EDITORIAL

Joyce Poot

Dear Reader,

Before you lies *On Representation,* the first issue of 2020. This is the year in which *Kunstlicht* celebrates our 40th year. It has turned out to be the year of a global pandemic as well. The Netherlands is currently under an intelligent lockdown to slow the spread of COVID-19, meaning our editorial board is staying inside as much as possible. For the first time in the history of *Kunstlicht*, our editorial board could no longer come together. Instead, we moved our meetings online. Our team has proven to be resilient, and whereas the launch of this issue has been postponed, we are happy to present you with *On Representation* without any delays. Hopefully, you will enjoy reading this issue during these times of restriction as much as we enjoyed working on it.

At *Kunstlicht,* we felt that the topic of this issue, representation, strangely coincides with the current situation. Forced to communicate through video conferencing services, the relevance of representation as our topic of conversation became clear. Sven Lütticken shares this experience in the introduction of this issue, where he writes that his lectures were moved online and he asks, "is representation now reduced to an endless gallery of bad portraits? Which background to use? How to address an audience trapped in tiny windows?"[1] However, there is something positive to take away from this issue as well. Several writers highlight how representation can make us experience places we cannot visit, helps us to connect not only with people we cannot meet physically, but might even help us to come into contact with non-human animals. Representation provides us with tools to connect to a society unknown, albeit often problematic ones.

Let us hope that amidst the current restrictions and isolation, we can use this time to experience something new, to look beyond our contemporary confinement. We will carry this idea with us into the upcoming *Kunstlicht* issue, where managing editor Anna Sejbæk Torp-Pedersen will guide us into the area of mapping and cartography. Even when we have to stay in one place, we will metaphorically travel again, looking at ways to not merely cross borders, but even install and subvert them.

In terms of news from our team, our previous issue was the last that the amazing Sam Edens designed (in collaboration with Corine van der Wal). She has been a valuable part of our editorial board for the past five years, and it has been wonderful working together. We want to thank Sam for all the hard work, smooth looking issues, and great feedback she has provided. As such, we are grateful that Sam is staying close to us by joining our Advisory Board.

We are delighted to invite you to turn to the next page and enjoy reading your new *Kunstlicht!*

On behalf of the editorial board,

Joyce Poot
Editor-in-chief

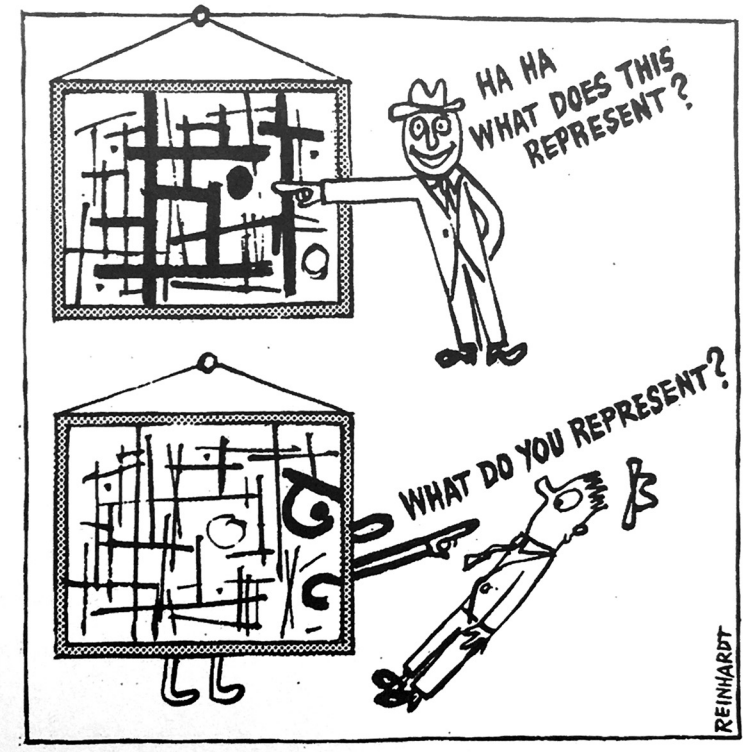
1
Sven Lütticken, "Introduction", *On Representation*, Kunstlicht, vol. 40, no 1, 9.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT DO YOU REPRESENT?

