

**ART** IN  
TIMES **POP**  
**CRITICISM OF**

**WILSON &**

**WATSON**

**LISM** **COLOGNE 52<sup>ND</sup>**  
**BERLIN** **INTERNATIONAL**  
**01 — 07** **AICA**  
**OCTOBER** **CONGRESS**



## **Art Criticism in Times of Populism and Nationalism**

AICA Germany



Organisation  
der Vereinten Nationen  
für Bildung, Wissenschaft  
und Kultur

Under the patronage of  
the German UNESCO Commission

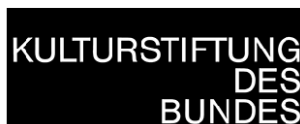
The 52nd International AICA Congress and this publication have been made possible by the German Federal Cultural Foundation, the Federal Agency for Civic Education and KAI 10 | ARTHENA FOUNDATION / Düsseldorf.

The following institutions have granted us their hospitality: Cologne – the Academy of Media Arts Cologne, the Michael Horbach Foundation, the Museum Ludwig, and the City of Cologne, Berlin – the Berlinische Galerie, the Hamburger Bahnhof and the Palais Populaire, as well as the galleries and public spaces who received us on the occasion of the pre-congress in Cologne and the post-congress in Berlin.

# ART CRITICISM IN TIMES OF POPULISM AND NATIONALISM

Proceedings of the 52nd International AICA Congress  
Cologne/Berlin 1–7 October 2019

Editor: Danièle Perrier



AICA Deutschland in cooperation with the German Federal Cultural Foundation and  
AICA International



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## ***Lisbeth Rebollo Gonçalves, President AICA International***

I am very pleased to greet you on behalf of AICA International in this preface to the Proceedings of AICA'S 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Congress. Annual Congresses are very important in AICA's life. They project up-to-date questions in the field of art and society, both past and present. We can say they are milestones for AICA's worldwide membership, and the art establishment at large. This is a reason for AICA's commitment to holding these Congresses on an annual basis.

Every time we have a summit meeting of this nature, I consider it is important to recall a little of AICA's history, and the meaning of the congresses in this history, written over time in the last seventy years. AICA was born in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in the framework of UNESCO. Its aim is to collaborate with UNESCO, in seeking to contribute to the reconstruction of ethical values. At an international level, it also aims to foster a rapprochement between different cultures, with full regard for the importance of cultural diversity. Art critics and art historians, as well as curators from museums of modern art, gathered at two meetings at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters in 1948 and 1949, to discuss the foundation of an International Association of Art Critics. They came from all over the world and included some of the most prestigious names of the time. Following those two international meetings at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, the International Association of Art Critics was founded in 1950 and admitted by UNESCO to the rank of an NGO in 1951.

Today, it may be said that AICA is a well-established forum for communication in the fields of art and culture, where many different voices can express themselves and be heard. It not only aims to promote art criticism, but also presents an open arena for debating the values of contemporary society. Its actions, decisions and debates can have important ethical repercussions, not only on culture, but also on society in general. AICA brings together people from all over the world, and is therefore, a locus for exchange and a breeding ground for ideas. There are around 5,000 associate members from 95 countries, organised in 56 National Sections, and an Open Section in which critics without an AICA section in their own country may participate.

From 2018 to 2020, AICA has been commemorating its Seventieth Anniversary. The 52nd Congress in Germany was an important milestone in this commemoration. AICA had not returned to Germany for an Annual Congress since the 1970s. Two important Congresses were held there in that decade: in Dresden and (East) Berlin in 1974, in the then German Democratic Republic (GDR), and in the city of Cologne, in the German Federal Republic (FRG), in 1977. This was, of course, at the height of the Cold War, following the division of the country into two distinctive parts, as a result of decisions taken by the Soviet Union and its three Western allies, in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War in 1945. That AICA, with its aim of political neutrality, was able to host these events and the accompanying debates on both sides of the ›Iron Curtain‹, was a matter of great significance and the cause of numerous national and international repercussions at the time.

In 2019 we came back to Germany with a theme proposed by the Association's German Section. Namely, AICA Germany considered it would be of the utmost importance to hear the views of art critics in an extended series of debates dedicated to ›Populism and Nationalism‹, thereby identifying art and criticism as expressions of society, with the potential to intervene in the tensions of everyday life. I can vouch for the fact that we were enriched by this exchange of knowledge and opinions and felt inspired to go further, in developing our own responses.

In this preface to the Proceedings of AICA's 52<sup>nd</sup> Congress, I would like to thank the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) for the vital support they gave us with the cost of organising the Congress and funding the publication of the Proceedings. I want also to thank the German Commission for UNESCO for their patronage.

I also wish especially to thank Danièle Perrier, President of AICA Germany and her team, for their impeccable organisation of this event.

I should also like to mention my appreciation of the fact that the Congress organisers invited Jacques Leenhardt, International President of AICA at the time of German unification, to take part in a special conference, focusing on the relationship between the two German Sections of AICA at the momentous time of German reunification, on 3 October 1990. I am pleased to record that, as a consequence of his address at that conference, AICA Germany subsequently planned a Symposium on the subject of East-West relations. This was to have taken place at the end of this month, but has now had to be postponed until 2021, when it will take place at the Albertinum in Dresden.

I thank all the critics, art historians, researchers and members of the audience who took part during the eventful two days of the Congress in Berlin.

***Danièle Perrier, President AICA Germany***

The 52<sup>nd</sup> AICA International Congress *Art Criticism in Times of Populism and Nationalism* addresses the consequences of the political shift to the right and the nationalism which goes hand in hand with this everywhere, and which has been able to spread rapidly through the dissemination of populist information in numerous media all over the world, thus also influencing art and art criticism. A glance at the newspapers or a minute of television or radio news, not to mention social media, makes this all too clear. In our increasingly fast-changing society, daily life is inundated with rapid tweets and slogan-like short messages, which – the more sensational the better – also provide a corresponding environment for advertising. Their pithy messages are all the easier to remember because they are short and concise, which is why even Western heads of state are increasingly turning to this means of communication to reach the people directly. In this way, they shrewdly bypass the filter of potentially critical reporting by conventional media. Whether fact or fake, the readers alone make the judgement, often with more emotion than expertise, and they in turn spread arbitrary opinions instead of well-founded arguments.

It is no wonder then, that the activists of the most diverse social interest groups also use very similar methods quite successfully for their debates, in disputes about their identity and uniqueness. Here it is the same, whether it is about #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, gender, or questions of sexual orientation or cultural origin; or whether it is about the question of nationality. Populist tendencies, regardless of their stripe, shape the landscape of media debates and thus also art and cultural criticism.

And art, which is a lively and topical part of social life, is not spared. Its hitherto assumed autonomy is being called into question anew, especially where it takes up ethnic themes or gender issues. I am by no means questioning the legitimacy of these needs, which are so often driven by emotions, but I do notice that these questions and debates inevitably have a strong impact on art and how it is dealt with.

Is it legitimate to cancel an exhibition by Balthus because his paintings might possibly give free rein to an unacceptable desire? Is this an inherent problem of art and thus the responsibility of the artist, or could it be due to the fact that the viewer, lacking knowledge, purely subjectively condemns the image being debated under the impression of current social issues?

