Renegotiations
THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ART IN THE NEW MILLENIUM
Temporary Liaisons and Far-reaching Convergences.
Public art under municipal auspices

//Håkan Nilsson

Ars longa vita brevis
On a late summer’s day in 2020, as I pass over Odenplan in Stockholm, a grove of deciduous trees has vanished. Instead, there is a sort of arrangement of conifers and autumn flowers. Soon they too will give way to a few spruce trees, which after a few months will in turn be replaced by new (or perhaps the same?) deciduous trees. At the same time, a section of a nearby street has been turned into a playground, but that too will be removed within a few months. “Ser du möjligheterna?” (Do you see the possibilities?) asks a sign from the City of Stockholm.

Do I? I certainly see how the temporary has become an increasingly common feature of our public space. Meanwhile, in the schoolyard of Gustav Vasa’s School in the same area, there are a couple of portacabins placed to alleviate the lack of space in the city’s schools. They have been there on temporary building permits since 2009. What exactly is “temporary” and what role might it play in public art?

School portacabins are a reminder that the “temporary” can be a way of circumventing the rules that apply to the permanent. This aspect of the temporal, as a suspension of the permanent, can be understood by what philosopher Giorgio Agamben has called the state of exception, where regulations are set aside to protect what the regulations came into being to protect. But as such, it also needs a time limit. In the case of the school portacabins, the City Planning Department has provided me with a definition: temporary permits are granted for up to five years and a maximum of three times, after which they are considered permanent.

However, it is not a state of emergency that the municipality wants to signal with its temporary playgrounds and decorations of public squares, but flexibility and possibilities. Why should urban space not change with

2 Mail from the City Planning Department to the author 11/06/2020.
time and demographics, needs and demands? When it comes to public art, the question has recently come to the fore. Public art, which has long been associated with monuments and/or memorials, goes against the idea of the flexible. Here, if it is not the eternal, then it is at least long-term values that are at stake. Today, many see this approach as more or less obsolete. According to this view, traditional public works of art cannot (any longer) lay claim to the eternal. It is partly a question of different levels of relevance. Permanent art is gradually being forgotten. The person the sculpture depicts is forgotten. The artist is forgotten. The statue, although it remains where it stands, is forgotten. In the end, it pleases only the doves. But it is also a question of what is to be remembered. Values change, places and their significance change, people, events and governments change. Not even the hardest bronze can alter these empirical realities.

*Ars longa, vita brevis:* Art endures, life perishes. As far as public art is concerned, Hippocrates’ maxim is no longer a given. The changing view of eternity is one of the reasons why public art in recent decades has taken on changing and sometimes transitory forms. “No more statues in the square” has become a mantra to explain the change. Everything that is permanent, evaporates. Instead, the square becomes a changing place, with temporary elements, such as when the artist Santiago Mostyn positioned himself on Möllevångstorget in Malmö one fall day in 2016, accompanied by a cello and violin, to painstakingly memorize and finally sing the entire Swedish national anthem.

In this text, I will discuss the approach to temporary public artworks at the municipal level. Through a questionnaire sent to the 20 largest municipalities in Sweden, I have tried to get a picture of how much of the public art at the local level is actually temporary and how those responsible for public art in the municipalities view this, both in terms of opportunities and concerns. Of the 20 municipalities, 19 responded (Gävle was, at the time of writing, in the process of restructuring its public art administration and was therefore unable to participate).

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3 The most intense debate on public art in Sweden in 2020 was undoubtedly the one that highlighted Carl Linnaeus’ background as the founder of racial biology rather than the Enlightenment scientist he had otherwise been remembered for.

4 That the “statue on the square” is resigned to become a remnant of a bygone era is of course not self-evident, as Anna Rådström’s chapter on Umeå’s “#MeToo cougar” in this volume shows.

5 The questionnaire is available as an appendix at the end of this text.

6 I am grateful that so many busy officials have taken their precious time to answer my questions. A sincere thank you to: Anja Boman, Art Secretary, Umeå; Olof Ahlström, Curator of Public Art.
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Open process. When Ruben Wätte was commissioned to create public art in the district Årby in Eskilstuna he opted for a permanent piece, which could form a meeting point in the public sphere for teenage girls. The piece was shaped in collaboration with the local dance group Royal Sisters. It resulted in the work Just to be (Here and Now), a kind of stage for performances and meetings. Images from the inauguration.

Photo: Ruben Wätte

Art, Sundsvall; Anna-Karin Wulgué, Art Gallery Director, Örebro; Anna Ehn, Head of Public Art, Uppsala; Anna Wignell, Curator, Process Manager New Public Art, Västerås; Josefine Bolander, Curator of Public Art, Eskilstuna; Stefan Hagdahl, Head of Stockholm Art, Stockholm; Peter Bergman, Curator at Fullersta Gård, Huddinge; Fredrika Friberg, City Creator, Nacka; Joanna Sandell Wright, Art Gallery Director, Södertälje; Mattias Åkeson, Curator of Public Art, Norrköping; Camilla Lothigius, Project Coordinator Public Art, Linköping; Sarah Hansson, Process Manager Public Art, Gothenburg; Joacim Eneroth, Curator Public Art and Collection, Halmstad; Filip Zezovski Lind, Art Director, Jönköping; Eva Eriksdotter, Museum Director, Borås; Joanna Thede, Deputy Curator of Public Art and Gunilla Lewerentz, Director of Dunkers Kulturhus, Helsingborg; Emil Nilsson, Curator, and Åsa Nacking, Museum Director, Lund; Anna Wahistedt, Manager of Image and Form, Malmö and all the others who helped me to find the right people.
For a reflection on the role and effects of temporary art, I consider two relatively early works (from 2006). *The Voice* by Lisa Jevbratt, which was a net-based work that existed as a counterpart to Public Art Agency Sweden’s website, and *Taxinge Piazza*, where the art groups’ International Festival and Front converted a parking lot in the Stockholm suburb of Tensta into a public square. I further discuss the concepts used in the art world to describe temporary (temporal) art, and moreover discuss the emergence of temporary art in the 1990s in order to highlight the issues that have always accompanied it. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of how critical/activist art can be accommodated within public art initiatives. My conclusion is that temporary art must submit to a litany of rules, regulations and expectations when it becomes part of the public art system, but in doing so, it also plays a role in transforming this system from within. I suggest that the relationship between the system and (temporary) art can best be described as one of convergence, and which media theorist Henry Jenkins defines as a process in which different quantities, by coming closer together, also undergo mutual change.7

