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LOMME' [FORESTS—IN YOUR
POCKET]: INGER KÆRGÅRD** ◊
**DEN FÆLLES KØKKENHAVE [THE
COMMON KITCHEN GARDEN]:
YNKB & MORTEN BENCKE** ◊

AN EDGE EFFECT/

**ART &
ECOLOGY IN
THE NORDIC
LANDSCAPE**

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SUE SPAID

SPELLBOUND: On Breaking the Spell Cast on Practical Artistic Action

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Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies that accompanied the 2002 exhibition she co-curated with Amy Lipton. As an independent curator, she has organized well over fifty exhibitions for artist-run spaces, university galleries, commercial galleries, and museums such as Santa Monica Museum of Art, Armory Center for the Arts, and SPACES, among others. She currently lives in Belgium. www.fabricationbelge.com

Art has the ability to elaborate and open up discourses without being labeled and categorized as this or that political faction. It can draw on a more complex system of references and the interdisciplinary than a purely politically defined activity.

— TUE GREENPORT

MOVING FROM DISCOURSE TO ACTION

Since the late nineteenth century, the art world has identified "uselessness" as the most distinguishing (and invaluable) feature of avant-garde art. Given the art world's continued reluctance to accept *as art* the outcomes of artists who opt to implement and test practical schemes, one imagines an art world under some spell regarding what constitutes art, even though few would deny that visual art (unlike architecture, biology, cooking or even magic, for which participation requires particular activities) is uniquely poised to reinvent and expand

its domain exponentially.⁶⁷ Rosalind Krauss' 1979 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" exemplifies the cult of "purposelessness" pervading the art world. Although she originally wrote this essay to discredit modernism's ties to medium specificity, her focus on *useless*, non-living land art rather *emboldens* the myth of the avant-garde, which she sought to bust by reprinting it in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1985).

Her twice ignoring that era's "living sculptures" made from living matter like trees, grass, seeds, organic debris and earth, first in *October* and later in her book without so much as a coda to justify their absence, suggests that she had problems reconciling life, which is always useful, and sculpture, however expanded its field (literally and figuratively). Examples of that era's "living sculptures" include Agnes Denes' *Rice/Tree/Burial* (1977), Hans Haacke's *Bowery Seeds* (1970), Harrison Studio's *Spoil's Pile* (1977–1978), Bonnie Sherk's *Crossroads Community (the farm)* (1974–1980), Robert Smithson's *Spiral Hill/Broken Circle* (1971) and Alan Sonfist's *Pool of Earth* (1975). Thirty years later, this approach still persists. In 2013, MoMA/PSI organized the "Expo 1" festival around the theme of recent ecological challenges, which have intensified the need for a paradigm shift, though for reasons its organizers ignored. Most artworks presented there reflect upon, rather than attempt to alleviate, manmade/natural disasters, thereby exemplifying "catastrophe art." Like the "horror-flick" genre it emulates, "catastrophe art" employs scare tactics to elicit emotions of fear, disgust and anxiety. Problematically, their fictional status

trivializes real horrors, further distracting spectators from the very problems this festival emphasizes.⁶⁸ Held hostage by the intractable spell of uselessness, the art world still goes gaga for purposely purposeless, open-ended situations.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, those artists who see the writing on the wall, and are effectively society's "first responders," are often most capable of implementing, not just proposing, new modes of being. Artists are typically futurists, exploring ideas and values that society is not yet prepared to grapple with. Too often, artists anticipate impending problems that local leaders and/or business interests won't imagine until they arrive and leave irreversible damage. Commissioned by the Ringling Art Museum in Sarasota, Florida, the Harrison Studio's *The Mangrove and the Pine* (1983) serves as a prime example of artists functioning as "first responders." Thirty years ago, they proposed eliminating the invasive *Australian Casuarina*, a pine-like intruder that swiftly "colonized" the swampy mangrove's Florida habitat.⁷⁰ Their

When coupled with the New Museum's "Against Nature" (2008) and MoMA/PSI's "September 11" (2011), "Dark Optimism," the exhibition accompanying Expo 1, effectively launched the genre of "catastrophe art." In 2013, there will be 185 horror movies, as compared to 135 in 2012 and 112 in 2011. No wonder U.S. museums want to stimulate market demand, but at what cost?