How can we as art critics make a decision in the ambivalence between defending the autonomy of art, on the one hand, and its social inclusion on the other? What are the criteria we can – or even must – consider for making such judgements? Do art historians such as Clare Gannaway have the right to take down a historical painting such as *Hylas and the Nymphs*, painted by John William Waterhouse in 1896, at the Manchester Art Gallery, simply because nymphs evoke the *femme fatale*? Fortunately, the decision provoked heavy criticism, so that the painting now hangs once again in its original place. History reveals that such decisions to remove works of art from exhibitions are driven by purely emotional sensitivities. It is astonishing that, in the end, the museum, obviously ill at ease due to the fierce criticism, camouflaged the whole action as an artistic performance, as if the decision of an art critic were an artistic act!

A further example: Why are ethical evaluation criteria invoked when a *white* artist paints a scene from the funeral of the Black American Emmett Till, who was murdered in 1955? Could the tragic, historical case, which unfortunately has lost none of its topicality – because Black youths in the United States continue to be shot arbitrarily by *white* police officers – not be seen as an homage? Or is it possibly because the image, in its abstracting manner, has turned out to be too inconsequential to be seen as a tribute to the victim? And what about the controversial filmmakers Woody Allen and Roman Polanski – is the value of art not independent of the artist who makes it?

We are thus confronted with the fundamental question: when and where is it legitimate to curtail artistic freedom of expression?

Art is always a reflection of our society with all its tensions and confusions. It reflects current discussions, today (as previously mentioned) especially with regard to the gender issue, the climate, racism and post-colonialism, at times provocatively and at other times affirmatively. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century the art scene has certainly become accustomed to political activism: for example, Christoph Schlingensiefel with his action *Bitte liebt Österreich* (Please Love Austria), better known as *Ausländer raus!* (Foreigners Out!), then there is the Occupy movement, and more recently the Centre for Political Beauty with the Holocaust Memorial in Bornhagen, and the artist group Peng!, who, with *Fake ID*, ask visitors how far they would be willing to share their identity in order to help a refugee gain access to Europe. Such actions call for very serious reflection and engagement. They are designed to be provocative and are certainly perceived in this way by society – whether positively or negatively. In this respect, one can compare them with the climate activist Greta Thunberg. She too calls out, in a highly emotional way, demanding that politicians must finally act, and thus makes herself heard, more so than art actions on the border of legality which call for civil disobedience. One might attest to their use of populist methods *avant la lettre*.

Yet, strangely enough, it is not these boundary-breaking activists, who demand a new ethical guideline for society and propose models for thinking about it, who are the focus of contemporary art criticism, but rather pictures that ostensibly or quite actually violate ethical values. In the turmoil of identity formation, ethical demands are suddenly being made – rightly or wrongly – of historical and contemporary works of art. A revised reading of even older works that have long been part of the fixed canon of art history is demanded, as if we are about to experience a new iconoclasm, or compile a new index of forbidden works. In his acceptance speech on receiving the Joseph-Breitbach-Prize,<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hettche quoted Harald Welzer as follows: »Each individual work [is] no longer primarily considered for its artistic quality [...], but rather for the emotional possibility of injury and irritation that might lie within it.« The list of arguments that pit the suffering of the world against the autonomy of art is long.

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1 The awarding of the Joseph-Breitbach-Prize to Thomas Hettche took place in Koblenz on 20 September 2019.

What influence does it have on art criticism, when moral values that create a sense of purpose flow into the assessment which, per se, limit the autonomy of art? How should it be weighed within the amalgamation of conflicting evaluation criteria? What is the status of the long-fought-for freedom of art (which is – quite wonderfully – enshrined in the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany) when various sides call for the removal of works of art from collections and even their destruction? Is it possible that art criticism itself plays a part in populist decisions with regard to art by occasionally failing to precisely define the evaluation criteria for protecting works that lie, for example, in the context of their historical creation?

How about following the advice of Frederic Bussmann, General Director of the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, who succinctly formulates »[t]he work of the art historian: fade out the context, deal with the works themselves, ask what you see, what you have in front of you«,<sup>2</sup> and perhaps reassert with Thomas Hettche that »only truthfulness in perception leads to quality«?<sup>3</sup> One should ask self-critically whether art criticism still dares to offer differentiated reference points for orientation.

The tremendous breakthrough of social media has had serious consequences for the profession of the art critic. Readers around the world have become all too accustomed to short, up-to-date texts that can be consumed quickly. As a result, publishers – in all sectors – are placing less and less value on demanding feature articles and critical cultural reports, with the result that cultural journalism has been struggling for sheer survival for years. Only a few journalists today still have the privilege of a secure and permanent salaried position as a guarantor of freedom of expression. The freelancers are forced to teach at academies or to work as curators or authors for museum catalogues. This, in turn, very significantly impairs free, critical reporting.

AICA is also affected by this development. There are only a few genuine cultural editors left in our ranks. It is therefore our task to initiate dialogue together, to emphatically define the issues, and to fight for free art criticism. This is exactly what we strive to accomplish with our congress. A wide variety of voices will have their say, some of them of a very contradictory nature.

We hope that the discussions of the coming days will be characterised by curiosity and conducted with respect for the differences of opinion – true to oneself and open-minded towards the others – in order to explore possibilities of understanding without prejudice, in recognition and acceptance of differences.

In other words: we wish to set out on the path of encounter in the spirit of François Jullien,<sup>4</sup> who attempts to span the bridge between French philosophy and Chinese thought. We wish to invent another form of the universal, since its humanistic interpretation is obviously considered too Eurocentric for parts of the wider world and has thus lost its value.

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2 Frederick Bussman zitiert in: Lennart Laberenz, »DDR-Kunst. Über die Renaissance der DDR-Kunst und die aktuelle Neubewertung der ostdeutschen Moderne«, in: *Monopol*, September 2019, S. 49 [translated].

3 see note 1 [translated].

4 See: François Jullien, *Es gibt keine kulturelle Identität. Wir verteidigen die Ressourcen einer Kultur* [Edition *Suhrkamp*, no. 2718], trans. Erwin Landrichter (Berlin 2017).

Approaches to reassessment seem to be emerging, at least here in Germany. In this context, it is gratifying that *Monopol* magazine devoted an editorial<sup>5</sup> to the reassessment of East German art, which – thirty years after reunification – is still not recognised accordingly in the West.

AICA is also reviewing the situation of the art critics' association at the time of reunification with its opening lecture by Jacques Leenhardt, which might also merit a reassessment from today's perspective.

I would like to conclude my reflections with the projection of an ephemeral installation by Thomas Sterna: it is a prayer by the artist to the curator, who, on the basis of the Christian 'Our Father', describes relationships of dependency with both humour and sarcasm. It was projected onto the glass façade of the Museion in Bolzano in a cloak-and-dagger action, just long enough to immortalise it as an image:

*»Our curator,  
who art in the jury,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy documenta come,  
thy selection persist,  
at biennials as it is in the museums.  
Give us this day our scholarship,  
and forgive us our doubts about thee,  
as we forgive thee thine doubts about us.  
And lead us not to the art fairs,  
but deliver us from the greed of the collectors.  
For thine is the art and the power,  
and the attention,  
now and forever.  
Amen.«<sup>6</sup>*

This can easily be applied to the critic who reviews the documenta, biennials, and fairs. I hope that all art critics have enough humour and composure to bear this side blow from an artist.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to the success of the congress and this publication, first and foremost the authors for their enriching contributions, and the moderators for the support they gave us in producing this publication. Thanks also to the editors who contributed decisively to the readability of the discussions; the translators, and likewise the photographers who immortalised the most beautiful moments of our encounters.

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5 Lennart Laberenz, »DDR-Kunst. Über die Renaissance der DDR-Kunst und die aktuelle Neubewertung der ostdeutschen Moderne«, in: *Monopol*, September 2019, pp.46ff.

