

LISBON

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ART IN PUBLIC SPACE:

From an Extended Perspective
on the European Periphery

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DEFINITION

The present text not only discusses whether Lisbon may be classified in terms of local praxis – both past and present – of developing art projects in public space, but also addresses fundamental questions about art in public space. Now that cultural studies have been positioned as correctives for established disciplines – such as art history¹ – rather than as a discipline in its own right, we have learnt that in discussions about art, it is helpful to first clarify the notion of art.

Seen in the light of the international development of art over the last 40 years, the concept of “art in public space” is charged with a number of different meanings. Three paradigms, as defined in 1997 by Miwon Kwon, attempt to introduce clarity into the concept:

1) *art in public places – typically a modernist abstract sculpture placed out-doors to “decorate” or “enrich” urban spaces, especially plaza areas fronting federal buildings or corporate office towers;*

2) *art as public spaces – less object-oriented and more site-conscious art that sought greater integration between art, architecture, and the landscape through artists’ collaboration with members of the urban managerial class (such as architects, landscape architects, city planners, urban*

designers, and city administrators), in the designing of permanent urban (re-) development projects such as parks, plazas, buildings, promenades, neighbourhoods, etc.; and more recently [1997],

3) *art in the public interest (or “new genre public art”) – often temporary city-based programs focusing on social issues rather than the built environment that involve collaborations with marginalised social groups (rather than design professionals), such as the homeless, battered women, urban youth, AIDS patients, prisoners, and which strives towards the development of politically-conscious community events or programs.²*

It might have been a result of the prevailing *zeitgeist* in Lisbon that at approximately the same time Miwon Kwon published these reflections on art in public space – in conjunction with an exhibition in Hamburg curated by Christian Philipp Müller – an exhibition was being held in the decaying “backyard” of Lisbon’s impressive city centre around the square Praça do Chile on the Avenida Almirante Reis. It was an exhibition that sought to explore new approaches to art in public space, albeit only through temporary installations. As part of his teaching activities in the Independent Studies Programme at the Escola Maumaus, the South African artist Roger Meintjes had developed the exhibition *Projecto Almirante Reis* in 1996 in collaboration with the artists Alban Chotard, Fernando Fadigas, Ester Ferreira, Teresa Fradique, João Pisco, and Luisa Yokochi. This exhibition subsequently came to be regarded as paradigmatic for a broader understanding of art in Portugal.

Since this survey of art in public space in 1996, there has been no further discussion of this concept in Lisbon worth mentioning. In addition, with the exception of Expo ’98, which was staged in an area in the

east of the city, no notable contemporary art intended for the “long term” has been installed on public sites in Lisbon. This fact is not something I wish to classify as being either “bad” or “good”, but instead should be treated – if at all – as a coherent phenomenon in a city that is not, nor was ever, the capital of an industrialised, ultramodern nation. Rather, the visual character of Lisbon’s centre – so admired by international visitors – is derived primarily from its ancient past.

IN A WEST EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The public art – to use today’s term – that predominates in the city centre is, on the whole, based on allegorical, decorative monuments dedicated to important historical figures: kings, noblemen, scientists, but also freedom fighters (from the civil war in the 19th century) and “discoverers”. They were installed on sites like roundabouts, as the centrepieces of squares or public gardens, and – emulating the Parisian model – had the purpose of adding harmonious accents to their surroundings. Most of these set pieces were erected in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of 1755. Prior to that, as a city largely characterised by narrow lanes, Lisbon had barely any monuments to speak of, with the exception of the Aquático obelisk in front of the Palácio das Necessidades (by Caetano Tomás de Sousa, 1745). Being the capital of a colonial empire, Lisbon had amassed immense riches. Hence, as in major cities in the rest of Europe, a succession of sculptures and monuments sprung up around the city’s public spaces in the two centuries following the earthquake. The defining aesthetic feature of these monuments was their devotion to idealised beauty. Mimetic in their relation to nature, with references to Greek and Ro-

man schools, the sculptures are evidence of classical influences such as Baroque, Mannerism, and the Renaissance (Raquel de Henriques da Silva, 2005). Knowledge of the fine arts was acquired in the academies of “beaux arts”, first in Rome, then in Paris from the 19th century onwards. In Portugal, art academies were founded in 1836 in Lisbon and Porto. It was here that many creators of public sculptures studied to gain proficiency using bronze and stone as well as to learn how to incorporate noblemen, horses, snakes, and elephants into iconological narratives that featured male and female figures representing triumph and fame. With their references to monumental Roman sculpture, Portugal’s sculptors subscribed to a glorification of history. Particularly during the 19th century, their role model was France and its art capital, Paris, which superseded Rome. The schools they emulated were those of Michelangelo and, later, Auguste Rodin.³

THE NEW STATE AND BELÉM

From the 1930s onward, António de Oliveira Salazar’s fascist “New State”, the Estado Novo, strove to present itself through art in public spaces – although there were virtually no free sites left in Lisbon, since all the existing representative squares were already hosting allegorical monuments of classical origin. What the city required were new locales; previously existing fountains and monuments needed to be moved elsewhere, as was done with the Neptune Fountain (Joaquim Machado de Castro, 1771), which was moved several times by the Estado Novo. The fountain’s final relocation was in 1950, when it was “removed” from the Praça do Chile to make way for a sculpture (Guilherme de Córdoba, 1950) edifying the “discoverer” of the Strait of Magellan, Fernando

Magellan, which was a gift to the city of Lisbon by the Chilean state – consistent with the then prevailing tastes of totalitarian systems. New space was unquestionably created when, in 1940, the Salazar regime hosted a “World Fair” of the Portuguese Colonial Empire in Belém (Bethlehem). This quarter in the west of the city is one of the most historically charged sites in Europe. It was from here that Vasco de Gama set sail in 1497 from what was then the port of Restelo to become the first person ever to sail around the entire African continent and thereby reach India. The expedition returned bearing considerable riches, which gave King Manuel I the means to commission the French-born architect Diogo do Boitaca to build the monumental Hieronymites Monastery in Belém. Four hundred years later, the Estado Novo conceived *its* world exhibition, the *Exposição do Mundo Português*, around the monastery, creating broad avenues in a modern urban layout with open gardens, monumental fountains, and ornamental pools, in addition to a number of largely temporary pavilions. Exhibited inside the pavilions were sculptures reflecting the aspirations of fascist ideology as well as a resident population of its own, settled into this pastoral “idyll” in true paternalistic fashion. The inhabitants were presented alongside representatives of the colonised peoples, who were put on display in the Belém grounds as bare-chested “primitives” in bush huts – analogous to the zoological gardens of northern and central Europe in the 19th century. Needless to say, this did not happen in a cultural vacuum devoid of *zeitgeist*, for in Portugal, too, as in Italy, modernism⁴ had found its voice, particularly through the Futurist movement that emerged in the early 1920s. What is remarkable in this context are the conflicting invocations of Primitivism in Europe.

