Organizing in the Public Interest

Participatory Organizing and Art's Organizational Turn

DITTE VILSTRUP HOLM, *postdoc*
Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy
Copenhagen Business School

Art's engagement with social practices has promoted reflections in art theory about strategies of organizing. Whether in the form of temporary self-organized initiatives, interventions into society or as the possibility of art developing alternative, sustainable organizations, questions of organizing come to the fore. In this article, I suggest that art theory will benefit from engaging with organizational theory, and I point to sociologist John Law's concept of "modes of ordering" as a useful analytical tool with which to study the organizing practices involved in and affecting contemporary art. In particular, the article targets the field of participatory practices and suggests that they might be interpreted as the effect of cross-institutional modes of ordering. The potential of such an analysis is twofold. First, it offers an alternative analytical entrance point into the field of participatory practices, as opposed to the two dominant positions of a durational-dialogical and a conflictual-interventionist perspective. Second, it underlines how organizational processes cut across disciplinary fields and institutional barriers, generating networks of processual relations that support and strengthen certain practices, while challenging and impeding other practices.

In this article, I engage with the organizing of participation in contemporary art that has been variously referred to as "participatory art," "dialogical aesthetics," or simply "the social turn" in art (Kester, 2004; Bishop, 2006; Bishop, 2012). I am motivated by the question of how we might understand the organizing of participation in contemporary art, if we refrain from framing it as a particular artistic form, but understand it as practices enmeshed in "the social." I thus place emphasis on participatory organizing

as an organizational process in which art intermingles with a network of other organizational processes. I seek to re-entangle art into the mess of "the social" in order to investigate the organizational powers at play in participatory organizing.

Broadly speaking, art theory's discussions of the social turn in art have been fueled by a number of interrelated questions, including the relationship between aesthetics and politics, and the ethical challenges of involving participants. Initially art theory was concerned with framing a particular genre of art out of what was otherwise considered a dispersed set of practices, and broadly accomplished this by dispensing with media-specific determinations of art to define the social turn by the artist's involvement of people, and by its political critique of society (Lacy, 1995; Bourriaud, 1996; Bourriaud, 2002). Thus, art's engagement with social practice turned "the social" into a new and innovative ingredient in artistic practice, challenging conventions of singular artistic expression and of art's intimate relationship with media-specific genres. It also placed a particular emphasis on art's political effects on society, importing various political theories to specify art's critical potentials of challenging the dominant ways in which life is organized in contemporary society (Kester, 2004; Bishop, 2004; Bishop, 2012).

In this article, I suggest that art theory might benefit from engaging with organizational theories in order to further the discussion of art's social turn. If we are to understand the organizing of participation in contemporary art, we need to engage with "the social" as a processual network of organizing practices in its own right and not simply as an innovative ingredient in art, or a passive context to art's active organizing practices. In particular, I introduce sociologist John Law's notion of modes of ordering (Law, 1994) that indicate ordering patterns in the networks of the social, and I suggest that "the social" be interpreted as a plural infrastructural process made up of the relationship between various material-semiotic modes of ordering.

My introduction of this organizational theory is also a methodological argument that underscores the necessity of engaging with processes as they unfold. Law's notion of modes of ordering provides a theoretical tool whose usefulness is predicated upon methodological attention to

details. Put very bluntly, it turns the question of art's political effect into an issue to be determined empirically and by way of following the way in which corroborating and conflicting interests affect the organizing of participation. Importantly, it does not pitch artists against other institutional interests, but seeks to frame organizational powers that cut across institutional layers, affecting both participatory artistic organizing and the context in which it plays out. It thus offers an argument for understanding participatory organizing as it is enmeshed in the social.

The article is structured in this way: First, I sketch the development of art theory's discussion of participatory practices and relate these to a broader organizational turn in art theory. I propose the notion of an organizational turn with reference to art theory's increasing attention towards art's position in relation to infrastructures of power. Second, I introduce John Law's notion of modes of ordering and argue how this might be useful in respect to understanding the organizing of participation in contemporary art, as these practices are enmeshed in the social. Third, I offer an illustrative example of how the use of Law's notion of modes of ordering points to participatory organizing as an effect of the particular mode of ordering I call public interest. Fourth, and in conclusion, I reflect on the broader potential of using Law's notion of modes of ordering to understand participatory organizing and contemporary art's involvement in the social.

