

In 2016 Valiz published *Facing Value. Radical Perspectives from the Arts* in collaboration with Stroom Den Haag.<sup>1</sup> Edited and written by Maaïke Lauwaert and myself, *Facing Value* intended a modest contribution to a different kind of society. The core values that drive how things are done and how people are treated shouldn't be based on profit maximization, endless growth, efficiency, individualism and competition, but rather on more ephemeral values such as humanity, diversity, empathy, care and trust. In order to develop those values we formulated nine strategies, such as Be unproductive, Share, Hesitate & Question and Support, that we derived from the works of artists, writers, designers and researchers. For this occasion I have edited and partly rewritten the final strategy, Unite, which is focused on the importance of difference for living together.

### Dealing with differences

The trains of thought in this text formed the basis for my approach towards the question of Hashim Sarkis' How will we live together?. Who is We?, the presentation in the Rietveld pavilion, focuses on values as well. Values necessary for a society based on a plurality of 'we', which we understand to consist of all humans and more-than-humans such as soil, microbes, animals and plants. In their respective research praxes *The Multiplicity of Other* and *Multispecies Urbanism*, both Afaina de Jong and Debra Solomon have developed methodologies, a language and values to change the design paradigm which supports that society. From my own research I'd like to add a few (historical) perspectives that might contribute to this endeavour. These are related to the work of De Jong and Solomon as well as to the research of Caroline Nevejan in the parallel program *Values for Survival*.

I like to start with a quote from poet and writer Audre Lorde, who objects against the idea that identity is one-dimensional; as if you could choose between all the different ingredients that make up your self. In stead of fragmentation she propagates integration of all aspects of one's personality as meaningful for the whole. She expands on this idea when she writes about the differences between humans, and more precisely between women.

*As I see it, it is a real problem learning to deal with differences. We are never going to become each other but we have certain common goals we need to define. We mustn't exclusively aspire to tolerate our differences or ignore them, we must recognize them, see what they imply and use them within constructive approaches towards the problems we share.*<sup>2</sup>

In three lines, Audre Lorde touches upon almost every aspect of living together that I believe to be essential. It is therefor an important reference point for this article.

‘No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.’ This reflection by the British poet John Donne, written in 1624, is often echoed by publications that consider the state of the current neoliberal society.<sup>4</sup> The calculating individual living only for personal gain—*homo economicus*—is portrayed here as a danger to our sense of community and solidarity and thus to society. Governments that count on this calculating mentality and are themselves examples of it, reap what they sow: selfishness and discontent. Donne’s notion of ‘continent’ tells us that being aware and part of a larger whole can contribute to our feeling of connection and thus a sense of responsibility for advancing the common good.

Donne’s continent is nuanced by the archipelago of Édouard Glissant: ‘The American Archipelagoes are extremely important, because it was in these islands that the idea of creolisation, that is, the blend of cultures, was most brilliantly fulfilled. Continents reject mixings ... (whereas) archipelagic thought makes it possible to say that neither each person’s identity nor the collective identity are fixed and established once and for all. I can change through exchange with the other, without losing or diluting my sense of self. And it is archipelagic thought that teaches us this.’<sup>5</sup> Glissant points to the tendency of ‘the continent’ to impose its worldview on others, leading to globalization and homogenization. He therefore prefers to speak of *mondialité* (globality), a manner of exchange that acknowledges difference.

During the research for the 2021 Biennale, I was introduced to the work on the pluriverse of anthropologist and activist researcher Arturo Escobar. Escobar seems to walk the path between the continent and archipelagos. Glissant’s critique aimed at the ‘continent’ and its dominant – i.e., capitalistic, patriarchal, colonial – worldview lies also at the basis of a pluriversal perspective on living together. On the other hand, the common good and feeling connected are as much part of Escobar’s thinking.

Escobar describes the pluriverse ‘as a peaceful, though tense, co-existence of a multiplicity of models, a world where many worlds fit, as the Zapatista put it’.<sup>6</sup> It is clear to Escobar that the current dominant system is entirely unbeneficial to the world and its inhabitants: humans and more-than-humans. Referring to feminist theory and building on the praxes from mostly Latin American and Indigenous communities, he explores this pluriversal thinking and how that could help to overcome what he calls the crisis of western civilization. Central to pluriversal thinking is the notion of relationality as a fundament of life – contrary to what has become a common belief in western society that the human and more-than-human world are separate entities and that all humans are separate individuals. This disconnection on all levels leads to unequal and extractive forms of coexistence and forms the basis of the imbalance of the ecosystem at large. To become aware of this relationality and interdependency means to become aware that we as humans are part of an indivisible

whole, consisting of many different worlds. This awareness has the potential to affect the ways in which we live, think and design according to Escobar. But how do you become aware?