On the one hand, 20th-century modernism borrowed from Primitivism to support claims of purported authenticity and hence originality, and to evoke it in its art. Masks and artefacts brought back from Africa were inspiration for numerous European artists. On the other hand, Nazi Germany – and to a somewhat lesser degree, the Portuguese fascists – decried and persecuted Primitivist-inspired art as “degenerate”, whereby Portugal was not the only modern colonial power that ended up putting the “Primitive” on display.

The central aspect of this display of Portuguese imperialism by its then still existing colonial empire and the concomitant glorification of its past was the so-called Discoveries Monument, which represents simultaneously a monument, a sculpture, and architecture. With a design based on an idea by the renowned film maker Leitão de Barros, the vast edifice was built in 1940 by the architect Cottinelli Telmo and the sculptor Leopoldo de Almeida as a temporary construction in wood and plaster. In 1960, the monument was rebuilt in stone to mark the 500th anniversary of Henry the Navigator’s death; since Cottinelli Telmo had died, he was replaced by the architect António Pardal Monteiro.⁵ The walk-through monument, with a viewing platform at the top, stands 56 metres high, 20 metres wide, and 46 metres long. On the inside, rooms have been built for hosting exhibitions and lectures, with a total surface space of 695 sq. metres over several storeys. The monument represents a stylised bow of a ship with the mast and sails pointing out to sea, or rather the Tagus River, which turns into a crusader’s sword towards its rear end facing the Hieronymites Monastery. Standing in a row along the bow are the major

protagonists of the canonised moments of Portuguese seafaring history. The 33 figures are idealised characters playing leading roles in the epic narrative of the “discoveries” – 16 on the west side, 16 on the east side. And at the monument’s prow, the formation culminates in the figure of Henry the Navigator. The religiously inspired vision of history is echoed in references to religious military and missionary orders added to the monument’s design. Thus, God’s will is seen in comfortable conformity with the atrocious consequences of the “discoveries”: the colonisation of peoples around the world combined with the wholesale trading of slaves, which by then was already based on modern, sober, and “reasonable” ideas of profit and efficiency.

In the same year as its inauguration (1960), a compass rose made of inlaid marble with a diameter of 50 metres – a gift from South Africa’s apartheid regime – was set into the square in front of the monument. At the centre of the vast ornament designed by the architect Cristino da Silva is a map of the world, on which toy-like miniature caravels are depicted sailing along the sea routes opened up by the “discoveries”. There are probably few other constellations quite like this monument, in conjunction with the compass rose, that so eloquently embody the mindset of Portugal’s fascist regime and representatively echo its aesthetic ideals.

MODERNITY IN BROADER TERMS: DE- AND RECONSTRUCTION

Large parts of Lisbon were destroyed in 1755 by a severe earthquake and a tsunami. Reconstruction shaped a city centre that, in the hierarchic spirit of the Enlightenment, was built in the form of a grid

on top of the ruins of houses that were once grouped along narrow, winding streets and alleys. The catastrophe “produced” the necessary space for a new city centre consisting of blocks of buildings and defined by streets that intersected at angles of 90 degrees – of the 27 churches that had been destroyed, just two were rebuilt. Thus, in the “old Europe” of the 18th century, an urban layout was implemented in the capital of Portuguese colonial power, much like the layout the Spanish had applied to various cities in South America a century earlier during the reign of Philip II as a rational form of organisation most suited to the exploitation of their colonised territories.

In central Europe, it was particularly the devastation wrought by the Second World War that provided the breakthrough for the modernist vision of a city with wide streets and motorways, large squares, and high-rise buildings of concrete and glass, which were sometimes set in “loose” arrangements within spacious green areas. Rational, car-friendly road networks were now no longer defined according to the given density of urban housing but allied with architecture that championed the notion of “less is more”. However, the architects had the challenging task of creating convincing proportions using just a small number of different interrelated components to design the façades. They were seldom able to do justice to the aesthetic demands upheld by the acknowledged pioneers of this kind of rational architecture. Instead, the resulting buildings resemble industrial architecture, constructed by engineers for functionality and devoid of aesthetic aspirations.

Having remained neutral throughout the Second World War, Portugal was not destroyed. Not a sin-

gle bomb ever fell on the country. Although 20th-century modern architecture made some ground in Portugal in a number of impressive buildings in Lisbon and Porto and is visible in the urban planning of Salazar's "New State", which produced several "traffic axes" outside city centres, modernity was unable to "assert" itself within the city centres themselves – unlike the "masterstroke" designs for the reconstruction of central European cities devastated in the war. Modern Portuguese cities of the 20th century came about instead in the colonies, especially in Maputo in Mozambique. Here, without any consideration for local sensibilities or opinions, urban planners enjoyed freedom of planning and building on a large scale, unchecked by complicated administrative procedures.⁶ Much as France had unleashed modernity in Brazzaville (Congo) in a form that had proved impossible to impose on the inner precincts of Paris, colonial Portugal succeeded in erecting its own modern city par excellence in southern Africa, far from the centre of power. In this respect, it is extraordinary how closely the inner-city layouts of Brazzaville and Maputo match the principles of the "International Style", which was universally heralded by authors as the philosophy of modern architecture and definitively embodied by the Weissenhofsiedlung near Stuttgart, built in 1927. The key difference lay in the projects' subtexts. The creators of the Weissenhofsiedlung believed in the possibility of a better world through functional design and good, "rational" architecture. As they saw it, by improving the living conditions of the masses, it offered a chance of creatively investing them with the possibility of emancipating humanity from prevailing circumstances. Political and philosophical issues of this kind were simply brushed aside in the colonies, where 20th-

century modernity was reduced to bare rationality (and thereby cost-saving construction methods) and to aesthetic appearance. The question of emancipation in regard to colonised peoples was out of the question.