Art history's theorization of participatory practices

Theories dealing with participatory practices within the field of art history start to emerge in the early to mid-1990s with, respectively, French curator Nicolas Bourriaud's suggestions of a "relational aesthetics" and artist Suzanne Lacy's framing of a "new genre public art" (Lacy, 1995, Bourriaud, 1996; Bourriaud, 2002). Bourriaud introduced the notion of a relational aesthetics to capture a broad interest among contemporary artists in human interaction and its social context, which artists expressed in their use of exhibition spaces to stage social encounters. Lacy's proposition for a new genre public art, on the other hand, formed part of a collective movement among artists, critics and curators in 1990s USA, aimed at challenging the preconception that public art had to be a sculpture. Instead, they empha-

sized collaborative practices, community engagement, and social concerns as key to a new genre of public art (see, also, Finkelpearl, 2013). Discussions of participatory and collaborative artistic practices, however, subsequently curtailed into a dispute between Grant Kester and Claire Bishop: Kester using liberal political theories to theorize participatory practices as dialogical aesthetics; Bishop promoting the critical potentials of participatory art as aesthetic interventions by reference to radical democratic theories (Bishop, 2006; Kester, 2006).

Kester combined a mixture of theoretical sources in his proposal for a dialogical aesthetics, including Kant's aesthetic theory and Jürgen Habermas' theory of rational deliberation in the public sphere to suggest that contemporary, socially engaged art continue a modernist tradition in which "aesthetic experience can challenge conventional perceptions […] and systems of knowledge" (Kester, 2004, p. 3). However, contrary to avant-garde practices of shock, socially engaged art challenges perception and knowledge by way of dialogical processes. Following Habermas, Kester suggested that the notion of the public sphere offered an idea of how we might engage in dialogue under specific performative rules that shelter this dialogue from coercion and inequality by ensuring we are more critically self-aware of our own position vis-à-vis that of others. More specifically, he used Habermas' theory to argue that select artists had organized transformative processes, by way of establishing provisional public spheres, in order to address specific social problems.

Bishop, on the other hand, underpinned her theorization of participatory practices with reference to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's radical political theory (Bishop, 2004).[1] Laclau and Mouffe's theory is predicated upon two central concepts: antagonism and hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014). Antagonism refers to fundamental differences in values and opinions, with Laclau and Mouffe arguing that political struggles generated by such differences are constitutive of any given society. The notion

1 — Subsequently, Bishop engaged with the work of Jacques Rancière to theorize participatory art in respect to its ability to challenge existing forms of social organizing by way of participatory aesthetic situations that confuse established systems and norms (See Bishop, 2006; Bishop, 2012).

of hegemony characterizes societies—or social orders—that attempt to conceal the conflicts this pluralism entails, thus discarding their origin in political struggles. A truly democratic society, on the contrary, is characterized by its ability to support the existence of fundamental differences, rather than conceal their existence. Mouffe has argued that the notion of antagonism offers a challenge to liberalism—including Habermas' ideal of rational deliberation in the public sphere—because liberalism is unable to accommodate this radical political multiplicity (Mouffe, 2005). In other words, for Mouffe, what characterizes a democratic society is not its ability to generate consensus but rather its ability to sustain conflicts by letting differences come to light.

Initially, Bishop leaned on Laclau and Mouffe in criticizing Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics for promoting politically naïve, convivial forms of social encounters, arguing instead for the critical potential of works of art that create "sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging, because the work acknowledges the impossibility of a 'microtopia,' and instead *sustains* a tension among viewers, participants, and context" (Bishop, 2004, p. 70, emphasis in original). However, Bishop was equally critical of the community-oriented do-good ethics of new genre public art, which to her mind replaced ethics with politics and essentially missed the opportunity to radically question the hegemony of existing social systems. Bishop's argument resulted in a heated debate with Kester, who defended the artistic qualities of community-oriented artistic practices and specifically challenged the value of antagonistic avant-garde practices in seeking to communicate through shock and, basically, restricting their community to an already convinced art audience (Kester, 2006).

