

## The Semiotic Intervention and its Performative Contingency

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I came across Dolores Zinny and Juan Maidagan's work for the first time at the *Semantic Gap* exhibition in Lund, Sweden, in 2004. The exhibition was related to a public architectural project, "Fontana" (the Italian word for fountain), in Lund, which still exists in the city but lay in ruins after a few performances. It was built with the intention of displaying the progress of scientific and technological development around that time by providing new surroundings for the city. Although many interesting thoughts and questions arose around Fontana at that time, the symbolic project of the Lund Institute of Technology unfortunately ended in failure due to its technical errors.

The work of Zinny and Maidagan at Lund Konsthall began in that context and referred to this local public structure and its story of historical events. When it comes to incorporating historic episodes and stories within recent artworks, many works have resulted from a research format or documentation material, such as interviews, documentary films, photographs, etc. However, here Zinny and Maidagan transformed and abbreviated the episode of "Fontana" into an aesthetic sign or formal signifier that was applied to the three-dimensional work and literally located inside the institutional space as another interesting event. The artists installed a big cut structure as a sort of architectural intervention in the exhibition hall, and the structure seems to be Zinny and Maidagan's semiotic appropriation as well as a formal appropriation of Klas Anshelm and Arne Jonas's original steel structure.

The works in that exhibition, in some ways, seem to offer just such a gesture, and they have a metaphoric role in mediating between the Konsthall and the exterior. They are, therefore, symbolic beings that dilate an enclosed institution's not-yet-visible potentiality. In other words, just as the former Fontana realized the symbol of the Lund Institute of Technology, Zinny and Maidagan's work denotes and realizes multiple significant aspects of Fontana — such as idealism and deprivation, institutional ideology and its failure — and thus creates the semantic gap of the empty signifier. They are epitomized by the exterior and are consequently allegorically reflected inside the Konsthall.

Their works never directly deliver a particular opinion, demonstrate problematic contents, or give a judgment. They exist rather as signs and signifiers, a purely formal and aesthetic language. Perhaps their works are based on language too economic and minimized to communicate compared with many other works derived from a contextual subject; however, their work has a different presence of communication. It is to be read and recognized through its modality in a situation, in a textual relation or location, hence its phase of rhetoric and syntax with its total aesthetic sphere. The structure of Fountain, which stands at the rear of the exhibition space, associates the interior with the exterior through a silent but significant performance, which can be read as a modest proposal, en passant, for a coming though still invisible moment with a certain meaning.

Including the Fountain pieces, Zinny and Maidagan's architectural installations and two-dimensional pieces have represented distinctive and differentiated space by usages of folding, unfolding, overlapping, cutting, overlaying and so on, which have constituted these artists' idiosyncrasy. Some works show delicate features between two- and three-dimensional play, through being partly cut or with the use of inosculating fabrics, in which very subtle and sophisticated details have created interesting spatial subdivisions, causing diverse vision and visuality from different distances and perspectives. Moreover, these aspects engage viewers through a

constant inversion, reversion and displacement between the interior and the exterior, or inside and outside. Zinny and Maidagan's pieces finally expose the paradoxical change of 'in' and 'out', reflecting the instability of the position.

Zinny and Maidagan seem to keep up with highly aesthetic language and attitudes, handling interesting formal elements, spatial rhetoric, syntax, details and texture intellectually. The artists continue to mediate space as an autonomous text, reflecting self-politics around the notion of position or concept of location in institutional space, which I would say is their singular quality. The minimal and semiotic gesture of the works finally brings a potentiality of movement and a moment of contingency in a stagnant space or a sort of conventional place. This spatial engagement also unfolds a discourse connected with the agonism Chantal Mouffe mentions in *The Democratic Paradox*.

What I call agonism ... is a different mode of manifestation of antagonism because it involves a relation not between enemies but between 'adversaries', adversaries being defined in a paradoxical way as 'friendly enemies,' that is, persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way. (Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London-New York: Verso, 2000, p. 13).

Zinny and Maidagan's association and intrinsic relationship of space can be understood using Chantal Mouffe's paradoxical relationship of 'friendly enemies' because their semiotic action or performance in the artwork or installation represents their desire to organize a common symbolic space differently and in a singular manner.

Nevertheless, a particularly valuable aspect of Zinny and Maidagan's work is that spectators can encounter a fundamental pleasure in the visual language, which connects with less ordinary vision, acknowledgment and thought. Finally, through their works, we ponder the linguistic conditions of art and perceive its performativity, through which we encounter the epistemological moment.

Kim Hyunjin, 2007

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Born in Hong Song, South Korea in 1975, **Kim Hyunjin** lives and works in Seoul as a curator and writer. She studied art theory at Hongik University, Seoul, and critical studies in Malmö Art Academy, and has worked for the Artsonje Center, Seoul (Assistant Curator), Vanabbe Museum, Eindhoven (Guest Curator 2005), Istanbul Biennale 2005 (Curatorial Assistant), etc. Besides her own independent projects and exhibitions, she is currently working for IASmedia, Insa Art Space as an associate curator. Her former exhibitions, such as *Reality Bites* (Loop, Seoul, 2002), *Where is My Friend's Home* (Test site, Rooseum, 2003), *Steaming Away from the Places* (Sangmyung Gallery, 2004), *Plug-In #03: Undeclared Crowd* (Vanabbe Museum, 2006), and her ongoing practices have been derived from her research and approaches to epistemological and ethical aspects of contemporary art.