ÂNGELA FERREIRA: "KANIMAMBO"

In central Europe, the debate waged about post-modern architecture addressed numerous critical views concerning the modern city. It was accused of spawning

*soulless "container" architecture, of the absence of a relationship with the environment and the solitary arrogance of the unarticulated office block, of the monstrous department stores, universities and congress centres, of the lack of urbanity and the misanthropy of the satellite towns, of the heaps of speculative building, the brutal successor to the "bunker architecture" – the mass production of pitch-roofed doghouses, the destruction of cities in the name of the automobile, and so forth.*⁷

These critiques were not noted in Lisbon, even though the same could also be said of specific projects in any town in Portugal, especially on their peripheries.⁸

With the World Expo in 1988, Lisbon acquired a new and spaciouly designed district that did justice to contemporary attitudes in urban planning. Broad areas surrounding the Expo grounds were earmarked for the private housing market. For the first time, public art of an international calibre was commissioned to be installed on both sites, tallying in large part with the second category of public art defined by Miwon Kwon.⁹ The art in public spaces programme for the grounds of the Expo, which

figures 1-4

Ângela Ferreira, "Kanimambo", 1998.

Photos: Roger Meintjes



from the very start were wisely conceived by the planners for further use once the event was over, was divided into two areas. The first area was the section that would later replace the fair's temporary national pavilions, transforming it into a district comprising companies, shopping centres, and public buildings (which have since been built). The second area chosen for public art projects was the adjoining residential quarter, which includes small businesses. National and international artists such as Pedro Cabrita Reis, José Pedro Croft, Ângela Ferreira, Antony Gormley, Carsten Höller, Fabrice Hybert, Susumu Shingu, Jorge Vieira, and Amy Yoes were invited to conceive works for Lisbon's newly created quarter.

With her work "Kanimambo", (figures 1–4) intended for a residential section of the Expo site, Ângela Ferreira created one of her first works of art for public spaces. The artist was born and grew up in Mozambique when the country was still an oppressed Portuguese colony. She later studied art in South Africa, where she became politically socialised, especially through the brutal conditions under apartheid. From a very early stage, the artist began to explore Western discourse, and in particular the production of meaning in art history, methods of art criticism, definitions of artistic concepts, and various forms of modernist art in terms of their relevance to African contexts. Similar to how modernism in the first half of the 20th century took advantage of African primitivism, Ferreira appropriates modern and late-modern forms of Constructivist, Abstract, and Minimal art, quoting from them in contexts of her own making by transplanting them into situations that are often alien to art and, from a Western perspective, could be read as conflicting with dominant

artistic discourse. In doing so, she evidently articulates herself in her art according to the "grammatical" rules of each respective artistic "language" as classified by art history; at the same time, she subverts and modifies them by means of slight ruptures (choice of materials, place of presentation, etc.), subtly undermining the idea of a Western purity of style. Ferreira is not anti-modern; on the contrary, she believes in the utopian visions of modernity, in modernity as an *incomplete project*, and as a possible solution for the African continent in regard to questions of democratic representation and civil rights. But her ideas go beyond the discourse of Western modernity as established by colonial power, predicating a discourse of *various forms of modernity* that are defined in terms of local geography. Her work examines the different ways in which these have been – and still are – articulated, not only within Europe but also throughout the world. Hence, viewed from this perspective, a "universal international style" in the Western manner is not tenable.

For the residential quarter of the Expo site, the artist created an installation composed of various elements. All four components oscillate between the possibility of contemplating these elements as constituent parts of a work of art, and a non-artistic purpose that the artist has "added" to the objects. Composed of constructivist elements in the style of Gustav Klutssis,¹⁰ Ângela Ferreira's sculpture serves as a climbing frame for children with its horizontal design. Minimalist metal furniture, benches, and tables offer visitors a place to hang out and relax; yet at the same time, the objects' perfect execution in enamelled metal and their well-considered proportions bring to mind the Minimal art of Donald Judd.

Allan Sekula, *TITANIC's wake*, 2000–2005, installation view, Project Room, Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon. Photo: Mário Valente

In a further component of the work, which echoes the modern methods of concrete construction design that typify the quarter's appearance, Ferreira has created a watering place. Taking into account Lisbon's hot Mediterranean climate, it is accessible for everyone to "use" and has the shape of a fixed hydrant with a flexible tube attached to a tap or spout that snakes round to end on top of a broad rectangular concrete plinth. With her installation, the artist makes reference to the act of work *per se* and to the very act of building the "whole thing", that is Expo '98. She does this through the association evoked by the watering place, which reflects the standard building procedure of moistening freshly laid concrete surfaces. The aspect of labour is also referred to in the title of the artwork, which is the fourth part of her installation. The title has been meticulously inscribed and cemented into the walkway using small pebbles of limestone and basalt rock, which are traditionally used in Lisbon to embellish pavements with mosaic-like words and ornaments. The title of the four-part work is "Kanimambo", meaning "Thank you" in Shangaan, the language spoken by the majority of the Mozambican workers, who comprised one of the largest groups of foreign labourers to construct Expo '98.

Through her oeuvre, Ângela Ferreira has made internationally important artistic contributions towards broadening the understanding of the complex relationship between Africa and Europe. She explores issues such as the nature of *shared heritage* in relation to colonial legacy on both continents, but also questions related to European modernity in the 19th and 20th centuries and its colonial history. At the same time, her works also frequently address the prevail-

ling amnesia in Portugal regarding the country's own colonial past.

ALLAN SEKULA IN BELÉM

In 2001, the American artist Allan Sekula presented his exhibition *TITANIC's wake* (figure 5) at three different venues in the district where, as described above, the *Exposição do Mundo Português* had been held in 1940, organised by Salazar's fascist regime Estado Novo. In the early 1990s, the Portuguese state constructed the Centro Cultural de Belém (CCB), designed by the architects Vittorio Grigotti and Manuel Salgado. It was built on the site where the central pavilion of the 1940 fair had stood – almost all the pavilions had been designed as provisional structures in wood and plaster and were dismantled after the fair. In 2000/2001, a Project Room intended for a series of six exhibitions conceived specifically for Belém was installed inside the area of the CCB complex. In spite of the CCB's available floor-space of 8,000 sq. metres, the exhibition space was deliberately reduced to just 120 sq. metres. The programme



focussed on possible associative readings of artistic practices in a designated place, be it in a typical arts centre of the 1980s and 1990s, or in a certain quarter of Lisbon with its particular (world) history, history *per se*, and the urbanistic forms used by Portuguese fascism to stage this history in Belém.