6 Thomas Sterna, *Kurator Unser*, 2014 [translated].



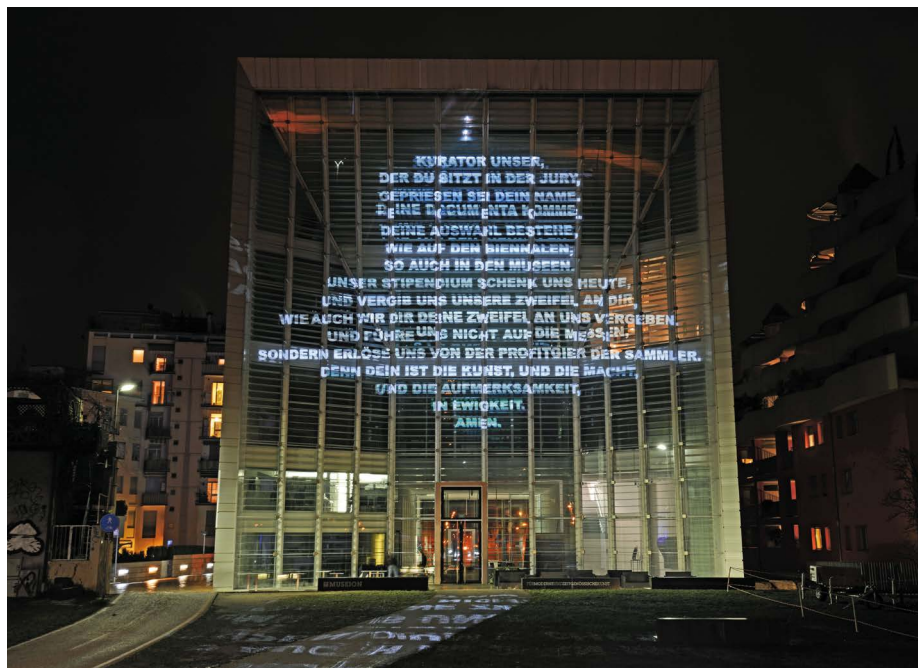


Fig.1: Thomas Sterna, *Our Curator*, 2014

We are also grateful to Lisbeth Rebollo, President of AICA International, and the colleagues who helped us to realise the congress. It is a special honour that the German Commission for UNESCO has assumed the patronage of the 52<sup>nd</sup> International AICA Congress, exactly seventy years after we were granted NGO status by the UNESCO.

Special thanks go to all our cooperation partners, especially the Federal Cultural Foundation, without whose generous support the realisation of our congress and this publication would not have been possible. We sincerely thank the Federal Agency for Civic Education, the Kai 10 | Arthena Foundation in Düsseldorf, and all the institutions that granted us their hospitality in Cologne and Berlin, as well as the galleries of the capital that hospitably opened their doors to us during the post-congress.



# LE DILEMME DE L'AICA EN ALLEMAGNE AU MOMENT DE LA RÉUNIFICATION. LE DEBAT SUR LA » RÉUNIFICATION « DES DEUX SECTIONS DE L'AICA RDA ET RFA

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## **Jacques Leenhardt, Président de l'AICA entre 1990 et 1995**

La II<sup>e</sup> Guerre Mondiale a produit une situation spécifique, qu'on a nommée » guerre froide « où les deux parties du territoire allemand devinrent pour un temps deux états autonomes. Il y avait donc une Nation et deux États. De part et d'autre du rideau de fer et, à partir de 1961, du Mur de Berlin qui divisa physiquement l'espace urbain de l'ancienne capitale du Reich, se construisirent des blocs idéologiques frontalement opposés.

En tant que constructions idéologiques, ces blocs ont donné forme à deux mémoires » nationale « antagoniques qui s'affirmèrent à l'occasion de la réunification et cela d'autant plus que l'idée de la » Nation « allemande était elle-même historiquement encore faible et plus culturelle que véritablement politique.

Ce bref rappel historique permet d'éclairer la situation qui marqua la réunification allemande au sein même de l'AICA. On connaît les faits : la disparition de la DDR ouvrait la voie à une réunification des deux sections de l'AICA. Tout l'intérêt intellectuel et politique de ce moment réside donc dans les modalités de cette réunification.

C'est autour de cette question que s'engagea un débat qui laissa quelques traces dans les archives du ZADIK<sup>1</sup>. Danièle Perrier, Présidente de la section allemande, m'a demandé de présenter ces événements tels qu'on peut les appréhender à partir de ces archives et dans la perspective du thème de notre Congrès : *Kunstkritik in Zeiten von Populismen und Nationalismen*.

## **Un débat germano-allemand**

La première difficulté pour parler de ce débat lié à la réunification des deux sections de l'AICA c'est qu'à proprement parler il n'a pas eu lieu. Les archives du ZADIK ne font en tout cas pas état de discussions entre les deux sections allemandes. Elles ne comportent d'ailleurs pas de documents venant de DDR. Il semble qu'il y ait seulement eu un échange de lettres entre les deux présidents, Walter Vitt de la section de BRD et Peter H. Feist de la section de DDR, et un autre échange de Walter Vitt, sur lequel je reviendrai, avec un critique habitant en ex-DDR.

Il y a certainement eu des conversations individuelles entre les membres de l'AICA de BRD aussi bien que de DDR, mais les archives n'en portent pas de trace. Cette absence est en soi parlante. Elle signifie que l'importance historique de l'événement politique qu'a constitué la chute du Mur de Berlin et la dissolution de la DDR le 3 octobre 1990 n'a pas suscité un large débat au sein de la communauté critique des deux États, particulièrement sur la question des modalités souhaitables de la réunification.

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1 Zentralarchiv für Deutsche und Internationale Kunstmarktforschung e. V. (Cologne). C'est là que se trouve les archives de l'AICA Allemagne que j'ai pu consulter grâce à son directeur scientifique, Günter Herzog et à Danièle Perrier et Marie Luise Syring de la section allemande de l'AICA, qui ont eu la gentillesse d'aller sur place sélectionner les documents qui pouvaient intéresser cette discussion, — qu'ils en soient tous et toutes vivement remerciés.

Les protocoles émis à la suite des Assemblées générales de la section de BRD en 1990 et 1991 ne portent pas trace des arguments qui ont été échangés au cours de ces réunions. En revanche les votes enregistrés sont tous à l'unanimité.

On ne sait par ailleurs rien d'une possible Assemblée correspondante de la section de DDR sinon que son président, Peter H. Feist, a semble-t-il proposé la fusion des deux sections allemandes.

De cette suggestion de fusion, les documents d'archives ne donnent qu'une information indirecte et sujette à interprétation. Il n'est pas impossible qu'elle ait eu, au départ, la faveur de Walter Vitt. C'est du moins ce qu'on peut inférer de la lettre que le représentant allemand devant l'UNESCO, Hans Meinel, lui adresse en juillet 1990 : » Bitte informieren Sie uns auch, wie weit Ihre Bemühungen im Hinblick auf eine Vereinigung mit Ihrer Partner-NGO in der DDR gediehen sind. « (27/7/90)

L'interprétation du texte de cette demande s'avère délicate puisque — si ma connaissance de la langue allemande ne me trahit pas — le mot » Vereinigung « peut désigner aussi bien une » fusion « (au sens de Verschmelzung) des associations qu'une » entente « (au sens de Vereinbarung) qui serait intervenue entre les deux présidents, laquelle pourrait avoir un objet différent.

