

The ProCoKnow Parliament

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In Scandinavia, we often pride ourselves on having the best form of democracy and the most developed welfare state. Perhaps this used to be the case, but today people take the democratic system for granted and have stopped questioning it. I find it unhealthy that the model for organising our society has thus become static. It forestalls productive criticism and makes people forget that systems and things are not fixed, natural entities.

The Icelandic parliament is called the *Althing*, which means *a space for all things*. It was established in AD 930, and from then on the Icelanders met annually at the Thingvellir plain to claim their ground and lay down rules for their society. Later, the parliament moved to Reykjavik, but the name and its meaning have been preserved.

As Bruno Latour writes, *thing*, derived from Old English and German, denotes not so much an object as a case, a controversy, or even strife. A thing implies friction and negotiation. One could therefore look at the Althing as a space for all negotiations. For me, the most important issue is not the outcome of such frictional negotiations, but the fact that we engage in dialogues, where engagement and critical reflections are themselves the end, and not just means to secure a solution or solve a problem.

What are the benefits of reverting to the Althing and the thing? What consequences would these concepts have for our way of thinking today? I believe that finding controversy at the heart of the thing entails an opening up of this thing to relativity; it becomes unstable, fluctuating, and responsive to the context in which it is used.

In the art world, works can also be understood as relative, not least because they depend on the responses of the viewers or users. Like many before me, I have worked with the dematerialisation of the object and the handing-over of responsibility to the user of the artwork. By insisting that the users co-produce the works through their perceptions and expectations, I create a situation where the work disappears as a thing in itself; instead, a fragile contract between the unstable work and its feeling–experiencing–thinking user is established.

My point is that continuous renegotiations keep an object or a system – be it political, social, or artistic – open and supple. Actually, I think any structure should have a little parliament: a household should have one, a school, a city, or a society. Here, they would be able to evaluate themselves in relation to the rest of reality. This is necessary in order to establish what I like to call an encyclopaedic attitude to the world, which nurtures difference as our common base.

Take for example some of the central platforms for the discussion of art: the museum, the university, and the artist's studio. I have become increasingly interested in trying to forge a closer relationship among these entities. We could roughly characterise the artist's studio as a site of *production*; the museum as an institution that takes upon itself the responsibility to *communicate* art to its users; and the university as an organ that produces research and theoretical *knowledge*. And why not synthesise the doings of these three structures into the concept *ProCoKnow*? Obviously, my idea is not to keep

the three platforms apart, each doing their own, separate thing. Ideally, they should spill into each other, blend, intertwine – learn from one another. Knowledge is produced and communicated by all three, and why not benefit from this fact, rather than accept a division between these entities, a division that has been reinforced throughout modernity?

The result of this division has been a formalisation of the museum, the university, and the studio. They have each become rigid and secluded containers, open to various forms of content production, while they themselves are naturalised and taken for granted as frameworks. By isolating themselves, these entities have severed their bonds with reality. They have forgotten to cast a critical glance at themselves and their practice – as is the case with the Scandinavian welfare state. This, in turn, has had a huge impact on the content they produce.

I think we need to reconsider what the museum, the university, and the studio can do. None of these entities is a container; they are agents. And their doings can have far-reaching consequences. The more flexible their structure, the easier it is for them to forge a sustainable link with reality.

A museum could become a school, a space for the production of knowledge – and a studio could do the same. For quite some time, I have been developing plans with the Universität der Künste in Berlin for a school that would benefit from its proximity to my studio. Others are discussing similar plans: Peter Weibel and Peter Sloterdijk at ZKM (Center for Art and Media) in Karlsruhe are but one example. The close relationship between the Städelschule and the exhibition space Portikus in Frankfurt, both directed by Daniel Birnbaum, is another. In the context of *Take your time*, my exhibition that opens at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in April, a similar scheme is under development. Along with Barry Bergdoll, Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at MoMA, and Mark Wigley, Dean of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University, I am setting up three one-day seminars in April and May that will explore questions about colour perception; one seminar will be held at MoMA, one at Columbia, and one at my studio in Berlin. The aim is to create sites for exchanges of opinion and for friction – since through friction and resistance we are able to cast a critical and evaluative glance at ourselves and our surroundings. Thus, three smaller parliaments join to form one parliament for the negotiation of art, architecture, and reality.