Allan Sekula was the final artist to be presented in this exhibition series, which was planned to run for one year. Based on a notion of art that challenges the musealisation and attendant de-politicisation of his photographic works, or at least seeks to subvert these tendencies, the artist accepted the invitation to show an extensive, previously compiled exhibition (which, in addition, also comprised three groups of works) in the far too small Project Room gallery in the CCB. In other words, the idea of breaking loose from the museum and infiltrating locales that were not dedicated to art had been in Sekula's mind from the very outset. The lack of space in the project venue in the CCB gave the artist freedom to work according to the conditions of presenting art both within and outside museums. In doing so, Sekula not only took his exhibition out of the Project Room into other areas of the CCB, but also even out of the CCB itself. In addition, showing his works in carefully selected locations not intended for art enabled him to contextualise these works specifically through the respective site of each presentation.

Sekula's exhibition in Belém made reference to the circumstances governing the production of meaning in museums, as well as to the psychological resonances of other public sites in Belém that he appropriated for an associative reading of his works in the places where he was presenting them.

The central group of works was displayed in the Project Room. However, as it was the most voluminous body of works in Sekula's presentation, it "overflowed" beyond the confines of the project space and spread into the foyers – those "neutral" zones of sublime emptiness between exhibitions that "prepare" visitors' minds for the following exhibition. Yet the purpose of this "overflow" was to sacrilegiously expose and call into question modern museum architecture and the philosophy of art it is founded on, as well as to reveal the pretentious pathos this architecture needs to draw on to "elevate" art.

Allan Sekula showed the work "Dear Bill Gates" (1999) in Belém's Maritime Museum in the section of the permanent exhibition dedicated to maritime salvage, a setting that offered an appropriate context for the components of his piece. (figure 6) The central element is constituted by a photography triptych showing the artist (self-portrait) swimming at sea in front of the coastal villa that belongs to the software magnate Bill Gates. A further element is constituted by a framed typewritten letter from the artist to Gates, in which, in an ironic but nonetheless poetic tone, he gives details of his attempt to approach Gates's villa from the sea, referring to the underwater sensors as having "worried the artist to get closer". The letter also makes reference to the painting "Lost on the Grand Banks" by Winslow Homer from 1885, which shows two fishermen in distress at sea, and which was bought by Gates at an auction for \$30 million, making headlines at the time for being the highest price paid for any American painting. Questions are raised concerning how nationalism can engender meaning with the help of "national" art; or rather, the question of how art *per se* is appropriated

figure 6

Allan Sekula, "Dear Bill Gates", 1999,
installation view, Museu de Marinha, Lisbon, 2001.
Photo: Mário Valente



by the art business, and how the artist is usurped by the collector. Sekula's probing extends further still to delve into the superlative dimensions of sky-high profits and capitalism's ownership culture, not to mention the system's inherent imperialism.

Sekula incorporated photocopies of Homer's painting as connective elements: in the Maritime Museum (as part of "Dear Bill Gates"), in the Project Room

(as part of *TITANIC's wake*), and in the Discoveries Monument, in conjunction with his slide projection "Waiting for Tear Gas".

Allan Sekula presented "Waiting for Tear Gas [white Globe to Black]" (1999–2000) in an immense 15-metre-high venue inside the Discoveries Monument. On the inside, the space inversely mirrors the exterior's allegorical depiction of a ship's bow made of fair-



faced concrete, and is not usually accessible to visitors making their way to the viewing platform on the monument's roof. (figure 7)

The work documents moments from the protests and clashes between demonstrators and police during the 1999 World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference in Seattle. The events reflected the explosive level of social tensions that were then developing and are still on the rise in capitalist countries throughout the world. The Seattle protests represented the most serious disturbances in the United States since the Vietnam War period, when demon-

strations were sparked by political discontent. Apart from civil unrest dominated by race issues (such as the riots that broke out in Los Angeles in 1992, when police officers were acquitted of assaulting Rodney King), it had been almost 30 years since the National Guard had been dispatched into a large American city.

The extent of the protests and police deployment in Seattle was nowhere near as drastic as the anti-war demonstrations of the 1960s. Nonetheless, the unrest signalled a renewed interest in political and social issues among working people and the young in the United States. Those who arrived in their thousands in Seattle raised countless questions concerning the environment and the exploitation of child labour and workers in the Third World. The overwhelming majority of protesters were united in their concern about the growing divide of social inequality and in their hostility to the power that transnational corporate behemoths wielded over working people – not only in America but also throughout the world.

These themes also repeatedly find their way into Sekula's work. As a "photographer" recording the events, he joined the demonstrations without wearing a gas mask, photographing from within the crowds as they were being pressed back by the police. Eighty-one of the shots he had taken were shown in a looped slide sequence projected in the Discoveries Monument. In his slide series, Sekula formulates a critical correspondence between current issues of globalisation and the "epos of discovery" so uncritically invoked throughout history; in regard to the globalisation initiated by the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope 500 years ago, questions are raised about

Allan Sekula, “Waiting for Tear Gas”, 1999,
installation view, Discoveries Monument, Lisbon,
2001. Photo: Mário Valente

the repercussions of these “discoveries” for millions of people on various continents. With his work and his choice of a specific location for its presentation, Sekula links the present-day moment of globalisation manifested in Seattle with another moment that lies in the past: the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope by Vasco da Gama. Yet at the same time, the artist also critically challenges this mode of imputing meaning through a monistically reductive historiography. The psychological resonances of the building emanating from the intellectual climate of the Estado Novo era when it was built, and the related view of history championed by the fascist regime – which, in terms of the moment of “discoveries”, still prevails today in Portugal – were strongly highlighted in Sekula’s presentation and conveyed to visitors with vivid effect and from a critical perspective. For a limited period, the monument in Belém became part of Sekula’s work. Inversely, Sekula’s work enabled people who were visiting the monument “merely” as a tourist attraction to acquire a more differentiated perception of the architecture, of the way in which a monument appropriates a historical moment, and how this moment itself might be reassessed through a broader interpretation in the light of changes in the modern world. Hence, viewed in conjunction with Sekula’s work, visitors were enabled to experience the monument as a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a “total work of art” in public space.