Quoi qu'il en soit, lors du Congrès de l'AICA à Toronto, j'ai pour ma part le souvenir d'avoir envisagé avec Walter Vitt cette solution de la fusion comme étant la plus raisonnable. Néanmoins, il avait été entendu que si la fusion ne pouvait pas avoir lieu, les membres de l'AICA-DDR seraient tous accueillis, sur leur demande, dans la section libre.

En 1992, Walter Vitt répond donc à la demande d'information de Hans Meinel. Il écrit » dass eine Verschmelzung der beiden AICA-Verbände nicht vorgesehen sei und der AICA-Verband der Bundesrepublik beschlossen habe, Mitglieder aus den neuen Ländern aufzunehmen. Über die Free Section bestehe für Interessierte die Möglichkeit, direktes Mitglied im Internationalen AICA-Verband zu werden. « Et puis il ajoute que, de la même manière qu'en 1990, » einige Kolleginnen und Kollegen aus den neuen Ländern wurden aufgenommen, darunter erstmal auch einen Kritiker der bereits der DDR AICA-Sektion angehört hatte. « (2/5/92)

Cette précision est importante. Elle montre qu'entre 1991 et 1992 la situation a légèrement changé puisque cette fois, ce qui n'avait pas été le cas antérieurement, des membres de l'ancienne AICA-DDR ont été acceptés dans l'AICA allemande réunifiée. Il y a sans doute là la trace de l'évolution d'un débat interne dont nous ne connaissons pas par ailleurs les détails ni les arguments.

L'analyse des modalités effectives de la réunification des associations tout comme la lecture des Protokoll statutaires et de la correspondance, tout cela met en évidence le fait que c'est la section de l'AICA-BRD qui a pris toutes les décisions concernant la réunification.

Dans son vocabulaire le courrier dans lequel Walter Vitt » informe « Peter H. Feist (président de l'AICA-DDR) de la décision prise est sans équivoque : » Ich möchte Sie darüber informieren, dass die Versammlung eine Fusion der beiden deutschen AICA-Verbände nicht herbeiführen möchte. « Et Walter Vitt explicite : » Sie betrachtet als einzig angemessene Reaktion « angesichts der » Lage nach dem 3. Oktober «, » weiterhin nach Ihrer Satzung zu verfahren und nur Einzelpersonen durch Zuwahl aufzunehmen. « 17/11/90

Donc un mois après le tremblement de terre historique que constitue la fin de la DDR, la section de l'AICA-BRD entend » weiterhin nach Ihrer Satzung zu verfahren «, autrement dit, maintenir ses règles d'admission des membres qui traditionnellement se fait par vote individuel, au cas par cas. Face aux circonstances exceptionnelles, la section AICA-BRD informe qu'elle agira selon ses statuts, autrement dit qu'elle ne fera pas d'exception.

Il faut noter que cette réponse reflète parfaitement le schéma général de la réunification allemande. Jusqu'aujourd'hui les historiens soulignent qu'elle fut menée unilatéralement par la BRD et non négociée par les deux parties séparées de l'Allemagne. On pourrait s'arrêter à cette remarque et considérer qu'en agissant conformément aux autres acteurs, la décision prise par la section AICA de la BRD ne prête pas à discussion.

Je vous propose toutefois d'examiner si, du point de vue de l'histoire de notre Association, cette absence de dialogue concernant la réunification des sections allemandes correspond à l'esprit et à la pratique de l'AICA. En tant qu'ONG de l'UNESCO, dont nous célébrons cette année le 70<sup>e</sup> anniversaire, l'AICA s'était donné pour mission d'offrir un lieu de rencontre et de dialogues pour les critiques travaillant dans des contextes politiques très différents. Par rapport à la coupure que constituait la guerre froide, elle avait dans cet esprit plusieurs fois élus des présidentes et présidents venant des pays de l'Est, je pense en particulier à ceux que j'ai connus, Wladyslawa Javorska de Pologne et Dan Haulica de Roumanie. Ces choix signifiaient clairement qu'à l'image de l'UNESCO, à laquelle elle appartient et dont elle partage les buts culturels, l'AICA n'entendait pas laisser la coupure politique et idéologique entre les deux parties de l'Europe dicter ses engagements culturels en faveur du pluralisme et de la liberté de pensée. Or, et c'est là d'où émerge mon interrogation, ces valeurs partagées ne semblent pas avoir joué leur rôle dans ce moment historique. Elles n'ont pas permis une fusion apaisée des deux sections allemandes.

Il ne saurait être question de refaire l'histoire ni de mettre en procès les acteurs de l'époque. Je serais d'ailleurs le premier à devoir répondre de ma responsabilité puisqu'en tant que président de l'AICA de l'époque, il m'incombait d'en faire respecter les valeurs. Pour la discussion à laquelle notre congrès nous invite, nous pourrions en revanche réfléchir sur les effets que produit, à terme, le manque de dialogue. Ce manque reflète en effet souvent une crispation identitaire qui conduit au refus de prendre en considération la parole de l'autre, et par conséquent sa légitimité. Cela est vrai de la critique mais aussi du travail des artistes habitant de l'autre côté du rideau de fer. La nécessité, aujourd'hui, de réécrire l'histoire de l'art de l'époque de la guerre froide témoigne de cet aveuglement relatif ou plus simplement du poids des hégémonies comme l'avait bien perçu, dès 1981,

Tomáš Strauss.<sup>2</sup> Le manque de reconnaissance a produit au fil du temps des frustrations qui ont enfermé chacun dans son monde et rendu difficile mais d'autant plus nécessaire la reprise du dialogue et l'aggiornamento de l'histoire.

S'il est vrai que le populisme est une politique qui fait son miel des frustrations, nous devons, — sans imaginer pour autant que nous avons une responsabilité directe dans la montée actuelle des populismes, ce qui serait ridicule, — nous interroger sur les raisons qui ont fait que, dans notre champ d'activité critique, nous n'ayons pas su éviter de telles frustrations. Aujourd'hui, de nombreux analystes décrivent l'émergence d'une psychologie, d'une sociologie et d'une politique de la déception (de la frustration ou de la rancœur) dont ils voient les effets particulièrement dans les mouvements qui agitent les nouveaux « Bundesländer » mais aussi l'ensemble des pays de la sphère soviétique. Ils pointent une frustration spécifique liée aux modalités de la réunification allemande. Pour résumer d'une phrase un grand nombre de travaux portant sur cette déception, je citerai une seule phrase rapportée par Brigitte Pätzold : » Il est urgent que les Allemands de l'Est retrouvent une identité. Non seulement on les a réduits au silence, mais on leur a fait aussi sentir qu'on n'a pas besoin d'eux «.

Le cas du critique d'art Hans-Georg Sehrt, très actif jusqu'à son décès en 2017, nous permettra de mieux comprendre, par delà les faits du passé, le *ressenti intime*, la matière psychologique complexe qui a résulté de toute cette affaire de réunification.

Lorsqu'il fait sa demande d'adhésion à la section d'Allemagne réunifiée, H.-G. Sehrt est un critique déjà confirmé (il a semble-t-il 50 ans) et n'a jamais été membre de l'AICA-DDR. Il a fait sa demande, si j'ai bien interprété les sources, après la chute du mur de sorte qu'il est directement entré dans la section libre en 1992. C'est à partir de cette situation administrative singulière qu'il demande à la section allemande réunifiée d'être accepté comme membre. La réponse qui lui est apportée est négative. Ce refus est toutefois agrémenté d'une sorte d'ouverture sur laquelle il reviendra dans un courrier de protestation adressé en 1994 à Walter Vitt. Il cite la réponse négative qui lui a été faite où Walter Vitt précise : » man wolle die künstlerische Arbeit der ehemals in der DDR-AICA organisierten Kolleginnen und Kollegen weiter beobachten um, gegebenenfalls zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt, zu einer anderen Entscheidung zu kommen. « (19/7/94)

L'indignation de H.-G. Sehrt explose alors et nous donne une perspective qu'il nous faut explorer. Que peut signifier — demande-t-il — cette volonté de » weiter beobachten « alors que les textes qui ont été fournis n'ont pas été examinés ?