Sven Lütticken

Throughout modernity, representation has been a promise and a problem. A cartoon by the painter Ad Reinhardt (based on a joke by his colleague Wolfgang Paalen) shows a besuited little man pointing at an abstract painting, exclaiming: "Ha ha what does this represent?" The painting then grows an angry face, points back at the little man and asks him what he represents (fig. 1).[1]



←fig.1 Ad Reinhardt, cartoon included in the cartoon series "How to Look", *P.M.*, 1946.

Modern art, literature, philosophy, and politics have been haunted by representation — by its absence or by its presence, by its iron grip and its endless deferral — both in the sense of the representational and in the sense of the representative, of Darstellung and Vertretung, of portrait and proxy, to use theorist Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak's terminology.[2] Reinhardt's cartoon conflates the two rather nicely, showing them to be profoundly entangled. The little man of course intends to say that the painting does not function as a portrait, as a depiction of 'reality'. It is doggedly

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Paalen described such a scenario in the introduction to his book *Form and Sense* (New York: Wittenborn and Company, 1945), 6: "Today it has become the role of the painting to look at the spectator and ask him: what do *you* represent?" In 1946, Reinhardt included his cartoon in a number of his How to Look art comics for the newspaper *P.M.*

2
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 66-111.

part of the world rather than showing it. Meanwhile, the painting's retort reintroduces the politics of representation and the question of representative politics: what do you, little man, stand for? On whose behalf do you speak? Some sort of mid-century American white male middle class privilege perhaps? Some sort of ideology of common sense that allows you to mock that which is opaque, which refuses to offer itself to your gaze like a well-behaved representation? The representational — the portrait — cannot always be neatly separated from the representative: the proxy.

In 2018, the German curator Kasper König suggested that the German-Turkish artist Cana Bilir-Meier only won an award because of her "exotic name", and during a conversation on stage he thought it appropriate to burden her with his complains about the behavior of Turkish men in Berlin (marking their territories in their pimped-up cars).[3] Thus König addressed Bilir-Meier not as an artist but as a representative of "Germans of Turkish descent", who apparently all have to answer for each other's perceived wrongdoings — which is rather similar to the way in which Muslims are ritually requested to 'distance themselves' from jihadist terrorism, even if no white European is ever expected to do the same in regard to fascist terrorism. What do you represent? Do you want to represent? Are there any exit strategies from imposed representations? We may no longer be fully modern, but if anything, issues of representation have only become more pressing and more bewildering in our collapsing contemporary condition.

The man in Reinhardt's cartoon can be seen as embodying the modern individual person-citizen-voter. He has his opinion and has the right to state it, and to cast his individual vote. The model of political representation installed during the American and French revolutions was based on such an understanding of citizenship, supposedly universal but in actuality limited to a fairly exclusive group — excluding enslaved people of colour, women, and the poor. While specific exclusions came in for criticism early on, the very principle of representative democracy as being based on atomized individuals and their opinions/votes likewise came under attack from both reactionary and progressive sides.

On the left, it was workers' councils which came to be seen as the alternative to parliamentary representation; here, workers decide collectively as workers, in assemblies linked to production — rather than delegating political agency as individualized voters. After the Bolsheviks crushed the workers' and soldiers' councils (*societs*) as sites of dual power, they created a state that a single-power, single-party dictatorship — the "concrete utopia of the 20th century", as philosopher Oskar Negt called the councilist model — revived in the 1960s by groups such as the Situationist International.[4] Ensconced at the council for the maintenance of occupations at the Sorbonne in May 1968, the Sitationists tried to effect a councilist revolution.

3
"Ich habe mich widerlich benommen, keine Frage," in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 6 December 2018. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kasper-koenig-kammerspiele-kritik-rassismus-kunst-1.4241822.