Art's organizational turn

To a certain extent, the theorization of participatory practices has since expanded beyond the debate between Bishop and Kester by joining and becoming part of what could be considered a broader "organizational turn" in art theory that approaches artistic—as well as curatorial—practices as various forms of organizing (see, for instance, Thompson, 2012). This organizational turn is noticeable within art theory in the upsurge and increasing

popularity of terms such as "activism," "social practice," and "commoning." These terms attest to a contemporary artistic interest in social organizing that is broadly critical of the hegemony of neoliberalism and its effect on contemporary society. Activism emphasizes the connections between art and political protest movements such as the Alter-globalization movement, the Movements of the Square, and Occupy Wall Street (see, for instance, McKee, 2017; Sholette, 2017). The term "social practice" has become the new preferred term for artists' participatory practices with a particular dimension of social concern, while "commoning" suggests a new form of social organizing that emphasizes social collaboration as a means of developing ecological responsibility (Jackson, 2011; Docx & Gielen, 2018). Collectively, these terms exacerbate a political struggle that has been a subjacent discussion in previous debates about participatory art: the way in which participatory practices implicitly or explicitly criticize the dominant forces of neoliberal capitalism and their effect on democracy, public welfare systems, and the production of culture. However, the new organizational turn offers a more critical scrutiny of the way in which not only participatory practices, but also entire art systems are instrumentalized, co-opted, and implicated in market-driven initiatives (see, for instance, Sholette, 2017).

The key emphasis within this broader organizational turn thus concerns art's ability to challenge and modulate existing forms of social organizing, while critically reflecting on art partaking in these same organizational practices. It indicates an increasing theoretical attention towards the position of art in relation to infrastructures of power, and it pushes the question of participatory organizing from a concern over how to organize a group of participants, to the question of participatory organizing's relation to a broader political landscape. In other words, participatory practices should no longer be approached primarily as a new form of artistic genre. Rather, the theoretical focus should be aimed at how artistic practices infiltrate and are being infiltrated by the social, or, in short: how art is enmeshed in the social.

Nevertheless, in respect to participatory practices, the expanded "organizational turn" in art theory largely continues the polarization that characterized Bishop and Kester's respective positions. As such, the opposition between a durational perspective on participatory practic-

es—emphasizing dialogue and collaboration—and a more conflictual perspective—emphasizing division and disagreement—still characterizes the discussion of participatory practices around notions of consensus vs. dissensus, collaboration vs. conflict, and affirmation vs. criticality. The purpose of this article is not to dismiss the value of either perspective, but to suggest a third way that is based neither on liberal theories of consensus nor on radical democratic theories of foundational conflicts. This third way is John Law's organizational theory of how organizations are constituted by the interrelationship between different modes of ordering.

Law's notion of modes of ordering implies starting from an analytical position beyond consensus-making or conflict. In addition, it implies starting from a position that does not stipulate barriers between art and the social, instead seeing such barriers as an effect of various modes of ordering. What characterizes both the durational-dialogical perspective, and the conflictual perspective, on participatory art is the value placed upon art as autonomous practice (Holm, 2019b). In the durational-dialogical perspective, the timescale of an artistic practice constitutes a value in itself, because it suggests an ability to sustain an autonomous artistic space (Beech, 2011). As such, the high value placed upon artistically generated spaces and autonomous collaborative practices (self-organized, grass roots, bottom-up) seems to be driven by the specter of artistic autonomy that not only insulates art from the effects of neoliberal capitalism, but also enables it to counter such effects. Likewise, the value placed upon art as a critical interventionist practice or as a sustainer of dissent is predicated upon the understanding of art's autonomy from other social practices (Bishop, 2012).

However, if we momentarily suspend the division between art and "the social," or at least start to think of this relationship also as a system of mutual support rather than a conflictual relationship, how might we understand the relationship between participatory art and the social? Here I lean on performance scholar Shannon Jackson's contribution to the discussion of social practice, which she connects to the age-long discussion of the relationship between artistic autonomy and heteronomy, or *ergon* and *parergon*, between what is inside the frame and what is outside, or between art and its social support system (Jackson, 2011). The artist might set a frame, she argues, but the artistic practice and the artist's livelihood

are also already framed by the social. In other words, artistic autonomy is always dependent upon systems of support. To further this organizational reflection, I turn to Law and his theory of modes of ordering.