With the three elements of *TITANIC’s wake*, Allan Sekula was working in the margins of art in public space. All three groups of work were staged in semi-public contexts with qualified access. One reason Sekula showed his works in the rooms of the museum intended for exhibiting art was to raise questions

about the museum per se. He used them precisely because this allowed him to exhibit his departure from the prescribed exhibition rooms and show work in other areas of the CCB that are accessible to everyone without paying admission. He made use of areas that curators and museum professionals would not consider “worthy” of art. In the Maritime Museum and the Discoveries Monument, he reached two different audiences: an “informed” audience that came to these non-art spaces specifically in search of Sekula’s exhibition; and the audience that would normally visit such places with expectations related to a Maritime Museum or a Discoveries Monument, and during their visit accidentally encounter the works of Allan Sekula.

With its project space, the exhibition centre Centro Cultural de Belém was the organiser of the exhibition(s). A key factor in the partnerships with the city of Lisbon as the official “operator” of the Discoveries Monument and with the Portuguese navy as the body responsible for the Maritime Museum, was the institutional weight of the CCB as one of the most important exhibition venues in Portugal. Characteristic of Sekula’s photographs is an ambivalence that is finely calibrated by the artist,¹¹ but to what degree the political implications of his works were grasped in all their facets by those responsible for the exhibition is a moot issue. At each of the three venues, however, and especially in the Discoveries Monument, Sekula gave museum administrators and curators a demonstration of enlightening alternatives to the frequently orthodox and indiscriminate “loading” of culturally dedicated public infrastructures.



Projecto Almirante Reis, advertisement display incorporating information on the exhibition, Praça do Chile, Lisbon, 1996.
Photo: Mário Valente

AVENIDA ALMIRANTE REIS

In 1996, a group of six artists developed an art in public spaces project while studying on the Independent Studies Programme at the Escola Maumaus. As previously mentioned, the project with the title *Projecto Almirante Reis* arose as part of a seminar taught by the South African artist Roger Meintjes. Unlike the works presented by Ângela Ferreira and Allan Sekula, where institutions guaranteed the funding of their temporarily or permanently installed exhibits, the group began their project without any exhibition budget at their disposal. The idea sprang from the group's interest in developing an exhibition based on "alternative" forms of art in public spaces. The choice of the location was determined primarily by the proximity of the Escola Maumaus to the Avenida Almirante Reis, in conjunction with the depth of historical, political, and sociological themes associated with the avenue.

From January 1996 onward, Alban Chotard, Fernando Fadigas, Ester Ferreira, Teresa Fradique, João Pisco, and Luisa Yokochi met regularly at different significant spots on the Avenida. The treatment of research into themes unrelated to art as an essential part of artistic practice was a notion shared by all members of the group. The permanent exchange of research findings in the course of the exhibition's development and discussions among the participants about their individual projects played a decisive role in the exhibition's final form. Through this, the exhibited works showed an unusually consistent level of quality, despite the broad variety of themes addressed. The group agreed not to place sculptures or installations in the public space on the Avenida; instead, they looked for communication media al-

ready in place that would be suitable as vehicles for artistic works.

The exhibition opened on 19 July 1996. While it related thematically to the whole of the 2.6 km-long Avenida Almirante Reis, a considerable part of the works was concentrated around the Praça do Chile – a square that divides the avenue into two distinct socio-cultural and economic sections. Its northern part is dominated by ostensibly homogenous middle-class living in spacious flats built in the Estado Novo period, while in the southern section of the Avenida a large number of immigrants have taken up residence in cheap hostels and decrepit buildings often in need of refurbishment. Topographically, the Avenida Almirante Reis runs up one of the two valleys that distinguish Lisbon as a city of seven hills. Both valleys were created by rivers that today are channelled beneath Lisbon's streets and flow down to the Tagus River.

In the course of the exhibition's development, all four district boroughs that adjoin on the Avenida were persuaded to contribute to the funding of the projects, whereby the exhibition concept was extended to include the Martim Moniz Square at the top of the Avenida and Rua da Palma, as a logical continuation of the main thoroughfare. Conducting research entailed making a number of contacts as well as entering into repeatedly difficult negotiations with institutions and public figures who had serious misgivings about the artists' ideas for a public art project, if not about art altogether. The key to success was the close cooperation between the Escola Maumaus and the district administration of Arroios – the municipal authority responsible for the Praça do Chile

Square. The president of the authority supported the exhibition project and mediated between the various institutions involved. Also tied into the project were the operating company that runs Lisbon's metro network, the National Theatre Museum, the owner of a (at that time deactivated) advertisement display, a large number of kiosk proprietors, the Municipality Photography Archive, Lisbon's authority responsible for leasing advertising space, the outdoor advertising company JCDecaux, and five portrait photographers who run studios around the Praça do Chile.

The exhibition's location (as its theme) spawned a plethora of motifs, among which were:

- the proclamation of the Portuguese Republic in 1910 – whereby Fleet Admiral Carlos Cândido dos Reis, who openly opposed the monarchy, wrongly assumed that the revolution had failed and committed suicide. This happened close to the avenue that is now named after him, but at the time was still called Avenida Dona Amélia, in honour of the then queen;
- the urban development of the northern section of the Avenida: Its design was conceived as an



figure 10

Projecto Almirante Reis, advertisement display incorporating information on the exhibition, Praça do Chile, Lisbon, 1996.
Photo: Mário Valente

figure 11

Projecto Almirante Reis, exhibition publication at newspaper stand, Praça do Chile, Lisbon, 1996.
Photo: Mário Valente



- expression of the political system of the Estado Novo, with architectural features that reflected its ideological aspirations;
- the Avenida as a major demonstration route both during the period of unrest between 1908 and 1910 prior to the proclamation of the Republic, and in the present on May Day;
 - the socio-cultural phenomena of the very diverse population groups who live in different parts of the Avenida, where they constantly intermingle.