**Opportunities**

Where the city of Stockholm sees opportunities by seasonally changing street environments and spaces for play, Santiago Mostyn occupied the square in Malmö with a temporary artwork whose clear but subtle political message was about inclusion and belonging – qualities that allow us to just pass by, more or less unnoticed, as we stroll across the square. But for the work *The Repetition* to have that effect, it cannot be permanent: it needs to break with the familiar, it needs to surprise in order to make visible everything that lies at the subtextual level. Recurring references in these contexts are French radical art groups, such as the Lettrists and the Situationists who followed later. The latter, with the concept of *détournement* (French for “redirection” or “hijacking”), attempted a kind of “double negation” in which the classic avant-garde strategy of sensational scandals was abandoned for a different kind of displacement, in which the conflation of elements was thought to create new political situations, which could not be dismissed as mere art.8

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8 See Guy Debord & Gil Wolman “A User’s Guide to Detournement” (1956) from *Situationist
Though not quite as politicized as Santiago Mostyn’s *The Repetition*, making the invisible visible, “creating a rupture in the everyday” as the aesthetics professor Cecilia Sjöholm puts it, is one of the qualities usually emphasized in an argument in favor of temporary art.\(^9\) The temporary “awakens” the viewer, and as the art gallery director Eva Eriksdotter in Borås points out, the same thing happens when something permanent is removed.\(^10\) Her insightful observation shows that the “invisible” is visible, though we need to be reminded of it. In an attempt to awaken not only the viewer but also invisible art,
Stockholm Konst (Stockholm Art) has begun to invest in new works whose role is partly to activate already existing art by initiating a dialogue with it. This strategy has been important in a broader field as well and has gained renewed relevance for many temporary projects in art, architecture and design since the turn of the millennium.11

The Repetition was funded and commissioned by Public Art Agency Sweden, an agency that has been a driving force in temporary public art over the past decade. Public Art Agency Sweden’s work in this direction was intensified in 2012 when Magdalena Malm took over as its director. Malm came from the curatorial project MAP (Mobile Art Production), an organization that has been working with temporary art in public spaces since 2007. When I ask Martin Sundin, who was the Head of Unit at the Ministry of Culture when Malm was appointed, whether her experience with temporary art was important for the appointment, he replies that it was not decisive in the recruitment.12 He notes, however, that once Malm took up the post, she was able to push through changes in that direction. The Ministry of Culture’s readiness was partly due to their desire to see a renegotiation of what public art could be. It was also due to a changed view of where Public Art Agency Sweden should operate, the result of which was to encourage collaboration with both private and public actors.13 It was also the case that the role of public art, after deregulation and the reframing of Public Art Agency Sweden’s raison d’être, had been under discussion for some time. When the state sells off its real estate, not only does it divest a stock of building-related art, it raises questions about whether public art will be needed in the future too. Both the Swedish Agency for Public Management’s Nya former för Statens konstråds verksamhet (New Forms for Public Art Agency Sweden’s Activities) (2005) and the Kulturutredningen (Culture Inquiry) (2009) advocate a fundamental change in Public Art Agency Sweden’s

12 Interview with Martin Sundin 11/03/2020.
13 Malm took office during Fredrik Reinfeld’s (M) second administration (2010-2014) when Lena Adelsohn-Liljeroth (M) was Minister of Culture.
activities. The former proposes, for example, that activities related to art should be placed under the auspices of the Moderna Museet and that Public Art Agency Sweden should thus be dissolved. 14

In 2020, temporary projects coexist with permanent ones in Public Art Agency Sweden’s supply. Contrary to what it may seem, a turn toward the “temporary” has never been a question of consciously choosing a particular path, something that Magdalena Malm has also pointed out on several occasions. In an interview in Kunstkritikk, for example, she stressed that for her there was no “contradiction between permanent and temporary projects.” 15 Perhaps the difference between these two concepts is smaller than it would first appear, at least when it comes to public art funded and commissioned by the public. In the present study of the position of temporary art at the municipal level, I find plenty of hybrid models in which the value of the dialogue itself varies. The interaction that “temporary” art often entails is partly related to, or at least coincides with, the fact that public art is partly seen through different eyes and partly given different tasks, a change that Malm can be seen as both a symptom of and a driving force behind.

**Municipal interest**

Responses to the survey I sent out to the country’s municipalities varied. Some gave extensive answers, while others were more brief. This creates an uneven balance, and the answers are therefore not always comparable. However, overall, the survey responses provide at least a tentative picture of the current situation.