Towards an organizational perspective on participatory organizing

Law originally developed the notion of modes of ordering in the book *Organizing Modernity* (1994) and later returned to it in individual articles (Law, 2003; Law, 2007) as well as in his more broadly targeted book on social science methods entitled *After Method* (2010). In *Organizing Modernity* Law deals with the question "what is social order?" or, more generally, with the question "what holds an organization together?" (Law, 1994; Law, 2007). The question confronts both scientific traditions and modern politics where there is a tendency to seek one rule to either explain or fix social reality. Grounding notions such as "the king," a particular "class" or "the market" are thus argued to determine social order. Law's argument, instead, is that social order is created by way of intricate material-semiotic processes and, as a result, it is an issue that cannot be determined in advance but has to be studied locally and empirically. Also, and this is the argument he develops in *Organizing Modernity*, one superior order alone will not do. Instead, he insists on the multiplicity of ordering strategies, and he argues that the social is a momentary infrastructure made up of the relationship between various modes of ordering.

Organizing Modernity is based on an ethnographic study of Daresbury SERC Laboratory, a scientific facility in the UK operating in the era of Thatcherism, and Law uses this study to argue that not one but, at least, four modes of ordering organize the laboratory. These modes of ordering are specifically "administration," "enterprise," "vision" and "vocation." In Law's artful description, enterprise is the mode of the cowboy: the entrepreneurial agent that bends the rules, takes chances, and returns with a profit. As such, enterprise, Law argues, celebrates "opportunism, pragmatism and performance" (Law, 1994, p. 75). It is also the mode of ordering injected into the laboratory with the rule of Thatcher and the implementation of New Public Management. Administration, on the contrary, is the mode of

"smooth running, legality and rationality" (Law, 1994, p. 78). It is the mode of ordering that speaks of a slow evolution of the laboratory, the small day-to-day adjustments, and accords with Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy. "Vision tells of charisma and grace, of single-minded necessity, of genius and of transcendence" (Law, 1994, p. 79). Finally, the fourth mode of ordering, vocation, is the mode of ordering of the scientists, denouncing all other goals than the scientific. It speaks of how people "embody expertise and skill" (Law, 1994, p. 81).

Modes of ordering are not located in particular agents or political subjects, but rather in specific organizational processes. This is not the bureaucrat versus the scientist or the enterprising cowboy confronting the genius; rather, such figures and roles are created by the modes of ordering and, in general, several different modes of ordering will affect the way in which any particular individual operates within an organization. A mode of ordering, according to Law, is recognized by its effect on the social. For instance, it may generate different materials, such as particular agents or devices. Administration, according to Law, generates the bureaucrat, the one who organizes according to a particular form of compartmentalized systematization, but also according to technologies such as the spreadsheet, with its capacities to determine timelines for project management. Both are needed to sustain the mode of ordering of administration. Modes of ordering, however, have other effects on the social; for instance, they create distinctions, differentiating between various materials and agents and their relative size and value. They create rankings and hierarchies; they might exercise strategies of deletion, and they might generate a specific distribution of resources. Law argues that agents do not drive a process, but are themselves produced by it: "This, then, is what my 'modes of ordering' are about: they represent a way of imputing coherences or self-reflexive 'logics' that are not simply told, performed and embodied in agents, but rather speak through, act and recursively organize the full range of social materials" (Law, 1994, p. 109).

For me, the notion of modes of ordering has several strengths. First, the notion emphasizes organizations as constituted by processes, as something that happens and evolves. An organization is not a stable structure, but something inherently changing and modifying. Second, the notion

underlines the existence of multiple ordering logics and thus points to the complexity of organizing that arises from the relationship between different modes. One of Law's arguments is, in fact, that the different modes of ordering engage in complex relations, and that the Daresbury SERC Laboratory could not exist had it been ruled by only one mode of ordering. It is the interaction between different modes of ordering that holds an organization together. Third, the concept is interesting because it does not situate organizational processes in particular individuals or levels in an organization, but rather as cutting across individual organizations, and even across multiple organizations, effectively generating agents, practices, materials and technologies.

