

Meaningful thinking, and by extension meaningful practice, can essentially move in two ways. We can begin from the direct observation of concrete reality, extrapolating from its discreet particularities abstract concepts, categories, laws, or forms. Conversely, we can also set out by postulating a series of axioms from which we then derive again, perhaps *ordine geometrico*, a description of a set of abstract organizing principles. Observation then comes afterwards, as a litmus test of sorts, when we test to what extent these abstract organizing principles really give shape to physical, material reality. In both cases – whether one begins from the particular to move to the general or vice versa – what is essential is that an imperfect yet operational correspondence between concrete reality and abstract generalities emerges. It is this operational imperfection of our models of thinking and doing that allows us to make sense of things by translating time and again between lived experience on the one hand and the level of the conceptual on the other. (All seemingly perfect models in fact side with either the concrete or the abstract too much, thus ultimately offering not much more than either an indiscriminate description of the world as it presents itself, or a blur of pure ideation that does no longer pertain to the world at all.) Also, it is worth noting that the distinction often made between materialist thinking (which assumes the primacy of material reality) and idealist thinking (which grants ontological privilege to abstract ideas, assuming they underlie material reality as it manifests itself and are therefore ultimately of a higher order of truth) has no necessary correlation with how we may choose to move.

But all of this is rather pompous of course, and overly abstract. A brief look at some of the protagonists in Riet Wijnen's *Conversation Four: First Person Moving*, which is at the heart of her current exhibition at P/////AKT, is therefore helpful. This scripted "conversation" is somewhat suggestive of a game at a party starring a rather unlikely assemblage of guests seated around the dinner table: there is Thomas Metzinger, a German theoretical philosopher interested in the philosophy of mind and in problems of consciousness, but also Silvia Federici, a radical theorist and social activist operating at the intersection of autonomist Marxism and feminism, as well as the whole of Abstraction-Création, a more or less informal association of artists making nonfigurative work in the 1930s. Conversation is deserving of scare quotes here, because the exchange ensues according to a strictly formalized procedure, as opposed to the more fluid and improvisational forms normally associated with conversation: each character takes turns making a statement, to which the other two respond by saying either 'yes' or 'no'.

This normative parameter is indeed reminiscent of play rather than of conversation in the ordinary sense of the word, and yet we can speculate that at the same time it is also what would make a sustained exchange between these wildly different characters possible at all. Take Federici, for instance: the genius of her work as both a theorist and an activist consists precisely of an especially meaningful and useful oscillation between, on the one hand, abstract (but certainly real) concepts such as capitalism and patriarchy, and, on the other, everyday lived reality. Particularly instructive here is the Wages for Housework campaign from the early 1970s with which Federici was closely involved. The aim of this campaign was to raise awareness that – contrary to what many still believe today – gendered work such as domestic work and childcare is in fact work, and not some purportedly "natural" predilection in women. Therefore, the campaign argued, it should also be compensated as such, as these forms of labour are absolutely vital to the continued existence of the economy. (In her writings, Federici at times displays a clear awareness of the fact that capital, if it had to properly remunerate all work that is done to sustain its relations of production, would most likely not be able to sustain itself.) The power of Wages for Housework then, is that it allowed for a reconsideration of the relation between the particular, private domestic realities and capitalism in general, and therefore also for a possible reconfiguration of this relation.

How, then, to reconcile a model for thinking and doing so powerful precisely in its specificity with equally situated projects – in this case Metzinger's ideas concerning the apparition of the self in consciousness and Abstraction-Création's interests (interests that play out differently

for different members of the association) in abstraction as a formal principle in artistic production? While this would at first sight seem like a rather hopeless undertaking that has “cognitive dissonance” written all over it, what becomes clear in *Conversation Four* is that there is in fact plenty with which to agree and to disagree. After some time, the positive and negative responses given by Metzinger, Federici, and Abstraction-Création start to become more sensible, and the order or the respective statements appears to evolve into something more than a mere accumulation of free-floating declarations existing independently from one another. In order words, a certain logic is constructed, and more or less consistent positions are fleshed out concerning, for instance, the connection between the individual and the larger social or societal fabric as a whole, or indeed materialism versus idealism. And as soon as these positions are more or less defined, they also begin to push up against and pull at each other, and a conversational dynamic emerges after all. Because to engage in conversation is, of course, to allow oneself to be moved.

**Riet Wijnen – Conversation Four: First Person Moving
Pense-Bête VI, Object: image and language**

**Reflected upon by gerlach en koop
Essay by Ilga Minjon**

**20 November – 18 December 2016
Thu-Sun, 14-18 hrs**