When asked whether the municipality invests in temporary art, 14 out of 19 answered yes. Some variation in responses may be due to how the question was interpreted. Both the term “invest” and especially “temporal” can have different associations, which also leads to a discussion of the latter term later in the text. 16 What can be inferred from the responses of the (few) municipalities that do not “invest”


16 The question in the survey was formulated as follows: Do you aim to incorporate temporary and/or process-oriented/dialogue-based art as part of public art?
directly, is both that they have an ambition to do so in the future and that they refer to artistic projects not directly part of the municipality’s public art, but do take place in the public space and with the municipality’s support. From Umeå, art secretary Anja Boman replies that they have been working with temporary projects throughout the 2000s, but that commissioning and placing these kinds of artworks in public space is rare. Other occasions and paths are found; for example, temporary artworks can be combined with permanent expressions, such as with the inauguration of *Listen!* (the #MeToo Monument) in 2019. In Helsingborg, Joanna Thede, acting curator for public art, answers no to the question of whether they invest in temporary art, but refers to an investment in street art through the City Planning Office, which means that the municipality does, to some extent, support temporary art in public spaces. In Halmstad, Joacim Eneroth, curator of public art and collections, notes that works of this kind are mainly produced in collaboration with external partners. Peter Bergman, director of Fullersta Gård in Huddinge, says that the municipality lacks a strategy and organization to work with such issues, but that they do see property owners and the community planning department starting to incorporate process-based artworks in their planning. The administrator for *Bild och Form* in Malmö, Anna Wahlstedt, says that they are in the process of a reorganization, but writes that they intend to invest in temporary art. At the moment, however, there is no budget for public art; each project has to go through an application process, which makes questions about the quantity of temporary art difficult to answer. Other municipalities express an ambivalent position as well. Mattias Åkeson, responsible for public art in Norrköping, writes that they lack an “explicit strategy” and that they, like Malmö, must apply for funds for each project. They apply every year for SEK 1.5 million for investments, maintenance and restoration, but nothing specifically for temporary projects.

All municipalities report an ambition to work with temporary art, but there are great differences with respect to the conditions for doing so. It is a question of finances: some municipalities have a budget for public art, others have to request it. Most municipalities apply the 1% rule, but when this is applied, it is often difficult to commission temporary art, depending on the nature of the governance

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17 Anna Rådström discusses this relationship in “*Listen! A Sculpture in the Square and a #MeToo Monument*” in this anthology.
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Many of those responsible for public art also testify to the pedagogical challenge of getting both politicians and property companies to invest in temporary projects. This also highlights the difference between different types of funding, such as operating or investment budgets, or collaborative projects between several municipalities and/or regions/state. The home of public art within the municipal organization is also important. In many municipalities, public art is tied to or falls under the municipal art gallery, others have their own departments (as is the case for large cities such as Stockholm and Gothenburg, but also Uppsala) and still others are under the city planning office or equivalent (such as Nacka) and thus have little or no contact with the municipal art gallery’s exhibition activities. I will come back to this point.

One stumbling block municipalities face is the question of whether a work of art funded through taxation must manifest in the form of a physical object. As Anna Ehn, head of public art in Uppsala, reports, the money spent must result in something physical that abides, but she also argues that this can be a documentation of, for example, a performance. Regarding performance, several write that it can be part of a larger project, as has happened in Umeå and Jönköping. Short-term art projects, such as performances, thus have greater opportunities if they can be linked to something else to which they call attention. At the same time, documentation is seen as having an intrinsic value; for example, Joanna Sandell Wright, head of the art gallery in Södertälje, argues that some temporary art projects circulate in magazines and books by virtue of documentation, thus contributing to public awareness of the place where the work is located.

Others explain that they can take a process-like approach and still end up with an art object. Josefine Bolander, curator of public art in Eskilstuna, explains that the municipality has opened up a sketching process, so that at this stage artists can engage citizens in a long-term dialogue, which in turn results in a work of art. Mattias Åkeson explains that they are working with similar solutions in Norrköping. Sarah Hansson, curator at Göteborg Konst, also points out the importance of how an art project is formulated. They see a need among clients

18 For a more detailed discussion on the 1% rule and its application in Swedish municipalities, see 1% för konstnärt gestaltning av offentlig miljö. En komparativ studie av enprocentsregeln i kommuner och regioner 2012 och 2018 [1% for Artistic Design of Public Spaces: A comparative study of the one-percent rule in municipalities and regions in 2012 and 2018], ed. Anna Söderbäck (Stockholm: Arts Council, 2020).

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Re-installed permanent art. Katarina Löfström’s piece Open Source in Wånäs Konst Sculpture park was reinstalled after the original work had been severely damaged by a fallen tree.

Photo: Mattias Giwell/Wånäs Konst
that process-oriented/dialogue-based art result in a physical work, but also believe that if processes and performances are instead described in terms of “events,” then an understanding that the work is not permanent increases. Joanna Thede in Helsingborg reflects similarly on the use of language, writing that projects of this kind are more easily accepted if they are called “theater” or “sound projects.” According to art curator Filip Zezovski Lind in Jönköping, more traditional terms such as “gestalting” (design) and “löskonst” (a term referring to a collection of movable, often wall-hung pieces) are avoided in order “to seek a language that does not limit the freedom of art from the outset.”

**Temporary art and the institution**

When asked how long the municipalities have been working with temporary art, different trends can be discerned. Those that see little or no investment at all, have no history of adopting this approach (e.g. Huddinge, Helsingborg and Malmö where the latter is in a process of transformation where the ambition is to work with temporary art in the future). Most respondents speak of it as a relatively recent initiative. It has been happening since the mid-2000s, remarks Mattias Åkeson in Norrköping. Anna Ehn writes that Uppsala has used this approach since 2014, but also points to a large temporary exhibition on the castle hill in 1998. Those responsible in Gothenburg, Västerås, Eskilstuna and Jönköping responded that they have worked with temporary art since 2015; Joanna Sandell Wright in Södertälje states that they have done so since 2017 (but also mentions previous municipal investments in street art) while Olof Ahlström answers “3-4 years” for Sundsvall. Others report a longer history. In Umeå, for example, cultural secretary Anja Bohman answered that they have worked with temporary art for the twenty years she has worked there. Stockholm Konst replied that they have been doing so since they were established in 2008, but that similar projects were already carried out during the Capital of Culture year in 1998.