By "purposely purposeless, open-ended situations," I have in mind relational art, social practice, community art, "any-space-whatevers" (intentionless situations such as Pierre Huyghe's *Unrilled* (2011–2012) presented at documenta 13), and what I call free-for-all (experiential experiments like Tobias Rehberger's vegetative landscapes whose lack of stakeholders augments their overall vulnerability). For a more detailed discussion of these various practices, see pages 29–32 in *Green Acres: Artists Farming Fields, Greenhouses, and Abandoned Lots*, (CINCINNATI: CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER, 2013).

The Mangrove and The Pine "You can never tell when an aesthetic decision will ruin a landscape." www.theharrisonstudio.net/?page_id=604

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As proof of the art world's reluctance to accept as art artworks that implement and test practical ideas, consider the dearth of art magazine articles discussing "living sculptures," useful or not. I credit this oversight to Rosalind Krauss' failure to address art made from living matter in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." T.J. Demos's essay "Art After Nature" (April 2012), the rare environmental art article in *Artforum*, mentioned only two living sculptures, Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscape* (1965–1978–present) and Nils Norman's *Edible Park* (2010–present).

earlier intuitions have finally been confirmed by scientists who recently measured the way mangrove-edged shorelines in South Florida and Sri Lanka withstood storm surges during Hurricane Wilma and the Asian Tsunami as compared to Hurricane Katrina's tearing through Louisiana's mangrove-ravaged coast. More and more ecologists are climbing on board.⁰⁵

Given the scores of examples where artists have not only cautioned against catastrophes, but recommended affordable preventative measures, it's high time that we dismantle the logic clouding our ability to appreciate practical deeds on par with visionary artists, who exquisitely render the human condition long before others notice.⁰⁶ Absent a paradigm shift, the art world will continue to privilege either discursive artworks that convey/depict radical possibilities or non-discursive activities that provide empty-handed distractions, while disenfranchising particularly vital artistic actions. Our current attitude renders visual artists powerless to do anything as artists save presage calamities or wallow in oblivion.

By uselessness, I have in mind the art historical notion of "art for art's sake," derived from Kant's thesis that beauty entails an aesthetic experience whose purposive form yields inexplicable feelings of purposeless, splendidous pleasure. Kant famously claimed that the beautiful is to be understood as purposive without a *definite* purpose. Douglas Burnham clarifies: "A 'definite purpose' would be

either the set of external purposes (what the thing was meant to do or accomplish), or the internal purpose (what the thing was simply meant to be like)," and therein lies the rub.⁰⁷ Any artwork that attempts to do something useful smacks of having a "definite purpose" and risks becoming ugly. Consider social-design scholar Victor Margolin's worry: "How do we think about art that moves from discourse to action, art whose intent is to produce a useful result?"

He adds, "Once artists enter a realm of action, it is difficult to characterize their projects differently from those of other actors such as landscape designers or even architects ... the discursive has spilled over into the practical, and the practical has become more discursive."⁰⁸

Personally, I consider the way designers routinely purloin novel schemes from artworks far more worrisome.⁰⁹

Expanding upon Kant's ideas, Hannah Arendt singled out artworks (whether literature, painting, or music) for their worldliness, durability and uselessness, yet she bestowed them with purpose as thought things meant to inspire reflection and musing.

"Because of their outstanding permanence, works of art are the most intensely *worldly* of all tangible things; their *durability* is almost untouched by the corroding effect of natural processes,

07 Douglas Burnham, "Kant's Aesthetics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ¶ www.iep.utm.edu/kantaest/

08 Victor Margolin, "Reflections on Art and Sustainability," *Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art*, eds. Green, S. and Margolin, V., (NEW YORK AND CHICAGO AND NEW YORK: INDEPENDENT CURATORS INTERNATIONAL AND SMART MUSEUM OF ART, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, 2005), pp. 24-27.

09 On this level, museums resemble the Internet: their contents are there for the taking! In passing conversation, I have often heard designers and architects describe particular art experiences that have inspired their work, but I have never actually read a footnote that credited some influential artwork or artist.

05 This online post explains why Sanibel Island refuses residents' requests to trim mangroves. ¶ www.islandreporter.com/page/content/detail/id/512141/Mangroves-Holding-the-island-together.html?nav=5049 ¶

As confirmed on this site:

www.frip.org/SLR%20documents/Zhang%20of%20MangroveStormSurge%20Est%2012.pdf

06 My nod to visionary artists is meant only as an oblique reference to the 55th Venice Biennale. By contrast, my mentioning the human condition furnishes a direct link to Hannah Arendt's *Human Condition* (1958).

since they are *not subject to the use of living creatures*, a use which, indeed, far from actualizing their own inherent purpose—as the purpose of a chair is actualized when it is sat upon—can only destroy them [*italics mine*].”¹⁰

