, on one side, the restaurant, where tiny little morsels and beverages would be served, on the other side, the club with music and dance. As opposed to traditional discos, the place is envisaged to open at 9 p.m., with the main music act before midnight, slightly changing the accepted time for clubbing and introducing a taste of

night life in the everyday routine of the guests. For its focus on the ideas of both amusement and collaboration, the project takes full account of Carsten Höller's 24-weeks *Double Club*, opened in London between 2008 and 2009 as a cross-pollination between Congolese and western culture.

"If you go to a club to get drunk, to have a blast, you go to be another person. [...] It is frustrating to be confined in one personality. It would be great to have the two at the same time, half of you drunk and half of you sober. But I think that's the best part of it, you can calculate the duality."²⁵



Fig. 11: Carsten Höller, The Double Club

Framed by a limited time-span, the *Double Club* was a place where, through separation and juxtaposition, different realities were simultaneously produced. Each space (the restaurant, the bar and the club) was divided into equally-sized western and Congolese parts on a decorative and functional level, and guests could choose between Congolese or western cuisine, or to merge the two, doing the same with drinks, music and aesthetics. The DJ played on a circular rotating dance floor which slowly revolved at about one turn per hour. He alternated between western and Congolese music, depending on the side of the club he was playing.

25 | Carsten Höller in James Collard, "From Conrad to the heart of disco", in: The Times, November 18, 2008, published in Obrist, H. U./Höller, C. (2011): *The Double Club. A Carsten Höller Project by Fondazione Prada*, Milan.

In response to what is now a hyper-complex reality, where the individual has to deal with a number of stimuli at the same time, the approach Höller proposed challenges the presumption of a centric vision on the world, revealing the possibility of a diverse, double – or even multiple – perspective on the self, the other and the surroundings. It was a double (or multiple) club also in the sense that it related art with design, fashion, music and food, involving collaboration on many levels and enabling each participant to contribute with its specific skill to the final result. Lastly, the project rooted on amusement and fun: “So understandable, but so strange, so parasitic, and at the same time so important, so much of a guide in terms of taking decisions”,²⁶ recognizing these as key elements in our life and in art.

A similar investigation of the potential of viewer’s physical and emotional involvement, activation of senses, fun and self-enjoyment is central to *dilettantin produktionsbüro*’s artistic projects, be it a restaurant, a conceptual dinner or something in-between a bar and a club. Although present in the arts down through the centuries in various forms and degrees, these categories have historically been devalued or considered irrelevant to high culture; due to their ephemeral nature, as well their time- and site-specificity, they have been hard to accommodate within art institutions and they have been unfit for the art market.²⁷

This is the reason why these categories have been taken fully into account by those artists who tried to dismantle the accepted structures of the art world, exploring possible alternatives or establishing their own. As one can glean from the even cursory historical references presented in this essay, much has already been done in this field, and questions about the significance of current artistic practices dealing with food, drink, hospitality and forms of entertainment can be put.

We are currently witnessing a multi-directional development. On one hand, there is an attempt to (re)introduce these artistic practices inside the institutions, with a view to their musealization and presentation in the context of traditional exhibitions. The institutions also tend to make use of these strategies to develop towards more flexible, welcoming and public-friendly structures, in opposition to the traditional understanding of museums as boring and authoritarian places dedicated to an exclusive circle of academics. There is an attempt to create pleasant visitor experiences, by attractive public programs and a number of events which merge culture, entertainment, food (e.g. initiative as lunches, happy hours and special Sundays at museum). On the other hand, an approach like that of Carsten Höller envisaged cross-disciplinary projects, viewer’s experience and amusement as a road out beyond the traditional exhibition format, considering the latter insufficient for the schizophrenic world of the 21st century.²⁸

26 | Ibid.

27 | See Introduction in Smith: 2013.

28 | See Carsten Höller in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist in Obrist, H. U./Höller, C. (2011): *The Double Club. A Carsten Höller Project by Fondazione Prada*, Milan.

Certainly, life is now developing towards transitory and parallel experiences – be them real, virtual or a mix of the two. Bombarded daily by an incredible flood of stimuli and information, we continuously enter and exit from a number of simultaneous situations, and often we have to deal with two or three of them at the same time (i. e. we chat on WhatsApp while in a meeting and having a Skype call). I therefore consider the 360°-surroundings created by many artists today such as Höller and *dilettantin produktionsbüro* and in which sensory experience is key to be an attempt to create art capable of including this hyper-stimulation, directing it towards fulfilment rather than fragmentation. An attempt to enter and arrest the flow, creating the condition to be present for a while in a specific time and place. A stimulus to turn life, as art, into an aesthetic experience – in the Greek meaning of the term: *aisthetikos* “sensitive, perceptive” and *aisthanesthai* as in “to perceive (by the senses or by the mind), to feel”.