An important conceptual aspect of the exhibition was the transfer of auxiliary resources that are generally required to generate meaning in art – such as lists of works, commentaries and documentation, invitations, and exhibition maps – into the specific context of an exhibition intended for temporary installation in public space. Accordingly, in their individual projects the artists did not rely simply on the

media they “found” in situ as vehicles of their work, but also went about appropriating other kinds of readily available infrastructures as means of distribution and announcement to promote the exhibition.

A disused advertisement/information display standing in the Praça do Chile – once used to indicate nearby shops whose addresses, at the touch of a button, were lit up by small lamps on a street map – was put back into service as a centrally located information point for the exhibition. (figures 8-9) The rear side of the panel, facing an entrance to the metro, consisted of an illuminated showcase for advertising posters. For the project, the facility was put back into operation and the map replaced by a new, detailed site plan – printed using the same silkscreen technique as the old one. Instead of the names and addresses of shops and businesses, the map now showed the names of the artists and information about their exhi-

bits – similar to how works are labelled in museums – as well as indicating where the works were located. The exhibition invitation card was a postcard with a view of the Praça do Chile and the information display, which at the same time also alluded to the total lack of postcards depicting this part of Lisbon. (figure 10)

In a reference to the way publishing houses used to display their latest newspaper editions in their windows to be read freely by passers-by, the group mounted the pages of their exhibition newspaper inside the illuminated showcase intended for adver-

tising posters on the back of the information display. The artists were each allocated a page to design and contextualise their respective interventions, and the publication also contained a more comprehensive text about the overall exhibition. In addition, the newspaper was displayed and available for free at kiosks in the Avenida. (figure 11)

For her work, Teresa Fradique used two adjacent billboards that were available free of charge to any institution publicising cultural events. (figures 12 and 13) This facility had been set up by the city throughout the metropolitan area following the 1974 revo-



figure 12

Teresa Fradique, "Untitled", photocopy of photograph on notice board (detail), 1996.
Photo: Mário Valente

figure 13

Teresa Fradique, "Untitled", photocopy of photograph on notice board, 1996.
Photo: Mário Valente



lution in an attempt to curb the rampant fly-posting at that time. The artist went to the Municipality Photography Archive located on the Avenida to research historical photographs from the period when the so-called Neptune Fountain was still standing in the centre of the Praça do Chile. The fountain in the middle of one of Lisbon's main traffic arteries was an altogether pleasant feature, especially given the city's climate, but it was felt by the Estado Novo to be unrepresentative. It had to make way for a monument in honour of the seafarer Fernando Magellan, which was more in tune with the tastes and the ideological view of history held by the regime. Fradique presented two historic photographs, one of the Praça do Chile with the Neptune Fountain, the other of the fountain being pulled down. The pictures were reproduced onto large-format posters so they could be pasted onto the billboards. Her page in the exhi-

bition newspaper consisted of a reprint of the front page of the *Diário Popular* from 17 October 1950, featuring an article that describes the Fernando Magellan monument's unveiling.

Ester Ferreira conducted research into the Teatro Apolo that once stood at the top end of the Avenida and was demolished by the Estado Novo. The theatre was known for staging revues that were unsympathetic to the regime, so the fascist government clearly had few qualms about tearing it down to make way for the new parade square called Martim Moniz. The fact that the streets in a recently built nearby quarter were named after celebrated actors who through this action had just been put out of work is not without a certain irony. Ferreira's contribution to the exhibition newspaper consisted of a detail of a map of this quarter alongside an advertisement announcing a forthcoming auction of the furnishings

from the theatre that was due to be demolished. For her work of public art, she used two illuminated display panels in the Praça do Chile provided by the company JCDecaux, which normally carry advertising posters. The artist designed and printed two theatre posters in the characteristic style of the Estado Novo, announcing two fictitious stage productions in the long since defunct Teatro Apolo, featuring the actors from the cast who were sacked and have long since died. (figures 14 and 15)

Luisa Yokochi worked in collaboration with portrait photographers whose businesses at that time were located on the Praça do Chile. Having first ordered a portrait of herself from each of the photographers, she won them over as “co-authors” of her project by giving them a free hand in how they executed her assignment. The shop owners hung the artist’s portraits for the duration of the exhibition in their shop windows, alongside the other portraits one would expect to see there. In the exhibition newspaper, Yokochi reproduced all portraits, naming the photographers and the respective index numbers of the shots. (figures 16–18)

All the works shown in the *Projecto Almirante Reis* evolved discreet and subtle forms of articulation, disguised as advertising media, shop window displays, or newspapers. Each of the artists had appropriated already existing modes of communication, turning them into vehicles for art. An informed audience started out by acquiring an overall impression of the exhibition at the information display; they then might have procured the exhibition newspaper at one of the kiosks; the newspaper contained a further map that visitors used to find and view the works. In many cases, observant passers-by regularly frequen-

ting the Avenida Almirante Reis around the Praça do Chile only gradually began to notice the shift in the messages being voiced by the familiar image carriers and other media in their urban surroundings.

ART IN PUBLIC SPACES AS AN EXTENDED CONCEPT: “PÚBLICO (CENTERFOLD)”

In 2001, the Portuguese artist Susana Mendes Silva produced a work for the Lisbon daily *Público* – a newspaper that since its launch in 1989 has become known in Portugal for its broad critical coverage of cultural events of all kinds. Each week for the duration of year, the newspaper reserved a double-page spread in its Saturday arts supplement for invited artists to use it entirely as they pleased.