MOVING FROM USELESS TO FREE ACTS

Although I admire Kant's conception of the beautiful, I worry that its literal interpretation unnecessarily constrains artists' opportunities, while incidentally regulating what art institutions consider art, thus relegating potentially useful artistic actions to alternative institutions, where their limited exposure minimizes their impact. Since remarkable artworks supersede their site and few public works fit indoors, art world hierarchies don't concern me. Still, one cannot ignore the connections between funding, institutions, audiences and continued opportunities. Even if most notable art world events occur first in alternative spaces, they recur in larger institutions as exhibitions or retrospectives, where more people remember and record them. Consider Janet Cardiff's *Foray Part Motel* (2001), which I first experienced during her 2001 MoMA PSI retrospective. A true coup for the MET, *Foray Part Motel* has not yet opened at the Cloisters, but it is garnering far more publicity in this context than ten years ago when alternative institutions across the world first produced and presented it.

To achieve what Kant envisioned, I recommend that the art world adopt the twin test of generosity (a gift that is freely given and received without any expectation of return) in lieu of the “beautiful,” and non-instrumental (devoid of means-end relationships) instead of “purposeless” or “useless.”¹¹ Otherwise, practical artworks, however generous and inventive, remain nonart. Were art entirely purposeless,

10 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 1998), p. 167.

11 Sue Spaid, “Beauty as Duty,” *More or Less*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, (PASADENA: ART CENTER COLLEGE OF DESIGN, 1999).

society would not feel bound to treat novel artworks like priceless treasures, worthy of insuring, protecting, and conserving, centuries after their cultural impact has waned.

To distinguish potentially practical artworks from non-art practical actions, I recommend applying Arendt's 1961 notion of a free act as the concurrence of the “I can” and the “I will,” making freely-performed artistic actions invaluable in themselves, independent of expected or desired outcomes.¹² So long as artistic actions are performed freely, the artist (and engaged participants) gains a greater satisfaction from the doing than the outcome, making the capacity to act (the means) more fulfilling than some unpredictable outcome (the ends), even when the originating impulse is purposive. On this level, purposiveness resembles function more than intention, since the former is goal-oriented, while the latter is meaning-oriented. Having a goal and striving to achieve something is indicative of some action done for a purpose. We are so used to regarding artworks as inherently functionless that contriving them otherwise almost seems sacrosanct.

The role played by the “I will” helps to distinguish artist-initiated, community-oriented projects like Pittsburgh's Nine Mile Run Greenway Project (1996–1999) or Finland's Strata Scheme (ongoing since 1987) from artist-run community art projects that reflect the community's will, though rarely the artist's. There's a huge difference between a community identifying a problem or concerns and asking an artist to imagine ways to address/resolve/render this situation and a community that is searching for a potential activity/project, but lacks a strategy for deciding what to do, so they hire an artist to manage/direct their efforts. The former engenders public art, while the latter fosters community arts. Similarly, there's a huge difference between institutions that aim to convey particular information so they hire artists to design particular educational experiences and programs

12 Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?” ed. Peter Baehr, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, (NEW YORK: PENGUIN BOOKS, 2000), p. 451.

initiated by artists that feed into projects. An outsourced will negates any free act:

My focus here thus concerns artistic actions that:

- 1) are public, which effectively excludes community arts, whose fixed roster will effectively render them private activities, and
- 2) begin as actions/processes, which excludes discursive/didactic/educational projects whose purpose is to inform, teach, or relay ideas determined by employers. This does not exclude, however, artistic practices that foster activism, research, experimentation, or social practice, yet do not necessarily engender exhibitable objects/situations/documentation, so long as these practices eventually reach some public, either as a live/staged performance or published results.¹³

What differentiates artistic actions from those of scientific experiments, political actions, parenting or teaching (all actions done for a purpose) is that artistic actions do not necessarily fail should their desired or expected outcomes not occur. Since their success is measured by the possibility (the "I can") of doing something (the "I will"), unanticipated outcomes do not negate their import. In fact, a main feature of all artworks is the tendency for unimagined outcomes to overwhelm artists' original goals. Harmful outcomes are another story. Harmful outcomes that are either utilitarian (done with the deliberate intent to harm) or ungenerous (occur precisely because careless participants failed to prevent their incidence) automatically disqualify such actions, however freely performed, as belonging to the domain of artworks.