## Rhythms

The artist Christian Nyampeta is working on a long-term project called *How To Live Together* in which he imagines a way of living together that leaves room for change and growth while remaining engaged and related. Referencing Roland Barthes' *Comment vivre ensemble* ('How to live together'), Nyampeta is especially interested in the rhythms of lives, societies and cultures that either clash or overlap. Barthes introduced the concept of 'idiorrhymy' to shape a theory in which we live together and recognize and respect the individual rhythms of the other.<sup>7</sup> Nyampeta believes studying and learning more about how communities organize and structure their lives around a communal rhythm is not only useful to us, but quite essential to being able to live together.

It may seem that our societies lack collective work rhythms these days, with our flexible working hours, remote work, the Internet, et cetera. Private time and company time are now indistinguishable. Nyampeta interestingly stresses that collective rhythms and patterns are not so much lacking - they have become invisible. So one of the tasks we face today is to understand the rhythms, to develop sensory organs for them, to analyse them and to submit them to a literacy of form. According to Nyampeta, we could say that rhythms are always there when- and wherever energy is spent. 'We can say for example, speculatively, that in the Netherlands our separate lives are more in sync with each other than it may appear. Especially given that nowadays it is possible to sync time very very very accurately. So when the alarm clock goes off at a specific time in the morning, perhaps this applies to a greater number of people in any given place in the country... If this is truly the case, it would mean that the activities and gestures of waking up, toiletry, breakfast and so on are very much alike across countless households at the exact same moment. The instant we wake up and perform our seemingly private gestures in our flexible times, we may be led to believe that such activities are personal, unique, individual, and so on, while we nonetheless are engaged in a mass choreography of immense value. Indeed, the consumption of electricity, gas, water and so on corresponds neatly to such personal gestures.'<sup>8</sup> However, synchronicity is not synonymous with harmony.

## Unclotting

Someone who knew this very well was Dutch architect Frank van Klingeren (1919-1999), who posited the principles of nuisance or inconvenience and 'unclotting'. He built two of the most radical buildings of the Netherlands in the sixties and seventies, De Meerpaal in Dronten and 't Karregat in Eindhoven. They were in all aspects social experiments through which Van

Klingeren could express his ideals about the open society, supported by the spirit of experimentation that pervaded the local administration at the time.

It all started in 1965 in the pioneering city of Dronten with the community centre De Meerpaal, comparable to Cedric Price's famous, albeit never realized, Fun Palace. At the intersection of four neighbourhoods, Van Klingeren realized an *agora*: a square with a roof. The square was not empty - it was entirely multifunctional, housing a theatre with an open roof, a bar, a public space with seats and a large cinema screen, a volleyball court, a bowling alley, an exhibition space, and a restaurant. The remaining space would be used, for example, for a market or the occasional bicycle race. In fact, anything was possible and there was always something going on. The combination of volleyball and Hamlet was not very successful, as soon became apparent, and yet that was exactly what Van Klingeren argued for. Such a 'nuisance' meant that people had to make contact to discuss how to facilitate each other's wishes. This could result in either friendship or hostility or any of the variations in between. So agreements had to be reached, taking into account each other's needs on the basis of knowing one another. There was the risk of massive failure, but according to Van Klingeren it could work, and each time it provided an opportunity for gaining understanding, respect and friendship.<sup>9</sup> And that would help the 'unclotting' of society, which was Van Klingeren's true agenda. He felt that people were clotting too much in groups and spaces, leading to less interest in the other and little social cohesion. Unclotting would restore the contact between people. He therefore designed his buildings to accommodate 'a well-functioning social device' - as meeting places where social integration was promoted without cancelling out people's differences.<sup>10</sup>

It was not Van Klingeren's idea to work towards compromises, but to stimulate an equal dialogue between different users of the same space. The differences between the users might lead to discussions and disagreement, but for Van Klingeren anything was better than homogenizing and controlling these differences.