So, how does Law's organizational theory translate into an art context, and how does the notion of modes of ordering help us understand participatory organizing? Broadly, it means that we do not necessarily start from the framing of participatory organizing as a work of art, but rather investigate it as an effect of the relationship between specific modes of ordering. Following Law, artistic practice should be understood not as originating with the artist, but as processes in which certain materials, text and relations are organized into a practice that includes labeling one agent as artist. It also means that artistic practices form part of other social practices that serve to both advance and challenge artistic practice. To clarify this more precisely, I will present an illustrative example from a case study of a participatory public work of art. The example will show how participatory organizing might be conceptualized as the (partial) effect of a particular mode of ordering I call public interest.

An illustrative example: participatory art for Istedgade

The case in question is a public work of art commissioned in 2014 by the Danish Arts Foundation and the City of Copenhagen for Istedgade, a street in the central Copenhagen district of Vesterbro. The street was undergoing renovation at the time, and the city had applied to the arts foundation for funding to develop a work of art in conjunction with the renovation. Two artists, Hanne Lise Thomsen and Kenneth Balfelt, were commissioned to compete for the assignment, but the competition was subsequently

FIG. 1
Hanne Lise Thomsen, *INSIDE OUT ISTEDGADE*,
Copenhagen, 2015.
Photo: Torben Petersen

dismissed in favor of the two artists sharing the funds set aside for the assignment. Therefore, they both developed artworks in collaboration with local citizens in Istedgade. Hanne Lise Thomsen developed the work *Inside Out Istedgade* (2015), which formed a multifaceted depiction of Istedgade's community, emphasizing a diversity of class, ethnicity, gender and lifestyle among the residents of Istedgade (see FIG. 1). It generated a temporary aesthetic event in the form of a public projection of photographs taken inside Istedgade's apartments, which also brought together the local residents to experience the work of art they had contributed to. Kenneth Balfelt and his team developed the project *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours*, which used aesthetically persuasive projections of lush instalments of urban greenery to mobilize social organizations, shop owners, residents and citizens from the drug-related environment to take part in co-creating and maintaining green environments (see FIG. 2). Their greenery project was inspired by the possibility of using new green environments as a material way to rebuild the street's social cohesion, which is currently being challenged by processes of gentrification.

FIG. 2
Kenneth Balfelt Team in collaboration with Spektrum Arkitekter, *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours*.
Proposal for green spot on Saxogade, 2018.
Illustration: Spektrum Arkitekter

What I present in the following are arguments developed on the basis of detailed analysis of the case, which I conducted in my PhD (Holm, 2019a). Following Law, I engaged with the artworks as elements in various social processes. One is the reorganizing of Istedgade; another is the reorganizing of public art support to become more responsive to local concerns. This entails looking beyond particular agents and organizations to see organizational modes cut across the situation of two artworks developed for Istedgade. In my PhD, I thus identified four modes of ordering: "artistic autonomy," "administration," "the site" and "public interest." In this article, I focus on the effects of public interest in particular.

I identified the mode of ordering of public interest through the repeated and varied ways in which collaborations with the public were attempted. The commission brief for the Istedgade project offers a good example (see, Holm, 2019a, for an English translation of the commission brief). It specified that the artwork was commissioned because of the local citizens' expressed interest in a work of art, thus positioning the local citizens as the initiators of the artwork. However, the commission brief also commissioned the artists to work with the stories of the street, both historic and current stories, thus suggesting that the local citizens be content providers for the work of art. Furthermore, the artists were to involve "as many citizens and users of Istedgade as possible" (commission brief, see Holm, 2019a) in the artwork's development, making them co-creative contributors to the work of art. Indeed, the broad notion of who to include, encompassing not only residents, but also the entire scale of citizens using the street, speaks of the effect of public interest. However, the commission brief did not stop at that aspiration. It also asked the artists to "create connections between past and present and between the many different citizens and users" (Commission brief, see Holm, 2019a). Finally, the commission brief specified that the two commissioned artists were to compete against each other, with the local citizens acting as judges of their project proposals.

