

The former military camp Kodra is a 420 acres site occupying a central location in the city of Kalamaria (Thessaloniki, Greece), a residential municipality primarily made up of refugees who came to Greece following Asia Minor's destruction in 1922 and the Exchange of Populations after the Lausanne Treaty in 1923. Important archaeological findings have been unearthed in the area, and the on-going excavations still take place every summer. The decaying barracks date back to the beginning of the 19th century, when Kodra was the largest military camp in the Balkans. Later on, Kodra became a refugee settlement (c. 1915) and until recently, served as a Greek military camp. Today, the inhabitants of Kalamaria use the abandoned field as a park even though a small portion of the site is still occupied by NATO forces. Kodra also hosts numerous cultural events such as concerts and art exhibitions, which include the contemporary art festival Action Field Kodra.

Presented within the framework of the 8th edition of this festival, "Letters from a Front" is a billboard project conceived to bridge the gap between Kodra and Kalamaria. Specifically built for the project on the highest point of the abandoned military base, the billboard frame faces the municipality so that its content occupies the local community's public sphere while drawing upon the particular history and politics of the site.

In response to this project, Bik van der Pol have created "Proposition For Reclaiming A Space" (2008) based on an excerpt drawn from T.S. Elliott's "The Wasteland" (1922). By introducing a reference to this poem within the context of Kodra, the piece literalizes the camp's wasted state by proxy while addressing an unanswered plea to the eternally mute landscape. The work acknowledges the site's loaded barrenness. Laden with historical memory, the camp seems to preclude the possibility for regeneration – even at the hands of contemporary art – left barren in the absence of any redemptive monuments. While the poem infers the ruins of post-war Europe, it here echoes the unconditional destruction Asia Minor refugees faced before coming to Kalamaria in the early 1920s, coinciding with the poem's first publication.

Within Bik van der Pol's work, the excerpt functions both visually and linguistically. Although the quotation marks are part of the original poem in which they signal speech, they here un-mistakenly point towards the text's found nature. The black-on-white font also suggests the magnification of a page. While the poem's original verse structure is cropped due to the text's full-blown enlargement, the overall effect is one of absolute urgency, recalling another famous verse from the same poem: "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME".

Through a mode of address characteristic of the dramatic monologue, the text beckons viewers in two ways. First, it calls viewer-readers to action, imperatively summoning the "you" to speak and to think. But while viewers serve as the text's recipient, they are also individually called upon to become its enunciating subject. Isolated from the poem, the quotation marks transform the text into a free-floating speech pronounced by an unknown person. Similarly to advertisement billboards whose rhetoric has no singular uttering subject, the text's subject, though residually present in the "me" and the "I", is undefined. This "I" is not a narrative "I"; it is the "I" of a desiring and needy person speaking. Within "The Wasteland", the character uttering this speech is loosely described as a rich woman addressing her masculine partner. But within Bik van der Pol's work, this character is completely absent. As a result, viewer-readers come to embody the subject, both enacting and originating the speech. While reading the work, they become actors performing the dramatic lines as an interior monologue. They act as

both the text's enunciating subject and its object addressee: they are called upon while formulating the demand.

This imperative demand is an appeal to consciousness. Within the text, the request moves from speech to thought, reversing the logical order of thought then speech. Speech – the Word – is what originates. It is that which gives form and brings into being. Thinking, according to Descartes' "Cogito, ergo sum" is being coming into the consciousness of its own being. As such, the work formulates an awakening to consciousness, a plea against silence and the deadening of thought, which is the equivalent of a cultural wasteland.

Bik van der Pol's work promotes a mode of participation that differs from the enactment of a gesture or community, conventionally seen as an "active" form of engagement by contrast to "passive" viewing/reading. The text formulates a call to consciousness performed in silence by individuals engaged in a pact with themselves through the reading of the work. Authorship is twice removed. The text is borrowed, deferring Bik van der Pol's signature, and it is de-personified, evacuating Elliott's voice inscribed in the character of the woman. This deferral contrasts with conventional advertisement captions within which there is no uttering subject to be found but the echo of capital interest. Advertisement billboard texts represent the dead words of a no-subject telling the 'anyone' in commonplace speech what to wear, where to go on holidays, who to watch and listen to. The text of "Proposition For Reclaiming A Space" is a living word embodying praxis: the coming into consciousness of a collective of individuals, reading the work in silence only to realize that the voice uttering the call is their own.