

**AT THIS PLACE, POSTPETROLISM  
WAS HERALDED ON 27 April 2006**

**PART I**

*An inconspicuously clothed actor steps onto the pedestal and moves behind the lectern. He steps up to the microphone and tests the sound system with the words "We still have electricity? Good!" He delivers the speech with a self-assured, calm and heartily convincing voice. He is proud of having introduced postpetrolism and pleased to have won over the audience.*

**Address**

- Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
- dear artists and art lovers,
- dear energy and environment experts,
- dear friends and relatives,
- chers amis de la suisse romande,
- blessed fellow thinkers and activists,
- dear pessimists and depressive individuals,
- beloved lovers,
- dear all,

welcome to the Kunsthof. Today is 27 April 2006, and we are congregating here in order to open a new chapter in the history of art - **art in the age after mineral oil**. We are here to herald post-petrolism.

Proclamations of artistic manifestos will always take place when art wishes to address an audience beyond its aesthetic products. Today I wish to do this in a simple and intelligible manner.

In the following I wish to explain three aspects, which indicate the great changes we are approaching: the end of the oil age, the expected redistribution of wealth and power - and global warming. Subsequently I will briefly discuss how this has occurred and eventually proclaim postpetrolism.

**Introduction**

Let us pause for a moment - as an American mineral oil expert did last thanksgiving - and thank the Lord for the years 1901 to 2005, when oil and natural gas has enabled enormous change in our society. The professor declared 24 November 2005 "World Oil Peak Day". The day, in other words, when the peak of worldwide oil production was reached. Now the time had arrived to face a new reality. Because everyone who believed that exponential growth could continue for ever - in a finite world - would have to be a madman or an economist.

These statements are thought-provoking. Therefore I stand here today, and together we want to take the first step.

**Peak Oil**

Experience has shown that a graph of exploitation of fossil raw materials has assumed the shape of a bell for every source. And when all sources are combined, the graph shows a large bell curve. The apex of this large curve, i.e. the time when the production of

worldwide mineral oil resources passed its maximum is called "Peak Oil". Of course, this moment cannot be calculated exactly to the day.

Maybe it really was 24 November, maybe it is peaks in this exact moment, maybe it will take some more years to be reached. Though one thing is sure: we are on the apex. For over 20 years, the amount of mineral oil produced has been larger than the amount yielded by new sources. The presently most important oil fields were discovered in the 60s, and many show signs of exhaustion.

From an economic point of view Peak Oil has a special meaning. As soon as demand surpasses supply, prices rise. Those of you, who experienced the 1973 oil crisis will know what that means. At that time the OPEC countries decreased worldwide oil production by 5 per cent. The price increased by 400 per cent, causing the most severe economic crisis after the World War II - and with it car-free Sundays, among other things.

Today we have reached the point, where the amount produced has started to decrease for natural reasons. In addition, the consumption, representing the demand for fossil resources, is further increasing powerfully. The effects have recently been felt by the car drivers among you at the petrol pump.

The growth imperative is based on cheap energy. And Peak Oil indicates the stage in time when this foundation of modern industrial society starts to shake. Or, as one could put it: "The party is over".

### **Redistribution**

Let us take a look at the distribution issue. 80-20, 20-80. As you know, 80 per cent of wealth is today in the hands of 20 per cent of the world population. At the same time, the rest owns only 20 per cent. Many developments indicate that the western power monopoly cannot be supported forever. Not only China and India are setting the system in motion, also the so-called "developing countries" are increasingly appearing more self-secure and energetic when claiming their rights. In connection with this, violence seems to be an option for certain groups. The first signs of the "globalisation of the claim to power" have become evident at the beginning of this millennium.

In future, we will have to share our wealth. Uncomfortably, the largest portion of remaining mineral oil resources is to be found in a region where we are permanently losing goodwill.

### **Climate**

Now let us take a look at the weather. Mineral oil has brought enormous change over the past 150 years - also with regard to the climate. Never during the past 650'000 years have the greenhouse gas concentrations as been high as today. The average temperature in Switzerland, for instance, has risen by 1,5°C since the seventies.