The commission brief thus exemplifies the many ways in which the public was invoked and organized into particular roles and functions in the process. The mode of ordering of public interest in this way expressed itself in organizational experimentation around engaging the public. It fostered innovations in organization-creations of the public, trying to attract and encompass the public's interest. As a mode of ordering, public interest aspires towards unity and consensus. It is fueled by aspirations that a work of art is in the public interest and it thus seeks the public's consensus, but in this case it facilitated a process of experimental organization-creation, which allowed dissent to be voiced. Was public interest to be secured by a work of art that engaged with the stories of the street, or by a work of art that involved as many local residents as possible? Was public interest to be generated by way of a public vote between two artistic proposals, or by way of the artist's involvement of the local citizens? Was public interest

to be secured by prolonged processes of involvement or by way of an aesthetically interesting outcome?

For instance, the public vote between the two artistic proposals was dismissed at the joint request of the two artists. Instead, they offered to share the funds set aside for the project. Their argument was that the competition countered the interest of the public. In fact, it might result in dividing the public between those who won and those who lost the competition. Instead, by sharing the funds, the local citizens would get two projects rather than one. Also, the artists argued that it would be unfair to involve the local citizens in the development of a work of art, if indeed the artist could not promise them that it would be realized. In other words, the artists made a clear distinction between the idea of a public vote between two project proposals and public interest.

Another issue was the conflicting opinions among representatives from the city and from the arts foundation that took part in the commissioning process. In broad terms, it involved the issue of whether local citizens would be best served by being involved in the process of developing the artworks, and thus securing their influence on the result. Or whether they would be better served by funneling the reserved funds into the production of an aesthetically impressive work of art that could function as a site to visit—the latter needing no essential involvement from citizens with regard to the process of developing the artwork. While the commission brief speaks of the early aspirations for ambitious processes of citizen-involvement, the closing verdict leaned towards the public interest of an aesthetically impressive result, which came close to cancelling one of the project proposals, as it aspired to let the result grow out of participatory processes with the citizens.

Participatory organizing in the public interest

According to Law, the modes of ordering need to come from the field itself, and not be applied by the researcher (Law, 1994). However, in Law's own study, he did not name the modes according to terms used in the laboratory he studied but chose his own names for the modes. Furthermore, he admitted that the four modes he had identified resembled, to a certain

extent, his own university environment in which new public management also affected the measurement of academic accomplishments in new ways (Law, 1994).

Likewise, the notion of public interest was not a term specifically used by anyone in the Istedgade case study. I chose it because it aligned with discussions of participatory organizing in art theory, in particular in respect to discussions about new genre public art. New genre public art was conceptualized in the midst of the US culture wars in which conservative forces fought to diminish public funding for art by arguing that specific forms of publicly funded art were not in the public interest (Deutsche, 1996; Kwon, 2004). In this cultural situation, proponents of new genre public art's participatory and community-oriented practices therefore framed new genre public art as being specifically in the public interest, contrasting it, in particular, with the modernist history of autonomous art (Raven, 1993; Gablik, 1995).

The art historians Rosalyn Deutsche and Miwon Kwon have argued that these politicized debates about public interest concealed the very idea that any construct of the public is partial and predicated upon the exclusion of those who do not fit into the category (Deutsche, 1996; Kwon, 2004). In other words, any concept of the public is essentially political, mobilized to support particular uses of public spaces or forms of artistic practice. But the effect on US cultural policy was vivid. Although public interest might not mean the same to community-oriented political artists and conservative politicians, the notion of public interest served to generate new distinctions within the field of art, reorganize distributions of funds and, in general, support new types of artistic practices. In particular, it implied that fine art, judged according to standards developed exclusively by the art's community, was not necessarily in the public interest. It separated art in the public interest from artworks developed autonomously by individual artists.

In my study of the development of the two participatory artworks for Istedgade, I noticed a similar conflict between autonomous art and ideas of public interest. I framed it as a conflict between the mode of ordering of artistic autonomy and the mode of ordering of public interest. Both of these modes affected the way in which the arts foundation, the city and

the artists acted in this case. For the arts foundation, the city administration and the commissioned artists, public interest formed an implicit strategic goal that was partially mobilized by the threat of a lack of public interest in public artworks, and partially mobilized by the expectations of a heightened public interest in the particular site of Istedgade. For the arts foundation, the successful realization of public artworks depends upon a good collaboration with those positioned at the receiving end, including officials taking part in the commissioning process and the citizens who are affected by the realization of artworks in their everyday environment. In the past, such success might have been more exclusively attributed to the artistic quality of the realized artwork, adhering to standards of artistic excellence, but with the contemporary changes to public service and administration in respect to the involvement of citizens, artistic quality is not the only parameter that affects the realization of works of art.