H.-G. Sehrt ressent le refus qui lui est opposé comme un *procès d'intention* étant donné que le refus ne porte pas sur la qualité de ses textes puisqu'ils n'ont manifestement pas été examinés. Cette absence d'examen découle logiquement du fait qu'on envisage de les examiner plus tard.

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2 J-M Poinot, Tomáš Strauss, *Beyond the Great Divide: Essays on European avant-gardes from East to West* Les presses du réel /AICA press, Dijon, 2021)

H.-G. Sehrt exprime son refus de tels procédés : » Ich habe es gründlich satt, mich dafür verteidigen oder gar entschuldigen zu müssen, dass ich zufällig nicht in München oder Stuttgart, sondern in Halle an der Saale, geboren bin, dass meine Artikel, Katalogbeiträge, meine Vorträge und Ausstellungsbearbeitung, mein gesamtes Lebensich, einschliesslich Schule, Abitur, Studium, Promotion usw. bis 1989 ausschliesslich in der DDR abgespielt hat.... «

Le fait d'être né en DDR condamne-t-il *a priori* à un refus ? Si on envisage de le recevoir plus tard après un examen détaillé, sur quoi repose la réponse négative qu'il a reçue ?

Les questions de H.-G. Sehrt font apparaître clairement que le refus qui lui a été opposé repose sur un *rejet a priori* des intellectuels de la DDR. Cela l'amène à poser une autre question qui découle de la logique de ce refus : l'AICA est-elle une association dont tous les membres doivent penser la même chose ? » Wird bei der Aufnahme in die AICA mit mehrerlei Maß gemessen, oder ist es eine Organisation mit einer grundsätzlichen Vorstellung zur Mitgliedschaft und einer Satzung? «

H.-G. Sehrt se demande enfin si l'AICA est une association qui tolère le pluralisme des opinions et si le rejet de son dossier n'est pas, justement, la preuve qu'il a affaire à une institution monolithique et idéologiquement homogène. Dans ce cas, conclut-il, il est sans doute préférable pour lui de rester dans la section libre et il ajoute : » Aber es ist schon eine recht bittere Erfahrung, wenn einem auch in einem solchen Bereich (...) zu verstehen gegeben wird, dass man sich nach aller Einheits-Euphorie doch erst mal zu bewären habe, (für einen Anfänger sicher nicht das Problem, mit über 50 etwas trübe). «

En s'excusant pour conclure, sur la véhémence du ton de sa lettre, H.-G. Sehrt abandonne les plans juridique, éthique ou politique sur lequel il s'était placé pour se concentrer sur ce qu'a été son *expérience individuelle* de ce refus. Que produit, chez un individu qui est aussi un sujet politique, le refus d'être accepté ? Que signifie pour lui la non-reconnaissance (personnelle, professionnelle), le déni de compétence et donc le déni de valeur qui lui sont opposés ? L'obligation de passer » en jugement «, de faire une fois encore ses preuves quand on est déjà reconnu dans sa sphère professionnelle, tout cela laisse des traces psychologiques profondes, chacun le sait. Cette expérience est traumatisante, produit de l'amertume, du ressentiment et éveille un sentiment d'injustice. Le candidat débouté H.-G. Sehrt finit par dire, comme un ultime défi lancé à des juges dont il ne reconnaît pas la légitimité du jugement, que cette lettre n'aura pas d'effet mais qu'elle servira peut-être à d'autres. Pour sa part il préfère ne pas renouveler sa demande et il annonce qu'il restera dans la section libre. Il a maintenu ce choix jusqu'aujourd'hui.

À cet échange, je voudrais ajouter enfin celui que j'ai eu, à l'époque, avec Peter H. Feist, le Président de la section AICA-DDR. Devant la difficulté de simplement fusionner les deux sections, solution que pour ma part j'avais tenté de soutenir, Peter H. Feist avait accepté le principe d'un passage en bloc — donc sans examen des dossiers individuels — de la section de DDR à la section libre. Cette procédure pouvait n'être que temporaire puisque demeurait l'éventualité d'une procédure d'acceptation individuelle dans la nouvelle section allemande.

J'avais pour ma part le souvenir que Peter H. Feist avait beaucoup regretté cette procédure imposée par la section de BRD et qu'il en avait gardé une certaine amertume.

En préparant cette communication, je me suis mis en contact non seulement avec les archives du ZADIK à Cologne, mais j'ai pris contact avec Michael Feist, le fils de Peter H. Feist décédé en 2015. Nous avons eu un long échange de lettres au cours duquel il m'a raconté comment son père avait vécu cette circonstance, ce dont je le remercie cordialement. En un mot, dans le souvenir de son fils, Peter H. Feist avait été moins blessé que je ne le pensais et cela pour une raison que l'historien d'art avait formulée ainsi devant son fils : » Ich bin viel zu sehr Historiker, um nicht alles, was jetzt abläuft, natürlich zu verstehen. «

Je voudrais terminer sur ce témoignage et ce qu'il manifeste de ce qu'est la compréhension historique et comment elle peut cependant laisser à côté d'elle prospérer une mémoire douloureuse. Comprendre ne signifie évidemment ni oublier ni excuser.

Peter H. Feist comprenait le refus qui lui était opposé, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'ignorait rien des forces qui rendaient probable la réponse négative qu'il eut à affronter. Mais ce n'est pas parce qu'elle était prévisible, en fonction d'une situation politique générale qu'il ne pouvait pas méconnaître, qu'elle ne lui laissa pas de regret. Regret peut-être simplement d'une discussion qui aurait pu avoir lieu, d'un débat sur les conditions et fins de la critique d'art. Regret — qu'on pourrait qualifier d'habermassien, — que finalement la communication comme échange langagier ne parvienne pas à dissoudre les stéréotypes et à humaniser les réactions et les regards. Peut-être, et ce sera ma conclusion, les regrets que j'avais sentis dans l'échange avec Peter H. Feist concernaient-ils avant tout ce qui est proprement notre métier de critique d'art : tenter par les mots de faire comprendre la singularité si dérangeante de l'art comme forme matérielle de l'altérité. L'art, l'autre, ce qui est en face de nous et nous regarde, voilà bien ce que la critique essaie de comprendre et de partager. Et cet espoir, parfois se trouve déçu.

Cette tristesse devant la difficulté de se parler et de se comprendre concerne davantage le monde des critiques d'art que l'espace familial où le recours aux mots n'est pas toujours nécessaire.



# **Nuances of Populism: Political and Cultural Dimensions**

## **Panel 1**

**MODERATION  
JÖRG HEISER**

**OLIVER MARCHART  
ANA TEIXEIRA PINTO**



### **Populism and Anti-Populism in Politics and Art**

***Oliver Marchart***

In his lecture *Populism and Antipopulism* Marchart discussed the question whether populism is a part of democracy or its opposite. He provided a brief outline of the structure and history of populism and addressed the question whether, not only populism is problematic but also the common forms of antipopulism. Political antipopulism, as it dominates the media public sphere, now corresponds, in the field of art, to a sentiment against any form of all too ›populist‹ or ›popular‹ art. In the second part of the talk – following his book *Conflictual Aesthetics. Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere* – Marchart addressed the reservations of large parts of the art scene toward political, activist, and thus necessarily complexity-reducing art.