4
Oskar Negt, "50 Jahre Institut für Sozialforschung," (unauthorized) transcript of lecture at the University of Frankfurt, July 4 1974, in Alexander Kluge/Oskar Negt, Kritische Theorie und Marxismus (The Hague: Rotdruck, 1974), 119.

As the echoes of May 1968 waned during the 1970s, movements such as Italian Autonomia and the Spontis in Germany tried to foster the growth of sustainable self-organized social structures — which proved a tall order under the prevailing economic and social conditions. Nonetheless, today's autonomist grassroots movements still (or again) seek to build up dual power to oppose state power legitimized by representative democracy.[5] On the other hand, it seems equally urgent to address and remedy the failings of representative democracy, and to seek to make it more representative rather than abandoning it completely. In the United States, strategies from gerrymandering to voter ID regulations and other strategies have been deployed to rob people of colour of their vote. This is an example of what theorist Ariella Azoulay calls the differential inclusion of minorities into the body politic.[6] Even when women, Jews, and people of African or Middle-Eastern descent get citizenship and voting rights, there will always remain a differential with the original universal subject — the white man.

In an emergency such as the Covid-19 crisis, being Asian in Holland or 'being Black while wearing a face mask' in the US can expose this differential in new ways. Not that there was a shortage of evidence for those affected; among the more widely visible symptoms is the hatred generated by the likes of Barack Obama or Ilhan Omar, which shows all too clearly that some politicians will never be truly representative in the eyes of those who conceive of 'the people' in ethnic terms.

Modern western culture has been marked by what feminist theorist Karen Barad calls representationalism in different registers, with political and cultural representation (proxy and portrait) being based on the same metaphysical foundations:

> Liberal social and political theories and theories of scientific knowledge alike owe much to the idea that the world is composed of individuals presumed to exist before the law, or the discovery of the law-awaiting or inviting representation. The idea that beings exist as individuals with inherent attributes, anterior to their representation, is a metaphysical presupposition that underlies the belief in political, linguistic, and epistemological forms of representationalism. Or to put the point the other way around, representationalism is the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing.[7]

The workers' councils promoted by philosopher Guy Debord's Situationist International were posited against what he termed the society of the spectacle, in which everything "that was directly lived has receded into a representation."[8] This was then a fundamental

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See for instance numerous articles in the magazine *Roar,* www.roarmag.org.

6
Ariella Aïscha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London/New York: verso, 2019), 133.

7
Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and <eaning* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2007), 46.

8
Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), trans. Ken Knabb, http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/1.htm.

critique of representationalism, and it was part of an anti-representationalist tendency in French thought that included the work of philosophers Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Such (post)structuralist theory fed into 1980s and 1990s cultural studies à la cultural theorist Stuart Hall, which was premised on the belief that the critical analysis of media representations (for instance representations of race or gender) can make a difference. As artist Hito Steyerl put it, "The assumption went something like this: if people were represented culturally in a positive way, political equality would become more likely. Passionate battles over the idea of a politics of representation characterized a large part of the '80s (and in many places, way beyond them)."[9]

And where do we stand now? Taking stock, Steyerl avers that "While cultural representation of everything is undergoing massive inflation (coupled with the devaluation and degradation of most individual images, texts, and sounds) political representation is not only uneven, it is also less and less relevant. The two realms also seem to be running wildly out of sync."[10] Cultural representation appears to triumph: in the Neofascist identity politics that has transformed the global political landscape in recent years, the leader gets legitimacy not from the protocols of representative democracy but from being a warped image of 'the people' (whom the likes of politician Ilhan Omar can never represent). In the end, the real issue may be that both types of representation now function more as portraits than as proxies — "and not necessarily very good portraits either."[11]

On November 21 of 2018, the Vrije Universiteit's newspaper, Ad Valvas, published a montage of two photos on its front page. The top image showed the university's Student Council (Universitaire Studentenraad) in 1998, while the other depicted its 2018 iteration. There was a pronounced contrast not only because the older image was in black and white, and the new one in colour. The contemporary student council was larger, and reflected a changing student population, but the truly striking difference was in the clothing and posing. The 1998 student councilors seem to be dressed in their everyday clothes, while their successors wear a uniform: dressed in dark blue business suits (except for one hijab-wearing girl, who wears a long blue coat), the guys all wear identical patterned light-blue neckties, and the women have scarves from the same fabric draped around their necks.