From Lund, Emil Nilsson mentions that public art has been included under the auspices of the municipal art gallery since 1996, further commenting though that it is a bit unclear how long process-based art has been part of the municipality’s public art initiatives: “events have taken place, but they have not always been defined as public art.” Örebro points to a work by the group Love & Devotion from 2005.
as the earliest work, but also mentions the city’s biennial Open Art, which started in 2008.

Like Emil Nilsson, Anna-Karin Wulgué, director of the Örebro art gallery, writes that it is also a question of how we understand “public art” and describes the biennial as a special case. Many municipalities work with or are involved in similar events where the question of their involvement with temporary art becomes difficult to answer. Borås, which has held its international sculpture biennial since 2008, argues along similar lines as Örebro, as does Halmstad, where we find Art Inside Out (since 2015) and x-sites (2017-2019, turning into a biennial in 2020) and in Helsingborg, which has held its annual street art initiative Artstreet Hbg since 2015. These biennials are examples of hybrids in which the municipality’s public art department is involved to varying degrees.

Art Inside Out is a residency activity and a collaboration in Region Halland that moves between all the municipalities in Halland. Skåne has similar regional initiatives in NOKS, Nätverket för Offentlig Konst i Skåne (Network for Public Art in Skåne). Several municipalities also show other co-financed projects, for example EKFA was a project organized by Västerås Museum, which was co-financed by the Swedish Arts Council (50%) and Region Västmanland (25%) with the remaining 25% coming from the different municipalities. The advantage highlighted here is that this project was not influenced by local public art policy documents, and therefore offered greater freedom regarding the selection of art. Several mention individual projects: Malmö cites the so-called tripartite funding of the City Tunnel as an example but sees this more as an exception than a rule.

In the responses from both Lund and Umeå, public art is balanced against what happens at their respective municipal art spaces. Umeå, for example, describes how performance is a “natural feature” of municipal art spaces and Lund refers to a tradition that goes back to the 1960s. Questions about municipal art spaces as “semi-public” environments (as art historian and curator Nina Möntmann has called it) and whether the exhibitions that take place there are to be understood as “public,” constitute an important field of inquiry. However, for the purposes of this study, it is more interesting to...
address what role the municipal art gallery plays in relation to public art, a question asked directly in my survey.

When asked about the role of municipal art spaces, Jönköping replied that there is no such thing while Helsingborg stated that it has been deprived of its official mission. In Nacka, public art is part of urban planning, and therefore have little contact with the municipal art gallery, while Stockholm, Uppsala and Gothenburg, as mentioned above, have their own public art departments. Stockholm writes how the art gallery (Liljevalchs) and Stockholm Konst “support each other,” even if they do not work together very much. When Stockholm Konst started in 2008, it was part of Liljevalchs Konsthall and the links were stronger then.20 Among other things, a part of the art gallery’s new pavilion was designed to showcase ongoing public art initiatives. Such a space exists in Uppsala, but it is currently located in the same building as the city theater, not at the art museum. Sarah Hansson, process manager for the 1%-rule at Göteborg Konst, replied that the municipal art gallery has a public art activity, but that it is in the process of being reshaped and currently has a marginal collaboration with Göteborg Konst. On the other hand, the municipal art gallery runs its own project, Urban Konst, which aims to create and promote public art in the city.

In other municipalities, the link between public art and the municipal art gallery is generally tighter. Public art is organized either together with the municipal art spaces or under its auspices. This is also reflected in other responses. In Eskilstuna, it is reported that public art initiatives are regularly arranged at the art gallery, and the art managers in Halmstad describe the municipal art space as having a close relationship with public art. Peter Bergman, museum director at the gallery in Huddinge, emphasizes the expertise of the art gallery, and Västerås, Borås, Eskilstuna, Sundsvall and Södertälje respond that public art in the municipality is arranged through their art spaces, while Örebro speak of their art gallery having a “decisive influence.” Malmö, which is currently undergoing a reorganization, also emphasized the importance of the gallery for this purpose.

It is not possible to make any sweeping conclusions based on these differences, though it is clear that those municipalities with close collaborations with local art spaces also see the gallery as part of their

20 Since 2019, it has been part of the Museums and Art Department, together with the City Museum and the Medieval Museum, among others.
overall work with public art, whether it is a question of using the site as a forum for performances or as a place where a discussion about temporary art can be held.

Temporary site-specific art: two examples

It is easy to associate temporary art with things that only exist for a certain period of time or in the context of a defined process. But “temporary” can also mean that the life of the work or process is uncertain, as is the case with the Helsingborg Street Art Festival. The works produced in this festival last for a while, but erode over time. These works can be said to exist in a kind of extended now, where a deliberate non-maintenance allows them to weather away rather than be completed or dismantled.\textsuperscript{21} Another example of a temporary yet long-lasting work is Taxinge Piazza, which was created in 2006 when the performance collective

\textsuperscript{21} But the outcome is not always certain. As Joanna Sandell Wright of Södertälje Konsthall notes, the tradition of ‘the permanent’ is strong, which also implies a desire to preserve the temporary, thus going against the very intention of the work.
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International Festival and the design group Front were given the opportunity to redesign the space outside Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm. The municipal art space awarded International Festival a grant, which was invested in working out an application to transform the parking lot outside the municipal art space into a public square. What began as a sort of extended performance in which the group attempted to implement a change without ever seeking to reach their goal, ultimately resulted in the city planning office getting involved in the issue and, against all odds, carrying out the project. The new budget was limited, so it was decided to maximize outcomes by finding the cheapest and most sustainable (i.e. durable) solutions possible. It was decided to design the new plan with road markings, using road marking paint, and to fill the square with lots of plastic chairs.