### **Social Sadism as Free Speech**

***Ana Teixeira Pinto***

In recent years a great many artists and institutions have rallied around the defense of ›artistic freedom‹, allegedly threatened by a moralistic creep. Freedom is here understood as the freedom to, if needed, offend others. In her lecture *Social Sadism as Free Speech*, Teixeira Pinto argued that appeals to liberty in this narrow sense can (and often do) clash with freedom in a broader sense, contributing to political unfreedom. What does it mean to advocate for a plurality of individual voices whose freedom is – paradoxically – predicated on muting or suppressing collective diversity? From this perspective the online cultural wars can be construed as a proxy for a greater battle around de-Westernisation, imperialism and *white* hegemony.



Fig. 2: Ganzeer, Tank vs. Bread-Biker, Cairo, 2011

## *Oliver Marchart*

Day in and day out, the media speak of a populist wave. But the term populism, as it is commonly used, is commonly used is accompanied by misunderstandings. Among these misunderstandings is the idea that populism has something to do with a certain definable political ideology; just as socialism as a political ideology means, for example, that one cares about social justice, or liberalism means defending individual rights. But populism is not an ideology. For there is no substantive political core to what is considered populist beyond the mere fact that populists speak on behalf of the people, which is only a nominal definition of populism. Thus, according to this definition, populism has something to do with invoking the people. Beyond that, nothing else can be said. However, in liberal democratic societies, this invocation of the people is the task of all parties, unless they see themselves as mere single-issue parties that do not speak in the name of the general public, but only in the name of a specific group. And this is not recommendable in today's democracies — you might recall that the FDP (the Free Democratic Party) was once kicked out of the Bundestag because it was no longer perceived as a party that stands for the general public, and thus speaks in the name of the people, but as a party that speaks on behalf of the hoteliers. For this reason, all parties that do not wish to specialise in managing a small core clientele always speak on behalf of the people. So, what is specific about populism?

Some argue that there is a certain populist style. If you consider politicians such as Donald Trump, Matteo Salvini, or Boris Johnson, you can see that they seem to share a certain style of politics. The concept of style may be of interest to art historians, but from a political science perspective I do not think it is very viable because it is too diffuse and very difficult to define. Therefore, it would be a good idea to understand populism more as a certain logic of mobilisation, and the minimal definition widely used in political science comes from Cas Mudde, perhaps the most renowned populism researcher at the moment, who points out that populism invokes two homogeneous antagonistic camps: the 'pure' people on the one hand and the corrupt elite on the other. These two camps are, of course, morally over-coded – the people are pure, the elite corrupt. This mobilisation against an elite portrayed as corrupt, whoever that elite may be, is what characterises populism. In addition, another characteristic can be observed, which was repeatedly emphasised by Jan-Werner Müller, for example, populists attach importance not only to inciting the people against the elite, but also to claim of themselves: »We and we alone represent the people.« From this, one can already see that populism, at least in the eyes of its critics, is anti-pluralistic. That is, it does not accept other positions that could legitimately speak in the name of the people.

From a completely different, namely a post-Marxist tradition of populism research, Ernesto Laclau has also pointed out that populism is always characterised by invoking the people against a power bloc; the antagonism of the people vs. the power bloc. Although one might think that this is a handy, and above all ideologically neutral definition of populism, if we look at the way the term populism is used, at least in continental

Europe (unlike, for example, Latin America and even the USA) we see that it usually has a pejorative meaning. The assertion that someone is a populist is almost always used to devalue that person's political position. This may be sympathetic to us in many cases, but it becomes problematic when populism is actually only a logic and not an ideology. Because what I then try to delegitimise politically, with populism as a swearword, is a position that is initially undefined in terms of content, which can be left or right. For populism *per se* has no content. Instead of discussing the right-wing extremist content of a certain political position in my criticism of populism, I simply speak of populism, which in many cases almost amounts to a trivialisation of right-wing extremism. At the same time, it ignores the fact that there can certainly be left-wing or emancipatory forms of populism. In political science, for example, a distinction is often made between two-position and three-position populism. Two-position populism has only two components, the people and the elites. In three-position populism, however, a third figure is added, and these are the others, such as refugees and migrants. Three-position populism is therefore often an extreme right-wing form of populism, because it is not only about attacking a power bloc but also about treading not only upwards, as it were, but above all downwards – namely on third parties. If, in contrast, you consider the Spanish Podemos party as an example of leftist populism, you will find that this third position does not appear in the Podemos discourse, and that the assertion of a homogenous people is also not part of the Podemos discourse, but that the Spanish people are seen here as a pluralistic society, which certainly includes refugees. There are thus by all means also forms of non-xenophobic populism.

Why is this hardly ever referred to in the public debate? My guess is that this has something to do with the half understanding of democracy in our liberal democracies today. The understanding of democracy is halved because it ultimately aims to defend a democracy without demos. Populism, however, is a form of political articulation that belongs to democracy. Populism invokes the sovereign, and in a democracy, invoking the sovereign, namely the people, cannot be illegitimate *per se* for democracy is based on precisely this. So how can there be democracy without populism? This answer is certainly shared by others in populism research, though not by all. There can be no democracy without populism. Populism accompanies democracy, as was once said, like its shadow. I am thus not so sure whether, as some media claim, we are already on the verge of the end of the populist wave. Populism, as we see it today in Germany, Austria, and other countries, is far from having reached its end. Populist parties keep popping up in waves. If the wave goes up in certain crisis situations, it flattens out again in phases of calming down. But populism goes hand in hand with democracy.

In light of this observation, it is possible to launch at least a qualified defence of populism, because, in a democracy, it is legitimate to speak in the name of the sovereign. The problem, however, is that the right-wing extremist versions of populism are now never described as such. If I had more time I could go into more detail. I have often discussed with journalists why the media actually calls certain parties right-wing populist and not right-wing extremist. Their answer was: We cannot get this through. We would like to, but we cannot broadcast that. This reveals the hegemony that predominates in today's society. In

order for us to be allowed to criticise the right-wing extremism of ›mainstream‹ parties at all, we have to use a euphemism – the term populism. We must not call a spade a spade.

This brings me to the second part of my lecture, namely populism in art. As you have seen, I have set out to rehabilitate populism. And in my recent book *Conflictual Aesthetics, Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere*, I also try to defend populism in relation to artistic practices, in particular in relation to artistic activism as a valuable form of art production. In doing so, I also question the criteria we apply to art – and by ›we‹ I do not only mean art critics, but society as a whole, the art sector, and the art system as such. What is considered valuable art, what is considered less valuable art? The first term that comes to mind when one thinks of populism in art is propaganda. According to widespread assumptions, political art is often propagandistic. And when we think of the term propaganda, we usually think of manipulation. But that is not the original literal meaning of propaganda. The word propaganda was used for the first time in 1622, when the Pope set up a commission of cardinals with the title *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*. This commission was literally dedicated to the propagation of the faith. When the Catholic Church speaks of faith, you can be sure that it means the true faith, not the lie. Although there was talk of propaganda in the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century, in contrast to Göbbels, there was no thought of manipulating people – it was taken for granted that the truth was to be propagated; that *truth*, of course, which was guaranteed by the laws of history and confirmed by the politburo, but nevertheless the truth.