Here, a student council mimics the accoutrements and self-presentation of a Dutch studentencorps — career-oriented student fraternities and sororities. The caption clarifies that these students are serious bestuurders — a Dutch catch-all terms for various types of administrators and managers. Bestuurservaring is an important asset on CVs; it prepares you for integration into the managerial class. The student councilors no longer appear as political representatives of their political constituencies, but more as self-performers that are about representation as Darstellung rather than Vertretung.[12] Of course, this is all perfectly understandable. I have no doubt that the students who decide to donate their time and become active in the studentenraad are highly committed and motivated, but this commitment and these motivations are channeled in a certain way under contemporary working conditions. The resulting juxtaposition is a striking dialectical image — the visual encapsulation of a world gone wrong.

In the spring of 2020, the university campus is closed and everybody is submitting to yet another 'surveillance scheme' by using videoconferencing service Zoom in order to give classes and keep up a semblance (or simulation) of normality. Self-(re)presentation and self-performance infiltrate even our home lives to an unprecedented degree. Is representation now reduced to an endless gallery of bad portraits? Which background to use? How to address an audience trapped in tiny windows? The challenges are manifold, in academia as in the art world and elsewhere. With physical assemblies being impossible, many forms of political activism and critical art practice have all but been suspended, even while institutions and individuals do their best to be (re)present(ed) online. The latest 'new normal' is an effort to prolong what passed for normality before — the normality that got us here.

If representationalism is, as Barad argues, "a failure to take account of the practices through which representations are produced," to acknowledge that "representations are not snapshots or depictions of what awaits us but rather condensations or traces of multiple practices of engagement", addressing this failure only becomes more urgent in the current state of exception.[13] In this issue of Kunstlicht, young scholars and critics examine artistic and cultural practices that are precisely about taking account of representation, and about holding it to account. What does representation represent?

In the first article, Máté Hulesch analyses the historical process that turned the Notre-Dame Cathedral of Paris into an abstract representation of an imagined linear history. Beginning with the 2019 fire, Hulesch draws out three previous historical shifts in its representational space, to argue that it was not the recent fire that turned the Notre-Dame into a ruin: it had been a ruin — an abstract representation of the past — long before.

In light of the so-called 'migrant crisis', Kiko Aebi reframes migration as a contemporary artefact of the colonial past through analysis of Lydia Ourahmane's *In the Absence of our Mothers* (2018). Aebi's article considers the intimate and protracted consequences migration has on family, allegiance, and identity across both time and geography. She does this through the analysis of the history, structures, and conflicts that fomented migration as well as the attenuating psychological consequences that extend from it.

9
Hito Steyerl, "Let's Talk About Fascism," in *Duty-Free Art* (London/New York: Verso, 2017), 174.

10
Steyerl, "Let's Talk About Fascism," 174.

11
Steyerl, "Let's Talk About Fascism," 175.

12
This also reflects a change in the electoral system; the old one was based on political student parties, whereas the new approach guarantees representation to all faculties, with the parties playing a secondary role. "Waarom je echt moet gaan stemmen op de studentenraad," in *Ad Valvas,* April 26 2018. https://www.advalvas.vu.nl/nieuws/waarom-je-echt-moet-gaan-stemmen-voor-de-studentenraad.

13
Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 53.

The artist contribution *The Headless Real* by the artist Yen Noh is a performance script, based on a script Noh first performed in 2019 at Dutch Art Institute.

Focussing on self-representation, Fabienne Chiang discusses what it means for artists, who are categorically defined as 'the Other', to take control of their image and perception. Works by the artists Carrie Mae Weems and Zanele Muholi demonstrate photography's role in the creation, dissemination, and justification of existing power structures. However, as Chiang elucidates, the artists also demonstrate approaches of subversion.