_Taxinge Piazza_ highlights a number of aspects of public art that are relevant to my investigation. Partly because of budgetary constraints, and the way the application process was integrated into the artistic one, but also because the artists were comprised of a performance group and a design collective.²² It is also interesting that the initiative originates from the local municipal art space, which, so to speak, turned outward toward the public.²³ The work was conducted outside Stockholm’s “public” art and was never intended to be understood as permanent. But since these kinds of markings are quite durable, they were left to slowly wear away.²⁴

If _Taxinge Piazza_ slowly disappeared, there are also works that are based on a continuous inflow and interaction. In these cases, the work ceases to “exist” whenever this flow is impeded. Lisa Jevbratt’s _The Voice_ (2006-2009) is such an example. _The Voice_ does not have a municipal commissioning body, it was commissioned by Public Art Agency Sweden, and existed in what was then a fairly new part of the public space, namely, a government website. The work was transformed by the searches individuals made on Public Art Agency Sweden’s website

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²² For a discussion of this, with an emphasis on International Festival, see “Too Much Too Soon: Tor Lindstrand’s and Mårten Spångberg’s International Festival” in _Empty Stages, Crowded Flats: Performativity as Curatorial Strategy_, ed. Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2017).
²³ Tensta Konsthall’s outward turn can be seen as part of a broader movement among many publicly funded art institutions in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which the Norwegian critic and curator Jonas Ekeberg described as “New Institutionalism.” See, for example, _New Institutionalism: Verksted #1_, ed. Jonas Ekeberg (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003).
²⁴ Interview with Tor Lindstrand May 15, 2020.
and searches that led there via other search engines). In simple terms, the work consisted of the search terms used, which, using typographic size differences and different frames around the words, provided information about parameters determined by the artist, such as how often a word was searched for or how frequent it appeared on the website. In other words, the work was interactive. Nonetheless, it still broke with existing conventions in that the interactivity was not visible to all users (since people were interacting with the search engines, not because they wanted to be incorporated into an art piece, but simply because they were seeking information) and in that the result of the search was delayed so that the output was not displayed in real time. The work aimed to make visible what was being searched for, and not invite analysis of the algorithm itself.

In this way, the result was a kind of portrait of what applicants expected to find on Public Art Agency Sweden’s website, and thus also a picture of hegemonic structures, both perceived and actual. What the visitors searched for not only shows who Public Art Agency Sweden represented, but also makes the visitors’ expectations visible. The Voice can thus be said to be site-specific, not only because it was associated with the website, but also because the work depicted (without evaluating) the different art-political, sociological and economic conditions that prevailed at that point in time. However, The Voice existed in this form for only a few years. This was mainly due to the fact that the website was constantly being rebuilt and the work therefore needed to be constantly updated to maintain its function. This was both a costly process and labor intensive for the artist.

The examples I have presented above show that maintenance issues are important even for temporary art, a point rarely discussed. This is certainly a problem that all kinds of public art encounters, as Karin Hermerén shows in Offentlig konst - ett kulturarv (Public Art - A Cultural Heritage). Among other things, Hermerén touches on the issue of responsibility for the many works of art included in the corporatization and selling of State agencies to private actors,

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including buildings and the art they hold. Hermerén shows, for example, that in 11 of 25 case studies, the buildings (and the art) have changed hands at least once since they were commissioned.27 The examples I present here highlight another aspect of time, namely how slow change and weathering can be part of the work itself, and how change can be repeated and occur at the rapid speed of digital technology. The predetermined lifespan of *The Voice* meant that the art had to relate to this very fact, which also illustrates how flexibility (and time constraints) has become an increasingly common issue for public art.

The duration of *The Voice* was regulated in a contract, and only months after the contract expired, Public Art Agency Sweden changed its internet provider and suddenly. The outcome was that all contacts between *The Voice* and the website were instantly broken. This highlights another interesting aspect of the public sphere. Public Art Agency Sweden’s website, a public environment, is owned and managed by a private company. But this company is periodically changed as a result of the dictates of the procurement process. The publicly funded public sphere thus steers art more towards the temporary, rather than the permanent.

The boundaries between the private and public sectors have long since been blurred. This of course also changes the conditions for publicly funded art. The survey reveals other hybrid arrangements between private and public, where, for example, municipal expertise is consulted when private companies are building residential areas on the basis of land allocations they have received from the municipality, and where the municipality procures private art consultants to produce suitable proposals for artists.

Even the question of a work of art’s regulatory compliance has become incorporated into issues that are regulated from the outset. If the deregulations of the 1990s had surprising consequences in terms of permanent art, public art commissioning bodies have a greater awareness today. In an interview, Anna Ehn in Uppsala explains how, even early on when commissioning public art for a municipal building, they already consider what will happen to the work if the site where it is displayed or performed is decommissioned.28 In general, many of the municipalities interviewed testify to the fact that in recent

27 Ibid., p. 290.
28 Team meeting on October 8, 2020.

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decades the process of commissioning a work of art has become more professionalized and bureaucratized.29

Temporary art and commissioning bodies
The temporary art of today often involves dialogue with citizens. It can be seen as an attempt to move beyond what the art historian and critic Alexander Nagel has called plop art, the kind of art that is suddenly just sitting there in the middle of the street, without anyone in the neighborhood being asked or even told about it.30 Nagel’s comment is

29 The same conclusion is reached in Söderbäck 2020. See also the reference to the private art consultancy ArtPlatform in “Public Art - An attempt to navigate” in this volume where they state that they started to work with municipal public art commissions in 2016, a decade after the consultancy was built. Four years later, municipalities are the commissioners in four out of five projects.

based on French artist Xavier Veilhan’s sculpture *Le monstre* (2004) in Tours. Nagel initially sees this as a textbook example of plop art, but changes his mind when he learns about the process behind it, where the local community had a major influence on the artistic process and its final outcome. Veilhan’s sculpture was commissioned by *Nouveaux Commanditaires*, a French public art organization (though not publicly funded) that operates based on the assumption that the need for and commissioning of a work of art must come from the local community, not from either the state or municipality. The “protocol” that stipulated the process underlined the shared responsibility of all stakeholders.