Here, I show you an example of artistic activism, namely Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping. The artist Bill Talen imitates a southern preacher, that is to say a propagandist, in the form of the fictional figure Reverend Billy. Together with his gospel choir he repeatedly performs the »First Amendment Song«, often at political demonstrations. They do nothing else but sing the First Amendment in gospel manner, that is to say the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, which guarantees the right to public freedom of expression. The situation becomes paradoxical when one is arrested by the police for this very reason. In this way, a performance that consists of nothing more than a demonstration of the right to freedom of speech is prevented by those forces of law and order that are actually there to protect this right. Reverend Billy is thus engaged in propaganda, but a form of propaganda that distorts a system that does not adhere to its own conditions of truth. Thus, when truth is propagated here by artists, even if in a paradoxical way, one could ask why artistic activism has such a bad reputation within the art sector? What is so bad about the propagation of truth? In my opinion, the problem is that, in the art sector, it is generally overlooked that artistic activism has accompanied art production since the invention of modern bourgeois autonomous art. From the very beginning, it was tested how one could move from an autonomous position to a heteronomous position, that is to say, how one could commit oneself to a cause or be in the service of a cause. While art was previously always heteronomous and thus subordinated to the church and the royal court, modern bourgeois art has become free through the development of the art market, the emergence of bourgeois patronage, etc. This is how the idea of artistic autonomy develops. And in the historical moment in which

this notion becomes solidified, autonomy can also be discarded autonomously. One can make the autonomous decision to heteronomy, that is, one can join a cause. The modern party-affiliated artist of the twentieth century is an offshoot of this historical development, which already began with Jacques-Louis David in the context of the French Revolution. David was not only a propagandist of the French Revolution, but, as an artist, he became a politician, a member of parliament, who joined the Jacobin Club and only narrowly escaped the guillotine after the fall of the Jacobins. David was a propagandist and politician; he thus gave up a bit of his own autonomy. From this historical point, an art history of heteronomous, political, and activist art could be written, from David to Courbet (who joined the Paris commune); to Russian revolutionary art; to the 1930s (when, for example, the New York Workers Dance League defined dance as a revolutionary weapon in the class struggle); and finally to contemporary forms of artistic practice that are still committed to a political goal or political movements to this day. Some names have already been mentioned, for example, the Centre for Political Beauty and Christoph Schlingensiefel – all these positions are widely known.

So where does the rejection come from, if political art and activist art have always been part of art? I think this rejection has something to do with the logic of populism and the logic of propaganda. Because the canon of values by which we are accustomed to measuring art is precisely one that does not support this form of politics based on simplification. We usually assume that the more complex, the more opaque and ambiguous an artistic work remains, the more valuable it is. Under no circumstances should it be completely open to interpretation. It must remain a space of the unintelligible, otherwise the gap between work and interpretation would be closed. This conviction runs counter to the principle of politics – because politics, and not just populist politics, is ultimately based on the principle of complexity reduction. One must make oneself understood. To do so, complexity must be reduced, that is to say, it must be simplified. This is exactly what populism is accused of, although it is indeed part of every political articulation. If a space of ambiguity remains, if I do not make clear what my political position is and what I should be elected for, I will most likely not be all that successful as a politician. However, I now think that this logic of political simplification is not as under-complex as it generally appears. In fact, I would suggest that complexity as a value, as it is held up in the art sector, is much simpler than the political simplicity I just mentioned. Why? My thesis is that, in the canon of values of the art sector, most works of art are actually not complex at all, but are rather based on a pseudo-complexity, a simplifying complexity. This is because artistic positions are characterised above all by their recognisability. It is thus a matter of labelling one's own position as an artist. Although these positions can ultimately be differentiated from one another on the art market, they are at the same time interchangeable in that they can be mediated via the general equivalent of money. This means that, in the final analysis, there is no incompatibility between artistic positions, at least not from the perspective of the art market. In contrast, the political form of complexity does in fact mean incompatibility. The political terrain is one of contradictions, of conflicts and confrontations between irreconcilable positions.



As an example, I would like to show you a work by the Israeli performance collective Public Movement, which refers to precisely this incompatibility of political positions. The work, the title of which is *Positions*, is itself not particularly complex. A rope is stretched across a public square, and the audience is distributed to one or the other side of the rope. Binary watchwords are then called out: male/female, left/right, Israel/Palestine, etc. Depending on what you choose, you have to select one of the sides. What becomes obvious is that none of us is always on one side of the dividing line. We have to cross this line permanently, and new splits between the participants are always emerging. For example, the group of those who have found themselves together on the side of the political left splits as soon as they are called upon to decide between Israel and Palestine. In this way, an awareness of the complexity of antagonisms is created. A complexity of conflicts that are ultimately irreconcilable. This complexity – the complexity of conflict – is true complexity, I would argue. And I would like to conclude with a third example.

To summarise once again: I had first attempted to present artistic propaganda as a propagation of truth using the example of Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping. One quality of artistic activism can thus be to speak the truth. It is in this sense that Foucault had taken up the Greek concept of *parrhesia*, which distinguished Attic democracy, namely ›speaking the truth‹ vis-à-vis a power that lies. The second reference consists of the overlapping of lines of conflict in one and the same person, but also in different groups which, as it turns out, are not identical with themselves. From this, I concluded that conflicts are always complex. With my final example, I would like to point out that, thirdly, conflicts are also complex because lines of conflict are constantly shifting. Conflicts are not stable, they change. Here, I would like to show you a piece of graffiti by the Egyptian street-art artist Ganzeer, who was painting political graffiti on walls in Cairo during the so-called Arabellion of 2011. We see the graffiti of a tank. Incidentally, Ganzeer himself understands his own work as counterpropaganda. In this work, the tank became a moving target. In the course of the development of the Egyptian revolution, the meaning of the tank shifted, and at the same time more and more layers of meaning were applied to this tank. I quote Ganzeer:

»A few months after I painted it, protesters were attacked by the military in front of the television centre. So another artist updated my work by drawing a lot of demonstrators in front of the tank, some of them being run over it. Once again, other people came and painted over everything. So once again, other people came and painted over everything except the tank itself, which now stood completely alone. They wrote something next to it along the lines ›the people and the army hand in hand‹, thus turning it into a pro-military work. Shortly after that, some other artists came along and painted a big military monster eating people right next to the tank. So it switched back to being an anti-military piece again.«

This is thus what happens as soon as I enter the public space with a political position; I put my position up for *discussion*. It is overrun by conflicts and can change its meaning over time. Ganzeer's work thus changes from anti-military to pro-military and

from pro-military back to anti-military again. Artistic propaganda is thus a complex matter. For nothing is as complex as the attempt at political simplification.



Fig. 3: *I really don't care* – First Lady Melania Trump Visits Immigrant Detention Center On U.S. Border.

**Ana Teixeira Pinto**

### Illiberal Arts

In recent years a great many artists and art institutions have rallied around the defence of ›artistic freedom‹ and ›free speech‹, allegedly imperilled by the moralistic creep of ›identity politics‹ or what is colloquially known as ›cancel culture‹. I am here thinking for instance of the controversy surrounding Dalston in London's LD50 gallery, which was boycotted for organising symposia with far-right ideologues like Brett Stevens (Amerika), Peter Brimelow (VDare), Mark Citadel (Return of Kings), or Nick Land (XenoSystems). Then there is the exhibition featuring Boyd Rice in Greenspon Gallery. Or the 6th Athens Biennial, titled *ANTI*, where one of the invited artists was accused of attempted censorship for denouncing the harassment he was subjected to by a *posse* of artists who had previously been informally involved with LD50. Another example is a recent talk about ›cancel culture‹ at *Spike* magazine, Berlin, where a discussion was centred around Mathieu Malouf's ›Tankie Meme‹, a sculpture trafficking on anti-Semitic imagery. *Spike*'s subsequent summer issue on ›Immorality‹ is also relevant here.