In the light of Mendes’s work for *Público* and the crucial question it raised about the (lack of) creative opportunities at the disposal of contemporary artists outside Portugal’s museums, it might be necessary to generally rethink how museums foster meaning in art. The fact that museums have their own particular rules of operation already conditions how art is viewed; but at the same time this also provides a decisive context for the kind of art which only inside a “white cube” is capable of generating a game of “playful” intellectual exchange between author and viewer. It can be assumed that the museum offers specific conditions conducive to art’s unfolding in the same way as specifically cinemas, as opposed to television or the internet, stimulate the specific unfolding of film as a medium. The museum offers itself as a place that guarantees artists a free zone to mount any kind of potential provocation, which will still be funded by the museum, however critical it is of society. The modus operandi of artistic production and the man-

figures 14 and 15

Ester Ferreira, “Vem Ai o Teatro do Povo!”
 (“Here Comes the People’s Theatre!”), silkscreen
on paper in advertisement display, 1996.
Photo: Mário Valente





figure 16

Luisa Yokochi, "FOTOQUITOS 40134-1", 1996, colour photograph in shop window display. Photo: Mário Valente



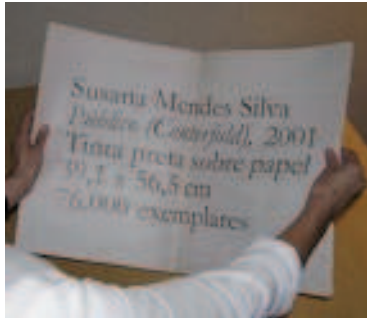
figure 17

Luísa Yokochi, "EUROCOLOR Video print", colour inkjet print in shop window display, 1996. Photo: Mário Valente



figure 18

Luisa Yokochi, "INSTANTÁNEO", 1996, colour photograph in shop window display. Photo: Mário Valente



ner in which museums function according to their own specific rules of use are mutually dependent.

Many artists who in the course of their careers have been given the opportunity to successfully compound the “vocabulary” of their artistic practice under the conditions for producing meaning in museums and galleries, and then try to “blindly” transplant this practice as their “brand” into the public realm, run the danger of losing their conferred effectiveness once outside the museum.

Art that positions itself outside the museum and refuses to be yoked to the tradition of measures for embellishing the city, but instead defines itself in its discourse according to contemporary artistic practices negotiated in the museum, cannot simply cast aside the body of rules governing the museum. Susana Mendes Silva’s work explores the tension between the museum’s canon of rules and the kind of art that needs to articulate and assert itself in the public realm in fundamentally different ways and outside the familiar institutional framework. In her contribution to *Público*, Silva carried the inherently self-referential

aspect of art, of authorship, and of the medium to the extreme: She adopted the site of her art in public space “Público (Centerfold)” as the title of her work. (figure 19) The total number of her multiple edition is correctly stated at the end of the piece, coinciding with the print run of the newspaper, while the work’s dimensions (those of the newspaper) are given in the correct museum method (height × width) at the bottom of the label, in other words of the artwork. The label itself in fact becomes the work of art, yet also continues to function as a label by dint of its transfer from the museum into the public sphere of a newspaper. Such a paradigm shift of a medium that is familiar to us results in a work that, as art in public space, stems from the conditions governing art in the museum, but only in order to deconstruct these same rules in an unexpected context.

FROM THE ARTWORK TO TEXT

The purpose of describing these artistic practices cited here as examples of “a broader understanding of art” (with regard to the public realm and art in public spaces) is not to place them in hierarchical rivalry with more classical forms of art. The degree to which viewers perceive art in public space as relevant, or are willing to engage in a *playful exchange* with this art – either in approval or rejection – is dependent neither on when the work was produced nor on the intentions of the artwork’s producer.

On his flight from the Nazis, the author Alfred Döblin spent several months in Lisbon in summer 1940 before finally departing for the United States. In his memoirs,¹² Döblin writes about the “interesting” monuments in the city. Besides various equestrian statues and pompous buildings, Döblin also com-

Susana Mendes Silva, “Público (Centerfold)”,
black ink on paper, 39.1 × 56.5 cm, 76,000 copies,
2001. Photo: Susana Mendes Silva

ments on a bronze figure depicting the then typical newspaper vendor of the *Diário de Notícias*, “barefooted” and in ragged clothes, located at the viewpoint of São Pedro de Alcântara. Döblin highlights the ironic contrast between the precious material used to make the sculpture and the shameful failings of a social system incapable of providing its children with adequate clothing. Döblin voices a further line of thought about art in public space in his remarks about the monumental statue celebrating the Marquis of Pombal. In monistical historiography, the marquis is generally described as an enlightened reformer of Portuguese society; his Machiavellian and often brutal manoeuvres to keep hold of power are mostly mentioned only in passing. Döblin notes that the monument dedicated to Pombal as a “benefactor of humanity” and an “enlightened despot” standing at the end of the Avenida de Liberdade could also be viewed in an ironic light: “For this is the world history that some humorists have called the Last Judgement.”¹³

Döblin took an active approach to the monuments and memorials in Lisbon and assessed them in a contemporary light from the perspective of a refugee persecuted by a criminal regime. In his manner of exploring associations with these monuments that were generally perceived as “edifying” the city, Döblin could be said to have “read” them as *texts*, in the sense formulated by Roland Barthes. For the distinctions Barthes makes in his perception of literature and art in works and texts¹⁴ are not hierarchically structured – in other words, not in the sense of better or worse, of older or contemporary art – but concern possible modes of reading, exploring different cognitive processes in the viewer on encountering a

work. Barthes speaks of a *game* that presupposes the viewer’s active involvement. In his definition, *works* can be passively experienced while *texts* can only make an impact if they are animated through active reflection. Text can by all means be discerned in older art, whereas contemporary art is not automatically available to be experienced merely by dint of its contemporaneity. Text always transpires when the viewer him/herself becomes the “author” of the work of art. These processes presume visual literacy on the part of the viewer, and the capacity – derived from his/her own knowledge and experience – to produce associations at the moment of encounter with the work of art:

*The infinity of the signifier refers [...] in the field of the text (better, of which the text is the field) is realised not according to an organic progress of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations. The logic regulating the Text is not comprehensive (define “what the work means”) but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy (lacking it, man would die); the work in the best of cases – is moderately symbolic (its symbolic runs out, comes to a halt); the Text is radically symbolic: a work conceived, perceived and received in its integrally symbolic nature is a text. [...] In fact, reading, in the sense of consuming, is far from playing with the text. “Playing” must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself plays (like a door, like a machine with “play”) and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which reproduces it [...].*¹⁵

Roland Barthes’ theory is one of a number of different propositions about the decentred subject for-

mulated in the same period (by Lacan, Althusser, and Foucault, among others), in which “the result is a resolutely anti-hierarchical conception of a production of meaning, rather than a grasping of the author’s Truth: the false truth, as it were, of authority.”¹⁶