¹³ On this level, some group could claim an "Occupy" activity as their artwork, though the very variability of occupy encampments makes the identification of clear goals nigh impossible, and hence implausible as some practical artistic action. Action-directing intentions distinguish actions from open-ended situations. [JEONOK'S NOTE: The Occupy movement began in 2011, as Occupy Wall Street, in New York City's Zuccotti Park. It went on to become a global movement against social and economic inequality, sparked by the global financial crisis of 2008.]

This notion of privileging the "doing" over the outcome originated with Robert Morris' 1968 *Artforum* essay "Anti-Form," which argued for the significance of the artistic process over the final object. This perspective was institutionalized by Harald Szeeman's 1969 exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* for which 68 artists presented physical objects, which the artists considered "indications" of the process as opposed to finished artworks.¹⁴ Today, we tend to term artistic processes "practices," since they are indicative of artists' particularized ways of making their art. Since such artworks are now recognized as open systems whose incompleteness indicates their capacity to change from one context to another, we now consider exhibited projects as artworks, whose presentational histories begin with their first exhibition, but include the underlying actions, just as an exhibited painting includes its underlying processes.

Purposeful artworks that are performed in a manner intended to resolve particular problems rather than boost sales and/or career, remain no less vulnerable to rejection, failure, or neglect than ordinary artworks. Unlike scientific experiments, an artwork's success depends on spectators. Audience members decide whether to pay attention to/and or validate particular artworks, independent of their success at carrying out their intended purposes. For example, an artwork might achieve exactly what the artist had hoped, but be rejected as an artwork, while it may fail to achieve its intended goal, yet be widely accepted as a terrific artwork. One might find it surprising that neither the desired purpose nor anticipated outcome contributes to a practical artwork's overall success as art. What matters most for artists is the freedom to

¹⁴ I single-out Szeeman's exhibition, given its significant role in inscribing institutional memory. Between 1967 and 1969, ten curators organized eleven exhibitions featuring mostly "indications" for thirteen institutions in six countries. Of the 68 artists who presented works in "Attitudes," that era's ninth iteration, two-thirds had already participated in related exhibitions.

develop and/or employ whatever skill sets they have, as well as to carry out those projects deemed worthy of their time. Still, I can imagine that it's especially disheartening when artists consider such free acts "their art," yet art worlders seem incapable of accepting, let alone appreciating their actions "as art."

MOVING FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Having outlined a potentially useful scheme for evaluating practical artistic actions, I now turn to actual artworks that demonstrate the art world's need for a paradigm shift. I begin with Strata Scheme's environmental artworks situated a few kilometers from each another, north of Nokia and west of Tampere, Finland. During the 1980s, the community approached artist Osmo Rauhala to discover artistic options to preserve and/or highlight the existence of strata, layers of rocks beneath the abandoned Pinsiö gravel pits that protect Central Finland's purest drinking water. Opting "to landscape this extensive gravel pit area by creating an integrated environment made up of several permanent large-scale artworks, the City of Nokia and the town of Hämeenkyrö partnered with the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki in order to organize an international art competition for landscaping the gravel pit in Pinsiö village. This was the very first time in Finland and among the first places in the world where it was suggested that environmental damage be restored by public artworks."¹⁵

Prior to visiting Agnes Denes' *Tree Mountain* (1992/1996-present), I had assumed that Finland, like so many European nations, had been severely deforested, so imagine my surprise when I discovered the countryside to be totally dominated by forests and lakes. That makes *Tree Mountain*, a massive artwork (28 meters tall, 270 meters wide and 420 meters long), constructed from 11,000 Finnish Pines atop the Pinsiö gravel pits near Ylöjärvi, all the more mystifying. This project's

long-term success is partly ensured by its bottom-up structuring, whereby 11,000 custodians have committed to care for these Finnish Pines (a.k.a. Silver Firs), a declining species, for 400 years. Each custodian's commitment is acknowledged by an inheritable certificate, to be passed on to twenty or more future generations. Exemplary of an outcome overwhelming the artist's original goals, Icelandic President Mrs. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and British Prime Minister Mr. John Major committed to trees 540 and 611, respectively, lending Denes' project far-reaching support. In the United States, public art is typically funded and managed by top-down Percent for Art programs,¹⁶ so *Tree Mountain*'s origins are comparatively fascinating. A testimony to its commitment to alleviate the world's ecological stress, Finland announced its plan to construct Denes' mountain during the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁷

Tree Mountain is exemplary of a practical artistic action, yet its design, function (eco-tourist destination), scale, and purpose (absorbing CO₂) are still debatable features of artworks. Denes' 1982–1983 drawing *Tree Mountain-Proposal for a Forest* (1982–1983) had helped those citizens to imagine what might one day rise from the gravel pits, but unlike design whose implementation is based on prior models, building this was a total experiment in every possible way. It would be nearly impossible to reverse this artistic action should some of the trees not take root or the complex patterns remain invisible. Not only do the mountain's monumental spiraling sunflower/pineapple (Fibonacci) patterns mesmerize visitors, but this manmade mountain, which initially kept collapsing under its weight, is physically supported by its tree roots, which outnumber its limbs three-fold. To answer Victor Margolin's worry about the practical spilling over into the

¹⁶ Eleanor Heartney, *City Art: New York's Percent for Art Program*, (MERRILL, 2005)

¹⁷ Sue Spaid, *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies*, (CINCINNATI: CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER, 2002), pp. 123–124.

discursive, it seems that practical artworks are always original, and therefore experimental, while practical design is based on tested ideas. Unlike practical artworks, practical designs follow

"general principles, best practices and guidelines that are tested, vetted and circulated by respected peers."¹⁸

More than fifteen years later, Strata Scheme, a citizen-initiated environmental art program that was originally called Strata Project, has not only developed the infrastructure to maintain its local art treasures, but is currently inviting more artists to propose projects that join art, nature and food.¹⁹ Unlike *Tree Mountain*, Strata's two other large-scale environmental wonders are far less controversial, perhaps because they lack restorative capabilities. Still, their presence protects groundwater from degradation due to development and mining. Erik van Hoorn's *Bowl & Kuhlas* (1998) features two sculptures formed from birch trees growing towards the light and situated in roundabouts. Nancy Holt's *Up and Under* (1993–1998) is a curving, grass-covered tunnel sited in a sand quarry.

Since I visited Holt's sculpture punctured with sun tunnels and reflecting pools a few days before the 2011 Summer Solstice, I assumed it must offer solar or lunar alignments. As a result, I kept posing myself (both standing and prone) like a sundial along the various curves to induce shadows, only to later find out (from Nancy) that it rather aligns with true north (in this case the North Star known as Polaris), so it indeed provides a perceptual guide, though not a utility that tends an obvious environmental solution, other than to prevent drilling to occur in the aquifer hidden below.²⁰ Given the way mining

has destroyed so many of the world's rocky aquifers, preserving this aquifer is no small feat.²¹ Having discussed three historical projects within the context of my essay, I now offer a brief overview of current eco-art practice in Nordic countries, expanding upon this essay's focus on practical artistic action.

MOVING BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE

Exhibiting Nature. Inspired by a tree that fell on the Aalto Pavilion in 2011, Finland's 2013 Venice Biennial contribution consists of two solo exhibitions by environmental artists Terke Haapola and Antti Laitinen, presented in the Nordic and Finnish Pavilions, respectively. Interested to unite art with environmental protection, Halkkonlahti Green Art has organized three "cross-artistic and scientific environmental events" centered at the Salo Art Museum Roundhouse in Salo, and winding around Halkko's Bay. Themes have included "Food Chains" (2011), "Waterways" (2008), and "Halkkonlahti" (2006).²² In 2007, the Finnish Environmental Art Show linked projects in Helsinki, Latvia, and Lapland to all over Finland.²³ Since 2001, the Oranki Art Association has organized twelve consecutive outdoor exhibitions forty kilometers south of the Arctic Circle, in western Lapland near the Swedish border. Each year they invite artists to attend symposiums, while building projects in the Oranki Art Park, which inhabits a pine forest surrounded by gravel pits. Finland's exceptionally high number of artist-oriented and citizen-initiated environmental art programs may be due to Aalto University's extremely rare MFA in Environmental Art. This university also sponsors the Nature-Art-

¹⁸ Sue Spaid, *Green Acres: Artists Farming Fields, Greenhouses and Abandoned Lots*, (CINCINNATI: CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER, 2012), p. 38.

¹⁹ www.strataproject.org/contact.html

²⁰ According to Strata's website, the curves of *Up and Under* feature four east-west alignments and three north-south alignments.

²¹ Sue Spaid, "Reconfiguring the Global Justice Paradigm: Groundwater Justice's Prior Status." Unpublished paper presented at the 2010 *Integrating Development and Climate Change Ethics*, Rock Ethics Institute, Pennsylvania State University, State College, USA.

²² www.halkkonlahti.net

²³ www.environmentalart.net/natur/

Education research group, which develops arts-based, environmental education, led by artists Mari von Boehm and Jan van Boeckel.²⁴ As a result of environmental art's greater visibility, dozens of Finnish artists routinely participate in various outdoor projects.

