

Art and Event – Lista 2011

Lista Lighthouse Gallery, 1st to 3rd July, 2011



How do you imagine the becoming process of the future event of the 21st Century?

How are you going to change your thinking and creativity in order to prepare for it?

What and how are you going to do this in the coming days, months and year until the next *Art and Event*?

These were the three questions with which Dr. Ben-Aharon rounded off the seminar *Art and Event*. During the three days of the seminar he talked about his concept, understanding and experience of the event on the one side, and of how this relates to art and creativity on the other.

A guiding thread, not fully developed but presented as a picture and a riddle to which one could continue to work oneself, was the Chassidic story of *The Seven Beggars* (<http://rcassuto.home.xs4all.nl/beggars.html>) by Rabi Nachman from Breslau. In this we could see reflected, according to Ben-Aharon, seven stages of transformation of creativity and consciousness. (These seven stages are being worked out more conceptually and in detail in Ben-Aharon's forthcoming book, *The Event in Science, Philosophy, History and Art*)

What is the event? The event is what makes everything into event; it is what makes everything new. Things happen all the time, the world itself is an evolutionary process, and in this sense everything is an event. But, for us these changes are *external*. So a first aspect of realization in relation to the event is to see how we *do not* take part in it, even when we experience something "new" or extraordinary, or ever so "spiritual". *We* do not normally change with the events. In our normal life things are not made new, there are perhaps only new arrangements of the same old things. To make everything new then means that *we become with the event*. It is a rebirth of this world and the things we already know; its not a different world or separate reality, but a becoming of the same through the source of universal becoming that now is working also through me: through the "I AM" which makes everything new. To work towards such a

transformation is the real goal of Ben-Aharon's work as a whole, and in the Art and Event seminar we approached art's contribution and potential for such realizations. Art can bring us closer to the event - it can for example, as the *Quartet for the end of time* does, bring about an end of our ordinary relation to time and create an entry into a more intensive time as living presence - and by studying this process we can intensify artistic work, release new creative forces and bring them into consciousness.

Everything, living and inanimate, takes part in an evolutionary stream of becoming, and has therefore also a potential of creativity, which remains hidden from its external form and expression (a tree, a stone, the air, the next human we meet). This relation between the actual - the created and finished form - and the overflow of creativity that belongs to it as a potential or potent force, is the relation between the *actualized and material* world, on one hand, and the *virtual* aspect of the world, on the other. For example a seed actualizes the virtual potency according to the seed's evolutionary program. But it can only actualize this one, isolated, form, and not the whole virtual plant kingdom or even its own species. Therefore the virtual wholeness of the plant remains invisible and unnoticed for most people. But for many artists this virtual domain is strongly felt, and this brings him or her into a need for expression: what the natural world cannot do by itself - expressing the virtual wholeness in each single object - the artist does by continuing creation beyond its naturally programmed limits. (The philosopher Gilles Deleuze regards music as a specific example of such a continuation of natural creativity, and uses Messiaen as example because of his explicit use of birdsong as inspiration for melodic form and texture, which Deleuze interpret not as imitation of bird singing, but as expression of its hidden potentials.)

Dr. Ben-Aharon explained how this relation to the virtual potential of the world can be exemplified by the difference between a "normal" person's and an "artist's" perception. When we see a rose, it's perceptual elements (colour, odour, texture, form) make impressions upon us. But our cognitive apparatus, our constitution (i.e. the relation between our faculties - thinking, memory, sensibility, understanding, imagination) immediately synthesises and produces our representation of the object: we experience, conceive and name it "a rose". This process works instinctively and automatically in us. However, for the artist, due to his or her naturally given constitution, there remains a fraction of time where this cognitive synthesis does not occur, is delayed, or, in extreme cases (like in Virginia Wolf's case), it is not happening at all. In this "time lapse", instead of being converted into a mental representation, the impressions work directly upon the body as a force or intensity, and the thinking activity, which normally would be used to comprehend and synthesize it into a representation, is thereby freed and left in its potential state. Artistic imagination, fantasy, inspiration, has its source in this thinking's potentiality. This marks the surplus of creativity for the artist, which has double effect: on the one side her direct encounter with the living element of the sensible world (red as pure intensity), and on the other the unused potential of the liberated, de-actualized, thinking. This is now felt as a force, desire or urge to create something new. This de-actualization and de-personalization of normal cognition is however also accompanied by the normal cognition, and therefore it remains un-or half-

conscious. It works as the background for the artist's creative relation to the world, and brings about his or her *need and desire* to be creative.