The questionnaire asked the respondents to comment on why they wanted to work with temporary art and with what value they felt it contributed. As many as 80% responded that this art opened up to dialogue with the intended users, either because it opened the door to discussion or because it is easier to anchor locally. “An opportunity for people to become involved in the development of the city,” writes art manager Josefine Bolander in Eskilstuna, and art gallery manager Eva Eriksdotter in Borås mentions “social sustainability” as a motivation for this approach. The municipalities’ responses also indicate that these works were considered better at capturing current issues and provide insights into and knowledge of artistic processes. Temporary art creates greater equality between the viewer and artist and an “active versus passive consumption of art,” according to Olof Ahlström, curator of public art in Sundsvall.

By involving the intended viewers, the users, the municipalities claim that other ways of looking at art, differing from how traditional art is viewed, are enabled. This may require that users have an influence, a kind of municipally organized grassroots perspective. But they can also come up with ideas for completely different uses and new questions regarding “utility.” Emil Nilsson, curator of public art in Lund, echoes these ideas when he links the development of art to social change. In the service economy, art is moving more towards event-based work, he says. However, a few municipalities see a potential danger in participatory art being instrumentalized in this way. There is a strong

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31 In 2020, the French artist was featured in Stockholm’s public art with *Vårbergs jättar* (*Vårberg’s Giants*), a public work in the Stockholm suburb of Vårberg inaugurated in October 2020.

awareness in the construction industry that the use of a building may change. Permanent art then risks reflecting a situation that no longer exists and thus hinders the building’s reprogramming. Temporary art simply responds better to this need for flexibility, say curators Sarah Hansson in Gothenburg and Anna Wignell in Västerås. On the other hand, others think that temporary art may have a greater critical potential, since it is not subjected to the same conditions as a permanent work.

The responses show that temporary art can help activate and engage citizens, but they also show that this kind of temporality, even when it includes participation, can be driven by other agendas. Ultimately, the question of the capacity for art to engage effectively, returns, which, in Alexander Nagel’s view, may well result in something looking like “plop art” without in fact being so.

**Getting involved**

The examples I present above, Taxinge Piazza and The Voice, show that permanence and transitoriness are best viewed as approximations in a reciprocal relationship. The concepts are thus not mutually exclusive since what is temporary is always permanent to some degree, and the permanent always temporary. This is also true of legal definitions. Temporary building permits are valid in the municipality of Stockholm for a maximum of five years and, as mentioned above, they can only be renewed a certain number of times before they become permanent. Permanent art, on the other hand, comes with a promise to be sustainable for a certain number of years. For Public Art Agency Sweden, the minimum is five years (depending on the situation and technique), while 20-30 years is usually considered the norm for building-related art.33

Taxinge Piazza and The Voice also shed light on the role of participation. If Taxinge Piazza ceased to exist because of the activity of the participants (i.e., it was worn down from their visits), The Voice ceased to exist as soon as participation was no longer active. Only traces remain, memories of an activity. Both artworks thus raise questions about what participation actually is: in neither case were the participants directly aware of their importance to the existence of the work. Yet the artworks were unthinkable without them.

33 According to an e-mail from Henrik Orrje, Head of Operations 12/11/2020.
What it means to be involved can thus look very different in different works and the relationship can consequently be described by a variety of terms: interactive, immersive, practicable, relational, performative, participatory, dialogical or even unconscious. What these terms have in common is that they point to phenomena that unfold in a temporal process, which also means that some works of art are readily identified by this characteristic; they may, for example, be called processual, temporary, temporal-based or time-based. The concepts themselves are multifaceted: interactivity can be human-human, human-document or human-system, for example, and under all of these there are subdivisions and degrees of participation. Leafing through a book is interactive in a certain way, being involved in designing it is another. An activity can also have different degrees of activity. Both listening and seeing more or less actively is central to the philosopher Jacques Rancière’s concept of the emancipated spectator when he writes that “viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms...” As Rancière tells us, experiencing and interpreting a work of art can be engaging.

Active listening involves more stakeholders in public art, particularly in relation to participation, where it is important for both the commissioning body and the artist to listen to both those affected by the art, without losing artistic integrity in the process. The process leading up to a completed public artwork is really a chain of decisions, all of which involve varying degrees of participation. Anna Ehn in Uppsala, for example, outlines a multi-stage process in which participation comes into play even before an artist is consulted, as was the case in the Gothenburg municipality’s Safe, Beautiful City, discussed and problematized in Oscar Svanelid’s chapter in this anthology.

The position of the artist in public art in general, and participatory art in particular, is thus (at least in theory) different from the situation in

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his or her own studio. A recurring concept here is “criticality,” which attempts to carve out a position between, on the one hand, a kind of dependence/loyalty to the art and a critical distance toward it. 37

The many concepts I introduced above are sometimes interrelated, though sometimes they are mutually exclusive, for example, the relationship between the work and the viewer. “Immersive” is a term which (like many others) is used in interactive media and computer games and describes the situation that arises when, for example, the player is immersed in the game and feels that he or she “exists” in the world.38

On the one hand, such a situation may seem to be incompatible with a critical distance, since the viewer is more or less in the hands of the storyteller; on the other hand, it describes what it is like to participate in Taina Ruiz Guiterrez’s video walks, Örebro Variations. In Guiterrez’s work, the viewer follows a pre-recorded walk using a phone and thus occupies one and the same place, but in two different ways. The work allows the viewers to see a different story unfolding in the place where they are, as if in a parallel universe. It is an example of how immersive works can ‘absorb’ the viewer while the physical place they occupy continues to be present but in a different way.