For "Back to Basics" (2012) at Bergen's Hordaland Art Centre, Norwegian artists Froydis Lindén, Inger Wold Lund, Tore Reisch, and Arngjerd Rustand presented artworks made from naturally occurring materials such as apples, earth, seeds, and stone.²⁵ For Icelandic artist Elín Hansdóttir's contribution to the Mairakech Biennale 4 (2012), she worked with eight master masons to produce a large-scale rammed-earth spiral, mirrored on its interior. To capture a giant spruce tree's actual-size, Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila divided it in six sections, presenting it seamlessly as *Horizontal* (2011). She remarks,

"The work is a portrait of a tree. It is a record of the tree's existence as a living organism, or perhaps more accurately a presentation of the difficulty of perceiving and documenting a spruce tree using man-made tools for visual recording."²⁶

After taking field recordings of Icelandic glacier for her piece *Langjökull Snæfellsjökull Solheimajökull* (2007), British artist Katie Paterson pressed the recordings onto ice discs cast from glacial water, collected at their source. Paterson's ice discs played back the glacial sounds as they spun on record players, melting over two hours.²⁷ In 2003, the Icelandic collective Icelandic Love Corporation used hydropower to highlight a triangle-shaped plot of vegetated land straddling a gravel field, as seasons, the sun, and the moon visibly recharge this paddock.

24 www.naturearteducation.org

25 www.kunstcenter.no/en/back-to-basics/

26 www.klasma.fi/calendar/eija-liisa-ahtila/works-of-art/horizontal

27 www.katiepaterson.org/icerecords/

Art Highways. Dubbed the "world's largest outdoor gallery (40,000 km²), Norway recently spent €1 billion commissioning forty-five architecture and landscape design firms to create eighteen National Tourist Routes, "panoramic viewpoints, picnic spots, rest areas and other installations" along the highway.²⁸ This project fell on the heels of the much publicized "museum without walls," located in Norway's Nordland County on the Polar Circle, more than 850 km northwest of Oslo.²⁹ Between 1992 and 1998, Norway's Ministry of Tourism and the Nordland County Council, Department of Cultural Affairs constructed Artscape Nordland, trail of sculptures produced by thirty-three artists from eighteen countries, dotting the landscape and stretching 560 km through thirty-three communities. In 2002, the County Council voted to add a new sculpture every year through 2010, bringing the total to over forty. Notable international artists who contributed sculptures include Tony Cragg, Dorothy Cross, Luciano Fabro, Dan Graham, Antony Gormley, Kristján Gudmundsson, Sigurdur Gudmundsson, Cristina Iglesias, Anish Kapoor, Per Kirkeby, Cildo Meireles, Markus Raetz and Sarkis.³⁰

Environmental Experiments. Numerous Nordic artists carry out environmental actions that lie somewhere between *daring what ifs?* and *injurious don't you dares!* Exemplary of *injurious don't you*

28 www.theguardian.com/travel/2009/jun/29/norway-architecture-art-road-trips ¶ Norway's National Tourist Routes are documented here: www.nasjonalturistveger.no/en

29 www.bentlehaastad.wordpress.com/2013/07/05/art-in-nature-by-the-polar-circle/

30 www.psik.com/2012/12/norway-outdoor-art-gallery.html

¶ Details of each artist and his/her artwork can be found here: www.skulpturlandskap.no/Skulpturlandskap/kunstnere.html

¶ The main website www.skulpturlandskap.no/Skulpturlandskap/ includes a tour.

dares! Norwegian mapmaker and hiker Egil Martin Kurel gained notoriety for *Feste/Artsch* (1998-1999) whose stainless steel plugs bolted into rocks led authorities to charge him with damaging nature. Not surprisingly, the National Museum of Contemporary Art acquired the dialogue that ensued between Kurel and government officials. He notes that Norwegian agencies only have systems for dealing with vandalism not artworks.³¹ Of course, whether artists have different rights than vandals is debatable. *Feste/Artsch* highlights the hypocrisy of institutions that use advanced technologies to exploit and damage nature, while also claiming some moral or spiritual imperative to protect it, further entrenching their power.