Art is therefore an expression of the event in becoming. It brings the purely virtual event into expression in the physical world by condensing an essence of the virtual (de-actualization of thinking opens for creation of new forms) at the same time as it releases and spiritualizes the forces of nature and matter (the direct encounter with the sensible world as forces and intensities). The relation between the different elements of the *event*, of *nature* and of *art*, can thus be represented in this ontological scheme:

1. Event in itself, a purely virtual reality;
2. Nature, arrested and limited actualization of the event;
3. Art, which unites both in a double process of expression: a) condensing the virtual, b) spiritualizing nature/matter

But all these processes can further become united in one, fourth process, which, according to Ben-Aharon can be said to be the Ur-Kunst, Primal Art, and the essence of the artistic. This is the meeting with another human being. In this we have united all three levels above. In the human meeting the physical nature of the human becomes transparent: for a second, the natural limitations (physical bodily form and bodily traits) disappear: the soul is expressed through the body; but then also the soul with all its natural limitations (habits, instincts, inclination, moods etc) becomes transparent, and a window opens through which the creativity (virtual potential of this event) shines forth in between and through body and soul. This will be the art of the future, and much artistic work is already striving towards this (some examples from the 20th century and today might be: Asker Jorn, Joseph Beuys, Christian Wolff, Thino Sehgal ...) Art begins to move away from abstract perfection and towards concrete meetings, or to put it differently, towards actualizing the becoming process of shared destiny among human beings.

But artistic creation and this search for the new meaning of art as a true meeting between human beings, is faced with the question of the *unconscious*.

The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas strongly experienced this moral dilemma of placing the unconscious in the middle of the meeting with the other. His whole philosophy is grounded in the, for him, given experience of fundamental responsibility for the other. For him this was not a question of reflection, but an immediate given *ontological condition*. Just because most people have no consciousness of this meeting, which can take the "twinkling of an eye", they think this is a reflective and intellectual category. But for Levinas, in the moment you see the face of another human being, in the moment you are exposed to the "nakedness", mortality and helplessness expressed in the face of the other, you experience full moral responsibility for the other's existence. It is as strong and "instinctive" as the relation between mother and child. But precisely because this is so immediate and all embracing, we shy away from it and deny it. It is immediately pushed into the unconscious and we continue the lineage from Cain: I am not my brother's keeper!

But in our time we see this; we feel that all human beings are our sisters and brothers at the same time as we suppress this experience, - and this split creates our present social reality. We cannot stand the direct encounter, so we hide, and everyone sees that we hide, and everybody hides from the hiding etc. When we see a human being, he or she is transparent for us, and in this light we also see our self because we experience how we are seen through by the other. But the moral responsibility we experience in this situation is so strong that we suppress and forget it as fast as possible and continue to treat the other in the same old way, setting up the same old borders.

Artistic work can therefore approach the event on two levels, both of which are also the reasons and motivations for approaching the event. To raise the creative process itself into consciousness entails to use the given constitution as a point of departure for making the cognitive synthesis and its decomposition a *conscious act*, and thereby transform consciousness altogether into event. Art thereby becomes an exercise in an art of living, an art of consciousness and perception. But then also the encounter with another human can become a fully conscious meeting. So here art unites the cognitive and the moral dimension of existence.

Again we can say that such a need expresses itself in much contemporary artistic practise, as for example in the shift from focus on the work of art as an *object*, to regard it primarily as a *process* and an *encounter*. The work of art is no longer a given object, but becomes a point of departure, almost like a score for the musician, and the audience become the artist or musician that brings the work into full realization. All such attempts can be regarded as a move towards the event.

For art as such to reach the event it needs to understand and utilize consciously the event, and this process of raising the unconscious creativity into consciousness amounts to the seven stages of metamorphosis of creativity, which Ben-Aharon develops in his *The Event in Art*.

In order to embed artistic practise in this field and infuse it with the real energy of these problems, and not let them remain external intellectual ideas with no influence of real artistic work, let us envision how the development of this *Art and Event* impulse can take form in a threefold way:

First we will continue to experience and study the lectures and writing of Dr. Ben-Aharon, which express the essence of the event and the development of appropriate concepts and methods for transforming ordinary consciousness into event. This is developed by Ben-Aharon's work on *Art and Event*.

Artistic practises can be brought into proximity to this work and also help exemplify it. In the seminar at Lista we already had improvisations by *Sheriffs of Nothingness* (Kari Rønnekleiv and Ole-Henrik Moe) and performance of Messiaen's *Quartet for the end of time* by the *Chamber Chameleons* (Kaja Aadne, Torbjørn Eftestøl, Catherine Leclerc and Kari Rønnekleiv) as examples of this. In this way we bring two kinds of



related practises into proximity; artistic work that already has an inner relation to the event, and work on the transformation of consciousness (event) related to art.

A second element is the cognitive-artistic practice that will continue to be developed as an interactive practice. The installation *In-visibility* was a seed for this in that it tried to combine the art of thinking and perception (event) embedded in and as an artistic expression (the installation). In the future this can be transformed into more direct experiences of the stages of transformation towards the event, and thus make art and event come more and more together as stages of transformation of consciousnesses and cognition.

The third element will be original artistic creation and actualization of the event, by means of the various arts, directed by Dr. Ben-Aharon. This would mean that artistic work becomes a direct expression of the event and the process of becoming and realizing the event. Artists and non-artists will join together in this work, some artists may use their medium, but not necessarily, and non-artists will have a chance of experiencing art in a new way. The emphasis would be the spiritual fusion of “art” and “event” as *concrete artistic encounter*, so that everyone would be equally part of the work whatever their specialization may be.

On this background, let us repeat the three questions:

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Report written by Torbjørn Eftestøl