In view of this perception, when it comes to the reception of a work as text and the attendant necessity of the viewer’s *practical collaboration*, coupled with the requisite preconditions on the part of the viewer, it would also be useful to take note of Adrian Piper’s doubts about the prospects of achieving effective change through a “global political art”:

*Representation of political content alone is unlikely to be successful in effecting political change in the viewer, because it directs the viewer’s attention away from the immediate politics of her own situation and toward some other space-time region that may have only the most tenuous connection, if any, to the viewer’s immediate personal circumstances.*¹⁷

A common element among the works described earlier by Ângela Ferreira, Allan Sekula, the participants of the Independent Studies Programme of the Escola Maumaus, and Susana Mendes Silva was their awareness of the phenomena formulated by Piper and Barthes. The artists all conceived their works as texts, as defined by Roland Barthes, and were interested in releasing symbolic energy through their art and thereby emancipating the viewer to play his/her own associative *game* with observable contiguities and possible transfers. In this respect, the key elements of their works were the forms the artists adopted to incorporate the general psychological resonances of the respective sites where they were being presented. These elements had been concei-

ved by their makers as “entrance points” aimed at the personal situation of the viewer/reader, in order to empower him/her as an active *reader* and *author*.

The gamble taken by the artists in abandoning the position provided for them by art history represents perhaps one side of the coin; the other is that the game of emancipating the viewer from the author’s “claim to truth” is categorically open for all to play. Yet the work “symbolically conceived” by the author of a work of art is not automatically perceived as text by the viewer. The *game* that the “authors” aspire to play, which goes beyond the passive consumption of art and literature, is dependent on the visual literacy, the capacities, and availability of the viewer.

The question of whether art – be it on temporary or permanent display, in public space or in a museum – is also able to assume the task of communicating such differentiated interpretations of its own activity and impact, as Roland Barthes himself did in his own “text” *From Work to Text* in 1971, can in one sense still be considered relevant. Namely, in terms of whether such art in its inordinate explanatory zeal to produce the envisaged interpretation, or in the conceived logic of understanding, can succeed in being perceived “merely” as a work and precisely not as text. In other words, whether this art might not be doomed to fail by its own “good” will.

- 1 Douglas Crimp asks in his essay "Getting the Warhol We Deserve: Cultural Studies and Queer Culture": "What is at stake is not history per se, which is a fiction in any case, but what history, whose history, history to what purpose." Available at: http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue1/crimp/crimp.html.
- 2 Miwon Kwon, "For Hamburg: Public Art and Urban Identities", in: Christian Philipp Müller, *Kunst auf Schritt und Tritt* (Hamburg, 1997).
- 3 Cf. Raquel de Henrique da Silva, "Estatuária académica: entre a norma, a história e a sensibilidade romântica", in: *arte pública – Estatuária e Escultura de Lisboa – Roteiro*, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa (Lisbon, 2005).
- 4 Based on the distinction between modernity and modernism formulated by Zygmunt Bauman.
- 5 Besides having been a renowned architect, Cottinelli Telmo is also part of the history of Portuguese cinema. He designed the building of the Tobis Film Studios in the outskirts of Lisbon and directed the country's first talkie feature film. Bearing in mind that the first version of the monument was erected in wood and plaster, it might not be a coincidence that it appears today as a one-to-one copy in stone of a former gigantic film set.
- 6 Paradigmatic for colonial administrations and for the colonising West in general is the assumption that the colonised countries have no history or sensibilities of local provenance. They are thought to be "empty" and simply waiting to be filled with history and culture by the colonial power.
- 7 Heinrich Klotz, "Tendenzen heutiger Architektur in der Bundesrepublik", in: *Das Kunstwerk* 32, 1979, pp. 6ff.; and Jürgen Paul, "Kulturgeschichtliche Betrachtungen zur deutschen Nachkriegsarchitektur", *ibid.*, pp. 13ff.
- 8 After the "Carnation Revolution" of 25 April 1974, which forced the Salazar/Caetano regime into exile after 50 years of fascism, there was a sudden explosion in house building on the peripheries of Lisbon and Porto. With the patina of time they have since acquired, these satellite and dormitory towns that were built ad hoc and often without

serious planning now seem less brutal than the suburbs of London, Paris, or Berlin that were systematically designed on the drawing board. In Portugal, modernist high-rise buildings were often conceived to fit in with more irregular, meandering roads than being marshalled into kilometre-long layouts of straight lines and rectangular blocks. This is partly a consequence of the country's rather challenging topography.

- 9 "... less object-oriented and more site-conscious art that sought greater integration between art, architecture, and the landscape through artists' collaboration with members of the urban managerial class (such as architects, landscape architects, city planners, urban designers, and city administrators), in the designing of permanent urban (re-) development projects such as parks, plazas, buildings, promenades, neighbourhoods, etc ..."
- 10 In South Africa, Ângela Ferreira conducted detailed studies of the Russian Constructivists as a 1920s artistic movement in pursuit of a symbiosis of cultural, political, and social utopias. Quite early on, Ferreira's interest was sparked in particular by the multi-functional artworks called Screen-Tribune-Kiosks, designed by Gustav Klutis (1895–1938) in around 1922, which she saw as offering ideas and practices with relevance to the

South African context.

- 11 An important reference for better understanding Allan Sekula's photographic works is a commentary Bertolt Brecht wrote about photographing factories: "A photograph of the Krupps factory or the AEG works tells us practically nothing about the institution. True reality has slipped into the functional. The objectification of human relations, as for example the factory, is not made visible. So there is indeed a need to 'construct something', something 'artificial', 'contrived'." Bertolt Brecht, "Der Dreigroschenprozess", 1931, in: Dreigroschenbuch: Text-Materialien-Dokumente (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1960), pp. 93–94.
- 12 Alfred Döblin, *Schicksalsreise – Flucht und Exil 1940–1948* (Munich, 1986), pp. 224ff. In English: *Destiny's Journey* (New York, 1992).
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 228–229.
- 14 Roland Barthes, "De l'oeuvre au texte", in: *Revue d'esthétique*, no. 3, Paris, 1971.
- 15 Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" (trans. Stephen Heath), in: *Art in Theory 1900–1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), pp. 941–946.
- 16 *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 941.
- 17 Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), II, p. 177.