On the other end of the spectrum leaning more towards *daring what ifs?*, the Danish art collective Wooloo proposed *Two Years' Untouched Garden* for the Sixth Momentum Biennial in Moss, Norway. For this work, they requested F15 Gallery, to let their preened garden, which faces a verdant slope overlooking the Oslo Fjord, ~~yet this preened garden~~ lay fallow until the seventh biennial. So controversial, the City passed an ordinance requiring that lawns be mowed every Friday! This original bit of political non-action, meant as a wry critique of Norway's embracing a UN program that pays developing countries to reduce deforestation so that developed nations' petrol-laden footprints can keep growing, was frozen as artistic inaction. As Alby Gård Jelev, points out,

"Wooloo is Momentum's trickster; they harnessed the event's power-as-domination, utilizing its authoritarian position to stress Norway's environmental hypocrisy thereby instigating potency for relevant progress."³²

31 John Grande, *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p. 143.

32 www.artwrit.com/article/wooloo-at-the-sixth-momentum-biennial/

Tue Greenfort's earlier eco-political exchange³ proved more successful. For *Exceeding Two Degrees* (2007), the artist used money saved by increasing the Sharjah Art Museum's indoor temperature two degrees Celsius, which matched the predicted global temperature rise by 2035, to purchase two-square miles of Ecuadorian rainforest. Although *Exceeding Two Degrees* (2007) appears practical (energy conservation in the Gulf and rainforest preservation in South America), it was meant less as a viable option and more as a strategy to publicize the absurdity of "trading environmental damage here for protecting nature there."³³ For *Diffuse Entries*, exhibited during "Skulpture Projekte" (2007), Greenfort sprayed a stream of Lake Aa's infamous manure-scented water injected with aroma-erasing ferric chloride back into the lake to draw attention to the City of Kassel's complicity with local animal farmers, whose unenforced runoff generates routine algal blooms.

These two works are consistent with Greenfort's earlier efforts to get art worlders to recognize their activist role as consumers if only they'd approach their daily routines with greater self-reflection, inspiring T.J. Demos to characterize Greenfort's work as "eco-institutional critique."

Just as the Harrison Studio later realized that "farming indoors" is too-energy intensive to be sustainable, Greenfort eventually abandoned his emission-free, bio-diesel bus, since he began to doubt "the sustainability of rapeseed biodiesel given the effects of monoculture on the ecosystem-potential soil depletion and heightened crop susceptibility to pathogens."³⁴

Swedish artist, Henrik Håkansson's projects can leave one feeling both agghast and appalled. Unlike Greenfort's low-tech photo-ops for birds, flies, and foxes, Håkansson was among the first to employ advanced technology to produce dazzling nature videos that afford

33 T.J. Demos, "Art After Nature," *Artforum*, April 2012, 194.

34 www.artslant.com/ny/events/show/13983-kerstin-br%C3%A4tsch-tue-greenfort-jordan-wolfson

intimacy with birds, butterflies, insects, meadows, snakes, and wasps. In *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies*, I noted his earlier "brush[es] with moral turpitude."³⁵ In 1994, Congo beetles' livelihood depended on viewers to remember to feed them their daily bananas and water. Two years later, several Peruvian fern stick insects inhabiting *Wall of Voodoo* (1996) accidentally died from ingesting pesticide-coated plants. Soon after, its wall structure, whose computer-controlled heat, light and moisture levels made it seem impervious to disaster, totally collapsed, leaving the already estranged insects stranded.³⁶

Although this section's artworks hardly seem practical, they have prompted, however unwittingly, wide-ranging discussions concerning human beings' attitudes toward nature, habitat preservation, cohabitation, and technology's owners/users, etc. However accidental these public debates, they prove just as "purposive" as pro-active projects implemented by first responders.

Artist-Farmers. Now existing as an archived site, the *Free Soil* blog, whose entries date from 2004 to 2011, broadcast numerous artists' environmental and sustainable-art related activities. A Free Soil co-founder, Danish artist Nis Rømer's art work still addresses issues of gardening/farming, soil, community and self-organized projects. Rømer has organized tours and has curated/participated in numerous farm-related exhibitions. In 2005, he worked with Marie Markman and Jesper Dyrehauge to create a temporary kitchen garden in front of the Norda Bank in Copenhagen's Christianshavn neighborhood, adjacent the waterfront. In 2006, he, along with Katarina Stenbeck and Johanne Løgstrop, formed *Publik*, an independent curatorial collective that focuses on art in public space. On behalf of *Publik*, he curated "Hot Summer of Urban Farming" (2006), which involved

eight artists activating different public spaces around Copenhagen, with an overarching theme of urban agriculture.³⁷ He is involved in several other collaborations, including *Field Work* with Lise Skou and *Walking Distance* with Pia Røncke.³⁸