Steyn Bergs and Aline Hernández interviewed artist Oraib Toukan about her work *When Things Occur* (2016). Consisting of Skype conversations with Gaza inhabitants who were differentially involved in the making of such images, the work raises questions concerning (self-)representation in the face of asymmetrical warfare and violence.

Agnieszka Wodzińska focuses on Wageningen University's and Utrecht School of the Arts' design intervention, *Pig Chase* (2009-2012), which aims to interrupt the sanitised visual culture of the Capitalocene by rendering visible some of the current industrial farming practices. She considers whether such an intervention has the potential to expose and work against the lack of representation of both farm animals and industrialised animal farming in the collective imagination.

Finally, Christoph Chwatal carefully considers the concept of the 'forum' as locale of presentation and representation through the project *Destruction and Return in al-Araqīb* (2010–ongoing) by Forensic Architecture and artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan's work *Conflicted Phonemes* (2012). Chwatal charts the potential of the projects' capacities to assemble communities around a disputed issue, spanning from those directly affected to activists and nongovernmental organizations.

Sven Lütticken is an author, art critic, and theorist. He teaches art history at the Vrije Universiteit and theory at DAI. Lütticken publishes regularly in journals and magazines such as *New Left Review, Texte fur Kunst, e-flux journal, Grey Room* and *Afterall,* and contributes to catalogues and exhibitions as writer or guest curator.

THE NOTRE-DAME CATHEDRAL OF PARIS AND ITS PHASES OF REPRESENTATION

Máté Hulesch

On the 15th of April 2019, the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris burst into flames, destroying the spire and most of the roof. The tragedy shocked the world as the building, which is considered by many to be one of the most important cultural heritages in Western-Europe, became severely damaged. The fire was interpreted by some commentators as a representation of the crisis of European culture: a divine punishment for the failure of Christianity, the return of the spirit of '68, a medieval version of the Twin Towers.[1] Emmanuel Macron declared that the cathedral should be restored by the 2024 Paris Olympics and millions of Euros were donated by companies and billionaires. The response and the aftermath of the fire raise questions through which I will concentrate the representative powers of space from a critical approach: how is a building able to represent such an abstract idea as "(Western-)European culture?"[2] As it will become clear through the following analysis, the cultural significance of the Notre-Dame has been socially and historically produced. My goal is to unveil this process and with it, question our seemingly obvious relationship with our architectural heritage — and the built environment in general.

I have never been to Paris, and have never seen the Notre-Dame in person. As a child, I loved Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* — it was my first encounter with the Parisian cathedral. Later on, I saw dozens of pictures of the building, I saw it in movies and other videos, I read texts about it, and most recently, I *walked* in and around it in a video game.[3] I learned about its design in architectural history classes where I even had to learn to draw its floor plan and façade. In other words, I owe all of my knowledge about the Notre-Dame to the different ways that the building is represented. I *know* the building even though I have never actually seen it in real life. For me, it exists only as an abstraction. But what about those who have visited the site? The fire largely damaged the building, *ruining* considerable parts of its structure, which had an immediate effect on the public's perception of the building. What the followers of the events saw in the flames was a shocking experience of a representative monument turning into ruins. However, as the anthropologist Gastón R. Gordillo's research on the ruins of Argentina suggests, *ruins* are abstract representations of the past, which raises the question whether the Notre-Dame was a ruin in this sense long before the fire made it crucially apparent, and therefore an abstraction for those who have visited it.

1
For a vivid summary of the reactions see Paul B. Preciado, "Notre Dame of Ruins," *Artforum* (2019) <https://www.artforum.com/slant/paul-b-preciado-on-the-notre-dame-fire-79492>

2
I refer to "European culture" as an abstract concept in a sense that it is isolated from the concrete, quotidien experience; in its concrete reality, there is a multiplicity of heterogeneous cultures which are all part of Europe. From this point of view, the idea that European culture can be represented by a single building is misleading, such an approach will necessarily exclude certain groups of people.

3
Assassin's Creed Unity, Ubisoft, 2014.