According to the current forecasts, the average global temperature will rise by another 2 to 6° C. Depending upon region, this may cause an increase in precipitation, frequency and intensity of storms, rising sea levels, desert formation and proliferation of

infectious diseases. The poorer regions of the world will be affected more severely by the climatic changes than we will. Since 1993, an annual rise of the sea level amounting to three millimetres is being measured. A rise of just a few centimetres in sea levels will mean the end for numerous island states and many densely populated coastal regions. Therefore you should visit the Maldives as long as they exist.

The efforts made to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> output will not suffice to stop the trend. The Kyoto agreement is important. It marks a beginning point. Nevertheless, even if the protocol is realised as negotiated, this will merely decrease global warming by 0,2 °C. Once the vehicle named "global warming" has assumed speed, there is no fast way out.

## **PART II**

*The actor steps in front of the lectern with the microphone. He holds a piece of chalk in his hand, which he will use to draw the Peak Oil curve onto the lectern. He is now speaking from memory.*

Everything that has so far been said - Peak Oil, redistribution, climate - indicates a discontinuity. How could such a point be reached? I have studied the history of mineral oil and now wish to illustrate it with an overview containing some references to art history. First of all I will draw up the aforementioned bell curve here. By the way, the economic development looks quite similar.

### **1850-70**

Although mankind has known about mineral oil for more than 5000 years, it is not until the middle of the 19th century that it is utilised as a source of energy. A Canadian doctor and geologist acquires a patent for the production of cleanly burning lamp fuel - **petroleum** is invented.

Shortly after, commercial oil production starts in Pennsylvania, and John D. Rockefeller builds an immense empire of mineral oil production and refinery named "Standard Oil" in no time at all. Also in art history the period around the middle of the 19th century is an eventful one. When, in 1863, more than half the submitted paintings for the exhibition at the Paris Salon are rejected, criticism takes command. The French emperor Napoleon III sees himself forced to exhibit the rejected pictures in a separate exhibition, the so-called "Salon des Refusés". As we know, these were the pictures by Manet, Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Pissarro and Degas, who today are perceived as the spearhead of modern painting.

### **1900-20**

In 1908, the Ford Motor Company causes a revolution within mass production when introducing its Model T. For the first time, an automobile affordable to the working class is introduced to the market, leaving the production line more than 15 million times. The delivery van version of Model T is exhibited in the foyer of Migros Limmatplatz. Mister Duttweiler built the success of Migros upon this car.

In the Futurist Manifesto released in 1909, one year later, bright electric moons, voracious train stations, smoking snakes and factories are worshipped. The progress, which the avant-garde subscribes to, is oil- and coal-driven. In 1913, the opera "Victory over the Sun" is first performed with the black square of Kazimir Malevich as stage setting. In 1920, a sign at a Berlin Dada exhibition announced that "Art is dead. Long live the new machine art of Tatlin".

#### **1948-65**

After the two World Wars, the so-called "Economic Miracle" occurs. The amount of mineral oil produced rises by up to 7 per cent per year - a figure never again attained.

Already in 1956, the geologist Marion King Hubbert predicts a peak in American oil production to be reached between 1966 and 1972. His calculation was correct. In 1970, the US reached maximum production output. Since then, the amount produced has continuously been decreasing, and the dependence upon imports has correspondingly been rising.

#### **1968-84**

In the course of the 1968-movement, criticism is voiced regarding the model of society prevalent in the western hemisphere. Subsequently, an intellectual dispute regarding modernism later to become known as postmodernism is initiated. **Postmodernism refers to the period, during which modernism loses momentum. It utters doubt regarding generally valid ideals and utopias, hence losing the capacity to create collective visions. It is neither capable of anticipating change, nor can it develop a mobilising effect.**

In 1972, the study named "Limits of Growth" for the first time sets economical growth and the limited nature of finite resources into relation. The publication sets off a short-term gold price rally.

In 1973, just two years after the US mineral oil production had peaked, the first oil crisis occurred due to an artificial limitation of supply brought on by OPEC. The oil embargo causes the largest economic crisis since WW II and powerfully demonstrates the dependence and vulnerability of modern industrial society.

