

Cindy Moorman,
het Wij
The Inclusion of the Excluded
Performance, Paradiso
Amsterdam, 23 januari 2020

1 As you walk down the busy city street towards Paradiso, the façade of the former church is bathed in orange light. It's the color of *het Vlak (the Plane)* – the location where *het Wij (the We)* converges – and of collectiveness. This orange has also been incorporated in the elongated series of wall posters that, gradually filling up with configurations of purple dots, guide you towards the building's entrance. Which has been transformed into a portal of purple light: welcome to *The Inclusion of the Excluded*, an evening organized by artist Berend Strik that centers on harmony and disharmony, with a program that includes one opera and three performances.

This building used to be a church, but Cindy Moorman's *het Wij* doesn't refer to a religious ceremony. It's a performance, made up of four, interrelated scenes. Over the course of the evening, visitors and performers immerse themselves in a scenario of social rituals, expectation and uncertainty.

2 Visitors entering the building are stamped on their forearm. "Does the stamp actually work? I don't see anything." Which is correct: the stamp is a purple fluorescent triangle that only becomes visible when at the end of the evening the blacklight is turned on. The triangle reminds you that you were there together. That you've shared an experience. Me, you, my neighbor, the performer, the artist, the singer – for a brief moment, we were all joined in *het Wij*.

Het Wij isn't explained beforehand – similar to how social patterns in general don't have to be explained. We know them when we see them. Visitors entering the space try to understand what's going on. Did 'the thing' start yet? Those purple dots again, on the floor this time – are they pointing towards something? Why is the light so bright and bleak? It's if you've accidentally ended up at your local community center – a feeling enhanced by the institutional coffee, served in those ubiquitous white cups; the silver jugs; the tinkling of spoons; sachets of sugar. Is that lady in the purple polka-dot dress part of it? Are we still waiting for something; someone; a sound? Or are we already part of 'something'?

3 The white light is switched off. A cone of purple light descends from the ceiling. You glance toward the person next to you. Does he know something you don't? Is she part of the performance; is this part of the performance? People who find themselves in the beam hastily wriggle out of the spotlight. To no avail: suddenly, a voice sounds and new beams of purple light cut through the room. Best remain in one place and surrender to whatever happens next. The room fills with voices. Are they mumbling, or is it actual words? Who's conducting, have these vocals been scored? Here and there, the voices merge into a single tone. This happens more and more, until the tones coalesce to form a single, collective chord. As the voices reach a crescendo, the separate cones of light transform into a haze of purple light that fills the room. A sustained, six-minute long ooh-ooh-ooh.

Everything starts to fall in place. The triangular cones of purple light, the stamped triangle on your forearm, the arms forming a triangle in the image over the entrance. Gradually, the shared feeling of uncertainty makes way for a feeling of collectiveness. The purple dots on the floor. Apparently, there's a unity of sorts – you get the intimation of a whole. The event is being directed; it was started. While some aspects defy explanation, there's a growing sense of community and you allow yourself to be transported by the encounter. The boundary between participant and spectator blurs, until the extended ooh-chord comes to an abrupt end. A deafening silence.

4 The evening hasn't ended yet, though. There are other performances. An opera. In a few hours' time, you'll leave the building with a memory of shared experiences stamped on your forearm. We were included; we were a group. There were no formal agreements, nothing had been decided beforehand. But nevertheless we were a group – because that's how it goes. *het Wij (the We)* simply comes about. A pleasant experience – just like it's nice to be able to go home again by yourself, as *het Ik (the I)*.

"In the present exhibition we do not come to look at things.
We simply enter, are surrounded and become part of what surrounds us."

Allan Kaprow - Essays on the blurring of art and life.