For the City of Copenhagen, Istedgade's lively history and expressive quality merited a work of art; something that would further benefit the branding of Istedgade as an exciting urban site. However, Istedgade is also known for its autonomous, slightly rebellious inhabitants, and thus the success of a work of art in Istedgade depended upon the local citizens embracing its arrival. For the two artists commissioned for the assignment, the choice of working with participatory practices was not imposed on them by the commissioners, but instead an autonomous choice they had each made in their artistic career. In fact, it was their artistic experience with participatory forms, and the quality of their work in this respect, that warranted their commissioning for this particular assignment. While they welcomed citizen involvement, they also aspired to manage it in accordance with their own participatory strategies, hence the dismissal of the competition between the two projects. In that negotiation, the artists effectively managed to align their quest for artistic autonomy, while serving the interests of the public.

Public interest thus formed a problem and an opportunity that confronted, challenged and partially reorganized the involved institutions and agents. To some extent, it was the strength of the mode of ordering of public interest that generated the resources for the project. It was because of the perceived public interest in a work of art for Istedgade that the artwork was

funded and commissioned at all. However, the complications involved in invoking several different strategies for involving the public—the different organization-creations of the public—also affected the development of the two projects. Particularly, it challenged the artists to successive strategies of rethinking their contributions to different forms of envisioning the public's interest.

Conclusion

In this article, I have pursued the question of how to understand participatory organizing in contemporary art as a practice enmeshed in the social. I have substantiated my interest in this perspective by underlining how art theory has recently undergone an organizational turn, also in respect to addressing participatory organizing. Art theory might initially have been concerned with framing a particular genre of participatory art, but today this focus has shifted to a concern for art's relationship to a broader system of social organizing and art's position within infrastructures of power. In framing this organizational turn, I argued for the benefits of art theory engaging with organizational theory to further the understanding of contemporary art's effect on "the social" and the effect of "the social" on participatory organizing.

I introduced Law's theory of organizing and his notion of modes of ordering, arguing that it could support the understanding of participatory organizing as a practice enmeshed in the social. In particular, I suggested that modes of ordering emphasize how organizational processes cut across disciplinary fields and institutional barriers, generating networks of processual relations that support and strengthen certain practices and activities, while challenging and impeding other practices and activities. I used the illustrative example of a participatory artwork for Istedgade to highlight further the potential of such an organizational analysis. In particular, I emphasized two things: First, I argued that participatory practices might be seen as the expression of organizing modes that cut across organizational layers and social practices. Second, I suggested that participatory organizing might be interpreted as the (partial) effect of a particular mode of ordering I termed public interest, which not only affected artistic prac-

tices of organizing participation, but also that of the broader context of the institutions involved in the development of a work of art for Istedgade.

By choosing the term public interest, I connected the case study to broader changes in the field of art where increasing focus on public interest has challenged the institutionalized idea of artistic quality as the singular parameter for the value of a work of art. Theorizing public interest as a mode of ordering shares Deutsche and Kwon's understanding of notions of the public as temporary and partial constructions, and it also supports the understanding that such constructions might serve political purposes. In other words, it points to an infrastructure of public interest as an organizational strategy that pulls together artistic practices with institutional collaborators into a mutually collaborative, but also potentially conflictual, relationship.

So, what lessons can be learned from this more broadly? The first lesson relates to methods, and it supports the need to follow processes as they unfold, thus paying attention to the ways in which artists engage in complex relationships with other institutions affected by the mode of ordering of public interest. The second lesson follows from the first and prompts art theory to recognize networks that cut across institutional layers, thus discouraging art theory's inclination to place art in opposition to "the social." Broadly, Law's organizational theory suggests that successful artistic practices need to be evaluated not as the expression of autonomous artistic ideas, but rather as the effect of successful connections between various elements, relations, materials and agents, including the drafting of an artistic identity. If there is a lesson for participatory organizing with political aspirations, it is to foster such alignments, at least in partial form, with as many agents and institutions as possible. ✳

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