In addition to the 2011 edition of "Hallkonahlti Green Art" dedicated to food chains and especially edible art, artists Søsja Jørgensen and Geir Tore Holm, who run the project *Sørfinnsei/* The Nord Land in a former school building, have been growing old potato varieties provided by Swedish/Norwegian artist-farmer Åsa Sonjasdøttir, who participated in "Hot Summer of Urban Farming." After distributing these varieties to the villagers, who grew them in their gardens, Jørgensen and Holm organized a village-wide potato contest to see who had grown the biggest and most unusual potatoes.³⁹ During the spring of 2005, Sonjasdøttir began to grow traditional potato varieties on the island of Ven, situated between Sweden and Denmark, where her family has a small farm. She later realized that none of her patch's potatoes were registered on the EU Variety List. As a result, *The Order of Potatoes: A Potato Perspective on a European Matter* (since 2009) focuses on fourteen traditional potato varieties that are effectively contraband beyond their original region, whereas her complementary project, *The Way Potatoes Go: A Potato Perspective on an American Matter* (since 2010), features potatoes from amongst fifteen varieties of potatoes in common use.⁴⁰

For Sonjasdøttir, ongoing projects afford her the opportunity to analyze the "law, rights and access to knowledge in relation to cultural plants in Europe" and the United States. She notes that German potato

35 Spaid, *Ecovention*, pp. 80-83.
36 Spaid, *Ecovention*, pp. 80-83.

37 www.eco-publicart.org/hot-summer-of-urban-planning/
38 For more information regarding Rømer's numerous projects, check out his constellation of websites, available here: www.nisroemer.dk/index.php.
39 www.goethe.de/ges/umw/pw/kuk/fo/son/en/index.htm.
40 Spaid, *Green Acres*, p. 161.

breeder "[Carsten] Ellenberg threatens the breeding industry by creating a completely different market, one interested in small-scale farming and diversity."⁴¹ Ellenberg, who receives a lot of press, has waged a personal campaign to bring the variety known as *Linda* back to the commons, rather than face erasure as so many forgotten fruits have. Sonjasdottir's potato-sack catalog notes that in the 1940s, the Swedish government collected 10,682 potato samples, 118 types of which they identified, leaving 102 types unidentified. In order to develop efficient varieties, the government opted to exclude many traditional varieties, which no doubt include many of the unidentifiable types.

Inhabiting Nature. For "Midsummer (Back to Nature)" (2012) at Kunsthalle Zürich, Norwegian artists Elise Storsveen and Eline Mugaas presented snippets of imagery, texts, and films from a bygone era (Scandinavia ca. mid-70s) in hopes of rekindling free spirits. Inviting spectators to lie on a beguiling pink bed, their installation prompted visitors to imagine "future" lifestyles inspired by this optimistic past.

"It was a time for free child-rearing in Scandinavia, sex-ed, homemade bread and stay-at-home dads, an attitude to life that came to shape them. The belief in leaving behind traditional values and returning to a free state, in harmony with nature and unrestricted by the constraints of bourgeois values, moved optimists forward full force and let them crash head on into the 1980s. Time has passed."⁴²

The group N55 began as a collaborative of Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian students from the Royal Danish Art Academy in 1994. Since 2004, Ion Sørvin is primarily responsible for N55 activities though he

works closely with collaborators Anne Romme and Titi Wolfer. N55 has actively forged novel ways to integrate nature and urban living, with a commitment to open-source sharing enables their ideas to be implemented across the globe. N55 remains Scandinavia's oldest continuously exhibiting, eco-minded operation. In 1997, N55 began exhibiting *Home Hydroponic Units* to encourage people to imagine subsistence farming taking place adjacent the dining room table. Between 2001 and 2003, several N55 members and friends designed a floating "truncated tetrahedron," *SpaceFrame* (2001–ongoing),⁴³ and began to live together as a "seed community" in the Copenhagen harbor. During this period, they developed several useful tools such as a floating beach jety, a pontoon bridge, *Small Fish Farm* and *City Farming Plant Modules* (all 2003) to access their neighborhood's available foodstuff. Since online instructions are available to build such tools, their useful artworks can be built, disassembled and rebuilt, or displayed in multiple venues simultaneously.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Åsa Sonjasdottir, "Artist's Statement," E-mail dated July 13, 2012.

⁴² www.ikeyou.com/en/node/31930

⁴³ www.n55.dk/manuals/spaceframe/spaceframe.html

⁴⁴ www.learning-site.info/N55BOOK2004.pdf