Immersive works are also often “practicable,” requiring the viewer to move around an area. Practicability is a term introduced by researchers Samuel Bianchini and Erik Verhagen, who use it to describe art that can or should be touched (and thus need not be public). “We describe them as ‘practicable’ because their defining characteristic is the ability to generate an activity that can transform both the works themselves and their audience.”39 This leads them to discuss artwork as a kind of initiator, a dispositif, a term developed by Michel Foucault to describe how an “apparatus” (dispositif) initiates and shapes human activities. The idea here is that the “practicable” artwork functions as such a dispositif, that it actually requires some form of interaction by the viewer to exist at all. The concept of dispositif also points to the need for critical examination of the “performance” itself. For Foucault, the term also denotes the strategies of modern power structures to

37 See the discussion in the chapter “Public Art: An attempt to navigate” in this anthology. As well as Irit Rogoff “From Criticism to Critique to Criticality”: eipcp 1/2003, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en.html [accessed 03/17/2020].

38 Janet H. Murray has discussed the relevance of this concept for storytelling in digital worlds in her Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

control and discipline individuals.40

“Practicable” art also creates a kind of bond between participant and artist, which is reminiscent of the way art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud conceived of the concept relational aesthetics.41 The traditional artwork, as Bourriaud argued, creates a relationship between artist and viewer. In relational aesthetics, it was precisely this relationship and this encounter between artist and viewer that characterized the work of art itself. Bourriaud has been the subject of criticism for his idealized way of describing the relationship between viewer and artist (in which the former at worst becomes the latter’s “material”), but here it may suffice to note that he downplayed the object in favor of what the work itself makes the participants do, that is, what kind of interaction the work/situation evokes.

Another way of approaching the complex issue of participation/involvement is to consider that when individuals other than the artist have influence over the production itself, hence the concept of “prosumers”, the distinction between consumer and producer seems to disappear. Participation in this respect requires a different level of engagement than what is commonplace in mainstream spectator culture; “no one protests if you walk out of the cinema,” as Haggren puts it in the book Deltagarkultur (Participatory Culture).42 Not that this means that the situation is entirely egalitarian; in every situation where there is participation, there is also a tacit agreement. If these agreements stipulate active participation (e.g. prosumers), passive viewing is not always acceptable (those who participate without participating are called lurkers). Identifying what these agreements are and how they are to be respected therefore becomes crucial for dialogue-based art. What will the dialogue lead to and who is it for?

Works where the creation process involves participants are therefore sometimes described as “process-based,” because they are characterized by dialogue. Insofar as the dialogue is to be considered as the work of art itself, the work is thus temporary. However, this does not mean that all temporary works are dialogue-based. Performance, for example, is an art form that takes place over a stretch of time but does not need


42 Kristoffer Haggren et al, Deltagarkultur [Participatory Culture] (Gothenburg: Korpen, 2008), p. 60.
to involve the viewer more than as a spectator (which, according to Jacques Rancière’s argument above, can be quite interactive). In this respect, this kind of performance is more similar to other art forms that unfold over time without the direct need for viewer interaction, as is the case for much of today’s video and sound art, which is why time-based is a more appropriate term than temporal in these cases. Of course, there is no obvious distinction, as a work that is on display for a certain period of time (for example, during a biennial) is temporary without being either time-based or dialogue-based. However, temporary and/or temporal here refers to art that plays out over time and is often performed dialogically between artist and participants.

As this exposé demonstrates, what involvement actually means is extremely complex and the question of what it might lead to needs to be preceded by a critical examination. I have also aimed to demonstrate that the dividing line does not run between temporary and permanent, which themselves are not static concepts. Moreover, the analysis shows that participation and transitoriness are not synonymous or symbiotic; for example, participatory processes can lead to permanent works. We also saw examples of this in my analyses of the municipal investments in temporary art, where, for example, we encountered a strategy of creating dialogue to increase participation in the creative process itself by opening up the part of the procurement called the “sketch assignment.” An artwork with an objective that creates a permanent outcome can increase the participant’s understanding of their own involvement, whereas temporary art can create participatory processes that do not contribute to activity. And vice versa.

**Temporary art: concluding discussion**

Some municipalities report that the fact that state institutions have started to work with temporary art has had an impact on its implementation. Another reason municipalities reported for wanting to work with temporary art is that it was seen to reflect what contemporary art looks like.
Renegotiations

like, and they do not want to separate out public from contemporary art. They see it as their mission to “show the breadth of what the art world encompasses in an accessible way,” as Anja Boman in Umeå puts it, while Joacim Eneroth in Halmstad stresses the importance of showing “more kinds of artistry and more kinds of art.” Similar perspectives emerge in the responses from Jönköping, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Västerås. Anna-Karin Wulgué in Örebro replies that temporary art is more in demand today; after being very much about function in the past, it is now more about “participation and openness towards an undefined result.”

It is evident that an important and central part of contemporary art has oriented itself toward participation and dialogue. This “turn toward the social,” as Claire Bishop calls it, has a chequered history that is worth touching on briefly here.44 In Sweden, this turn toward the social is best exemplified with an exhibition curated by Ulrika Léven, Åsa Nacking and Mats Stjernstedt at the ICA store Malmö Caroli in Malmö in November 1993. Elin Wikström, among others, participated with her work *Hur skulle det gå om alla gjorde så?* (*What Would Happen if Everyone Did This?*) in which she slept in her bed in the shop during opening hours.

But as Lisa Jevbratt’s aforementioned artwork reminds us, process-based art also has other genealogies: interactivity has been a central factor in digitalized art since at least the middle of the last century. The similarity between dialogue-based art and internet art became increasingly evident with the first generation of “net artists” around the mid-nineties, where the interaction between artist and viewer often moved between the public space and the digital sphere. If such a distinction can be made, then we can say that *The Voice* was enacted in the part of the public sphere that exists in the digital world. Net art depends on its viewer/user to exist and thus (partially) dissolves the boundary between artist and viewer, another recurring theme we see in process-based art.