In 1977, US President Jimmy Carter addresses the American people explaining that there is no alternative to reducing oil consumption. He calls his project of retiring from the dependence on oil as the moral equivalent to war. Three years later he is voted out of office and his successor, Ronald Reagan, adopts an agenda that in no manner encompasses alternative energy sources. With other words, the problem of oil dependence was already recognised and widely discussed thirty years ago. The belief in economic growth and the respective increase in wealth, though, have been capable of prevailing against knowledge and common sense.

As Joseph Beuys takes part in the foundation of the Green Party in 1979, the environmental movement experiences a brief period of glory. - **On the whole, though, the ecological question unfortunately leads to a defensive posture, which has contributed to a drought with regard to utopias within society, an unproductive decrease in options for thought.**

### 1985-present day

In the mid-eighties oil again becomes cheaper due to the Asian crisis. Together with the information boom, the economy gains new momentum - maybe for the last time in the traditional sense. During the past seven years, the oil price has risen a seven-fold. No holds barred we are approaching the final oil crisis.

**The art-historical period of modernism cannot be separated from industrialisation seen from our present point of view, and this period again is inseparably intertwined with the exploitation of fossil fuels. The option of disposing over energy in nearly unlimited amounts must today be recognised as the driving force behind the development of - petrolist - modernism.**

### PART III

*The actor returns behind the lectern. He takes a full glass of water in his hand and drinks half the contents.*

That's the story so far. So here we are. Here in the Kunsthof in Zurich. Let us turn to postpetrolism.

The glass is now half empty or half full, depending upon your point of view. Some experts say that, if we react immediately, things will turn out all right. Others predict World War III or the end of capitalism. We say, something new is on the doorstep. And we say it is happening now. Here, postpetrolism begins.

The prospects aren't rosy, as they were to the avant-garde of modernism 100 years ago. Even if we perceive the glass as being half full. It will never become full again.

At the present, the trick is to keep on breathing. *(The actor takes a deep breath.)*

If we are honest, the times with all that power were quite strenuous. Speed up, speed up, consume, consume! Aren't we just as exhausted as this petrolist modern and post modern age? Not to mention the ballast that has been amassed. Let us first sit down and face reality. Let us enjoy the view. We have arrived at the top of the bell curve.

We securely can predict is that the 21st century will be a turbulent one. Postpetrolism is a movement within this movement. In future we will have to find different forms of mobility.

The strange thing is, that no impressions or scenarios exist for the time after Peak Oil. The exclusive matter of dealing with the problem is the search for substitute technologies. **And that is the exact reason, why art now enters the scene. Here, a huge space appears before our eyes. New images are required, alternative life patterns and visions. Who else should we expect to provide such?** Maybe art could become something quite practical, a kind of open source project.

Which is the *Conditio Postpetrolearia*? I do not postulate a central, universal idea. Many elements will develop beside each other. The central point will be to invent the energetic cycle anew in an extended sense. Fossil energy sources have freed us from feudalism and enabled bourgeois democracy. Also energies of the post-fossil age must become the lever to a new step of liberation.

What gives us the incentive? Remember the equations: hope = energy and imagination = power. A pioneering spirit will undoubtedly play a great role in the process.

Many paths lead down. We should not be too fearful with regard to change. After all, fear is - as Sartre stated already - a condition, which neutralises the person. And it will be impossible to return to the 19th century, at the same time as this is undesirable.

We should preferably seek new opportunities for extravagant consumption. This is the lesson the past 150 years has taught us. Happiness always has something to do with wastefulness. Maybe it is a waste that you are here today. But maybe you will tell your children and grandchildren about the initiation of postpetrolism. In the same manner as your parents told you about the first landing on the moon.

In any case I feel privileged in proclaiming postpetrolism together with you here and now. To be exact, it has already begun. And for the last few minutes you have been thinking about it too. This might already have set something in motion. At this point, postpetrolism is merely a word. Thank you very much for listening. Now we have arrived. It has begun.

#### **RING-A-LING-A-LING**

*The actor drinks the remaining contents of the glass. He goes to the bell, holding the microphone up to it. He keeps on ringing it for quite a while. Applause. The first post-petrolist projects enter the space and are focussed on by the spotlight.*