#### Looking outward

Dialogue is the perfect form with which to express a common interest without having to reach a shared opinion. It is an exchange with the other, born from curiosity and attention for the other's ideas, feelings and thoughts. The fact that you can never fully gauge or understand the other does not have to stand in the way of working and living together. After all, don't we wish to accomplish something together? That is also the conclusion reached by Richard Sennett in his study of forms of cooperation. Working and living together require skills such as being able to listen, showing an interest and, especially, developing empathy: 'Looking outward makes for a better social bond than imagining others are reflected in ourselves, or as though

society itself was constructed as a room of mirrors. But looking outward is a skill people have to learn.’<sup>13</sup>

This is true for all people, and I think it is essential for architects. According to the former assistants of Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992) she taught them to do semiotic analysis of reality before beginning the work. ‘She did not start from zero. She inhaled everything.’<sup>12</sup> Bo Bardi wasn’t scared of reality; on the contrary, she used it to create another reality. A reality that was not always appreciated: the Brazilian government shuttered her 1964 exhibition *Nordeste* in Rome because it showed a reality that they were unable or unwilling to accept as theirs. As a building, the SESC Pompeia community centre is probably the best-known example of this work ethic. From the desire to construct another reality, Bo Bardi took the spontaneous use of the abandoned building that had developed over the years as her point of departure. She created a communal house for the residents of the adjacent neighbourhood where they could sit, talk, eat, read, create, look, play sports, sunbathe, hang out, sleep, play chess, learn, drink, swim, work and live together. SESC demonstrates what humane architecture can look like without being small-scale or historicized. To me the iconic, irregularly shaped round windows of the sports building are exemplary for what looking outward could mean: learning to look through a different lens, beyond yourself, even beyond yourself as human being. Beyond your own ideas, presumptions, privileges, prejudices and blind spots to see, feel, acknowledge the value, the wisdom and the knowledge of other worlds.

Looking outward therefore goes hand-in-hand with looking inward. It requires letting go of certainties, practicing curiosity and empathy, and accepting what you don’t know. At the same time you can’t place yourself outside of this reality; you are part of it and therefore need to see yourself in relation to it. Once you’re aware of the *relationality* between things and beings, when you recognize the differences and see its consequences on a cultural, social, spatial and ecological level, you will no longer be able to ‘unsee’ it. You just might start designing accordingly.

1 Maaïke Lauwaert, Francien van Westrenen (eds), *Facing Value. Radical Perspectives from the Arts* (Amsterdam: valiz, 2016). *Facing Value* formed the outcome of our 3-year long research and exhibition programme *Upcycling*, about the creation of value at Stroom Den Haag (NL). See: [www.stroom.nl/webdossiers/webdossier.php?wd\\_id=3013576](http://www.stroom.nl/webdossiers/webdossier.php?wd_id=3013576)

2 Audre Lorde in conversation with Dagmar Schultz, *Die Tageszeitung*, 12 July 1984 in: Audre Lorde, *Dream of Europe. Selected seminars and interviews, 1984-1992*. Edited by Mayra A. Rodríguez Castro, Kenning Editions, Spring, 2020. See also: Audre Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, Sex: Women redefining difference', in: *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press, 1984).

3 Quoted for example in Hans Achterhuis. *De utopie van de vrije markt* (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 2012).

4 Édouard Glissant and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *No. 038(DOCUMENTA (13): 100 Notes-100 Thoughts)*, Ostfildern: Hatje-Cantz, 2012.

5 Sophie Krier and Erik Wong use the work of Arturo Escobar as the startingpoint for the first iteration of the *Travelling Academy*: <https://pluriverse.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/>

6 Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy and the Making of Worlds* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), p. xvi.

7 Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

8 Maaïke Lauwaert, 'Interview with Christian Nyampeta', *Metropolis M* 2015, no. 6, pp. 22-23.

9 Marina van den Bergen and Piet Vollaard. 'The Biggest Living Room in the Netherlands: Frank van Klingeren's Karregat in Eindhoven, 1970-1973', *OASE* 57 (2001), pp. 62-73.

10 Marina Van den Bergen and Piet Vollaard, *Hinder en ontklontering: Architectuur en maatschappij in het werk van Frank van Klingeren* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2003), p. 310.

11 Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), p. 278.

12 Quote by José Celso, director of the Oficina Theatre in: Francien van Westrenen, *Another Reality. After Lina Bo Bardi, exhibition guide* (Stroom Den Haag, 2016).