It is perhaps serendipitous that the art field moved toward dialogue-based art at the same time as net art was established. But another, common cause for the emergence of both, and which is usually discussed, relates to larger, societal changes such as the financial crisis of the 1990s, the deregulation that took off with the emergence of neoliberal politics and the accompanying notions of the “creative class.” Major issues

such as globalization, political shifts and various economic crises are, of course, relevant in some sense to all artistic activity. What set dialogue-based art (and net art) apart was that it so clearly tried to find forms that could respond to the consequences of globalization. It did not seek to make objects for an art market but, on the contrary, to use art to bridge the social gaps widened by including the viewer. Both dialogue-based art and net art held the promise of strengthened democratic institutions in which the participators were involved in a more direct way.

Dialogue-based art is therefore often presented as part of a broader form of activism. Curator Nato Thompson describes how socially engaged art is closely intertwined with movements such as AIDS activism, the women’s rights movement, etc. Artist and activist Gregory Sholette has discussed the emergence of a variety of socially engaged art groups from the 1980s to the present day. Theorist Grant Kester also discusses the art scene’s turn toward dialogue-based art, taking on the issue of what happens when an artist acts on behalf of someone else without any point of anchorage.

Much has been written about this, and it would be beyond the scope of this study to explore all the complexities. However, two points are relevant to my discussion here. One is about how temporary, dialogue-based art relates to the art world. Theorists and critics such as Maria Lind, Nato Thompson and Claire Bishop have pointed out that the emergence of this kind of art is often based on the hope that art can offer a counterweight to the world’s increasing commodification where citizens are turned into passive consumers, as well as a turn away from the art market’s focus on the genius of the individual artist’s product, and that this also comes with the justification that art should act and activate people where the state has failed. They all point to the risk that the new strategies will be “captured” and commodified. On this point, Lind writes: “Here, activism’s idealistic

47 Grant Kester, Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
48 Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, op cit.
view of cooperation clashes with the demands of private companies and the state for increased profitability and efficiency.\footnote{Lind "The Collaborative Turn," op.cit., p. 20.}

The second point concerns the relationship with public art. It is clear that art, which extends beyond the traditional art venue, will engage other spaces, thus also approaching the domains of public art. Dialogue-based art has emerged here as a critique of the way public art has been utilized. So problematic was public art seen to be that Suzanne Lacy coined the term \textit{New Genre Public Art} for art that sought to actively engage in public spaces. \footnote{Suzanne Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimage and Metaphoric Journeys", in \textit{Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art}, Eds. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1995).} “Unlike much of what has been called public art to date, ‘new genre public art’ – art in both traditional and non-traditional media that communicates and interacts with a broad and diverse audience on issues directly relevant to their lives – is based on engagement.”\footnote{Rosalyn Deutsche, \textit{Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996).} In a discussion that was also conducted in a broader field, Rosalyn Deutsche, for example, repeatedly problematized the role of art in the context of gentrification.\footnote{Jenkins, \textit{Convergence Culture}, op.cit.}

As can be seen from the discussion of the emergence of an “alternative” public art, much of its self-understanding is based, from the outset, on a social commitment where there is also an ongoing discussion about how to avoid instrumentalization by external forces. It is also a question of occupying new areas and engaging participants, even if the artistic expression may be “traditional.” Social engagement is often the driving force – artists strive to overcome the shortcomings and bridge the gaps that arise between producer and consumer in commercial culture.

This discussion broadens when we consider the participatory cultures that blossomed in the context of digital media. Henry Jenkins has repeatedly pointed to a shift in the creation of what he calls convergence cultures, showing how consumers take over the role and become co-creators, even re-creators of the work.\footnote{Jenkins, \textit{Convergence Culture}, op.cit.} The word “participation” as used here and as the authors of the book Deltagarkultur (\textit{Participatory Culture}) note, has become a positive word because it suggests a “democratic structure where everyone is offered co-determination,” but at the same time, it states that this ideal is something that is
seldom realized. Their view of participation is based on all involved parties being aware of what they are participating in and on a dialogue between them: “Participatory culture presupposes reciprocal communication between subjects within the context of a work, a medium or a social situation.” These are ideals that are not always so easy to live up to (if they are even desirable) in the case of artistic activity, where the issue is perhaps better formulated in terms of responsibility. The artist has a responsibility to the intended viewers, but the viewer also has a responsibility in this exchange.

As the above example shows, participatory art and the discussion surrounding it began in the United States in the 1980s and took over in Europe a decade later. Discursively, the same discussion revolved in relation to questions of communities and cultural consumption in general and in net art, in particular. All this forms a clear backdrop against which contemporary art’s interest in dialogue-based processes emerges. The question that remains, however, is what relevance it has for understanding the emergence and function of temporary art in “public” public art. Can art be activist and still pass through all the processes associated with its anchorage in a specific municipality?

Perhaps the latter question is not asked the right way, or maybe it is a bit anachronistic. The conditions that shaped “new genre public art” are quite different from the conditions that prevail today. After three decades, process-based art has transformed the art world and with it the perception of public art as such. Public art has become more professionalized, and insights into the available modes of expression and shortcomings are much more salient today than they were just ten years ago. This does not mean that issues related to instrumentalization, or gentrification are a thing of the past, but there is a growing awareness of these issues among stakeholders.

The work with dialogue-based art commissioned by the public and placed in the public space can be described as a kind of convergence. Convergence, Jenkins writes, is a process driven from both the top down and bottom up. From the top comes various dispositifs in the form of agendas, steering documents and organizational structures. From the bottom comes the will to access space and finances to work for a kind of art that activates its participants. Where the art

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55 Haggren, Deltagarkultur (Participatory Culture), op.cit., p. 32.
56 Ibid, p.43 (my italics).
57 Jenkins, Convergence Culture, op.cit., p. 28.
is forced to submit to increasing bureaucratization to enable public commissions, the institutions of public art must change too. Not only does this apply to their educational responsibility, but also to a review of their own structures so that they respond to the needs of art. In the responses from the 20 largest municipalities in Sweden, we see that such work is underway.