Diverse as they may be, there is a twofold thread running through all of these controversies: 1. the insistence that far-right idioms, memes and tropes be read as aesthetic material, at one remove from the sphere of the political; and 2. the idea that (mostly) *white* artists appropriating far right imagery subtract from the far-right surge rather than adding to it.<sup>1</sup> There are, in my view, many problems with this approach, the first of which would be the adoption of a vocabulary (i.e. the adoption of terms such as ›cancel culture‹, ›social justice warriors‹, ›political correctness gone mad‹) and the arguments that truck with it, all of which were lionised by the far right to attack LGBT and transgender students. The myth of a free speech crisis on campus<sup>2</sup> has been manufactured as part of a broader culture war waged by the populist right against those who seek to root out oppression. In an era when the global far right has been in the ascendancy, ›freedom of speech‹ and its proxies ›academic freedom‹ and ›artistic freedom‹ became part of an ideological arsenal, by means of which those who are trying to widen the discussion around topics of gender and race are demonised for ›shutting down debate‹.

Freedom of speech is, juridically speaking, not an absolute right, hence the concept of ›hate speech‹, which is not legally protected free speech in Europe. It is however not the purpose of this article to engage in comparative law analysis, rather I would like to ask: what does it mean to advocate for a plurality of individual voices whose freedom is – paradoxically – predicated on popularising positions inimical to collective diversity?

The concept of ›free speech‹ is, in all the above-mentioned examples, intimately tied to the freedom to, if need be, offend others. In order to be truly free one must be able to transgress social norms – how else would freedom assert its autonomy? In a

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1 See Morgan Quaintance, ›Cryptic Obliquity‹, *Art Monthly* 426: May 2019. <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/call-response-by-morgan-quaintance-and-stephanie-bailey-may-2019>.

2 ›Non-platforming‹ has been in effect since April 1974 when a resolution was passed granting student unions the right to deny a platform to ›openly racist or fascist organisations or societies‹.

great many passionate defences of free speech, to now quote Keston Sutherland, the conjunction between these two elements – freedom on the one hand, transgression on the other – »is presented as a parenthetical addition that, however, must imperatively be insisted on: we cannot say what free speech is without right away adding that giving offence is, or may be essential to it.«<sup>3</sup> It might then follow that giving offence is portrayed as an unsought yet unavoidable side effect of ›saying it like it is‹. From this perspective it is easy to see how (to now paraphrase Sutherland) it might be, under these circumstances, seen as one's moral and historical duty to hurt other people in order for speech to free itself from the constraints of civility. As I watched a friend struggling to hold back tears as she gazed at *Tankie Meme* in disbelief, the logic of this argument hit me in all its brutal concreteness. If the measure of freedom is transgression, the measure of transgression is the amount of pain one inflicts. As writer Morgan Quaintance put it: (the) »re-presentation of aesthetics of oppression (however indirect or cryptic) for impact and affect<sup>4</sup> does not further or broaden the ›conversation‹, rather it furthers and broadens the narrative that oppression is inevitable. ›If we behave like those on the other side‹, as Jean Genet argued, ›then we are the other side. Instead of changing the world, all we'll achieve is a reflection of the one we want to destroy‹ «<sup>5</sup>

It would be trivial to point out that complaints about political correctness are also too eager to brush off the pervasive oppression that unchecked microaggressions can inflict. Rather, I would argue that appeals to liberty in this narrow sense can (and often do) clash with a desire for freedom in a broader sense, contributing to political unfreedom. In other words, the conflict between ›freedom of speech‹ and ›identity politics‹ is not a conflict between freedom and unfreedom but a conflict between two divergent conceptions of freedom, namely *freedom to harm* and *freedom from harm*. Those who argue for the enjoyment of disinhibitions predicated on inhibiting others argue for a professional *milieu* able to secure their individual freedom to disenfranchise, to exploit, to demean, to delegitimise, and ultimately to silence critique.

Rather than discussing free-speech, or the lack thereof, I am therefore interested in examining the conditions under which the pain of others can become the measure of our freedom. I am interested in ongoing attempts to render aesthetic experience a direct extension of moral outrage. In other words I am interested in sadistic cathexis,<sup>6</sup> and the social function it performs. I am interested in the circumstances under which cruelty can mask as principled stance and recruit the rhetoric of morals – the defence of freedom – to buttress an utterly immoral edifice. Finally, I am interested in how the defence of liberal values can acquire a use-value for those with an illiberal agenda. What follows is my attempt to unpack this question by means of a few points that I feel are worth considering.

3 Keston Sutherland, »Free Speech and the Snow Flake«, in: *Mute Magazine*, 1 April 1919: <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/free-speech-snowflake> (26 November 2020).

4 Morgan Quaintance, »Cryptic Obliquity«, *Art Monthly* 426: May 2019, <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/call-response-by-morgan-quaintance-and-stephanie-bailey-may-2019>.

5 Jean Genet, *The Balcony*, a play published in 1956.

6 I am here borrowing from China Miéville's *On Social Sadism*, Salvage, December 17, 2015.

### Possessive Individualism

Principles, as Donald Kinder and Tali Mendelberg argue, are best understood according to how they are ›put to use‹, how they are employed, and for what ends. Arguments for ›freedom of speech‹ tend to place the whole normative weight on the value of the individual and his/her liberties, with essentially no emphasis on social obligations. The term that best describes this position is ›possessive individualism‹, a term coined by C.B. Macpherson to refer to the conception of the individual as the sole proprietor of their own capacities, owing nothing to society for those capacities.<sup>7</sup> The human essence (to paraphrase Macpherson) is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of self-possession. The relation of ownership entails a very specific conception of the individual and his/her roles in the social world, which consists of nothing but exchange between proprietors. Market society is the social world this ideology engenders. In turn, market society structures a set of assumptions that are ill-suited to recognising the structural dimension of racial and gender inequality. As a result: »today prejudice is expressed primarily in the language of individualism«<sup>8</sup>, such that it is: »virtually impossible to invoke individualism« and by extension individual freedoms »without race also being implicated in the conversation.«<sup>9</sup> Prejudice is always expressed in a language that *white* Americans and *white* Europeans find familiar and compelling. In other words, racial animosity is always expressed in the language of principle.<sup>10</sup> This is why the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten's* controversial publication of twelve cartoons depicting Muhammad was understood as a legitimate exercise of free speech rather than an expression of animosity towards Muslim minorities in Europe. This is also why the public debate about the Muhammad cartoons was adjacent to a surge of fantasies of reverse colonisation involving the subjugation of *white* people. Individualism is at once the way race is experienced and the way race is occluded. Individualism also allows one to acknowledge that inequality exists without accepting that it exists as the result of historical injustice, thereby focusing on questions of ›temperament‹ and ›culture‹ to explain the lack of commitment to ›humanist values‹.

### Artistic autonomy

The term ›aesthetics‹, introduced into the philosophical lexicon during the eighteenth century, is predicated on a discontinuity; the aesthetic experience is in some way severed from sensory experience. From Kant onwards (and here I am mostly paraphrasing Jacques Rancière) detachment becomes the hallmark of the aesthetic. This entails a

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7 See C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

8 Donald Kinder and Tali Mendelberg, »Racialized Politics: The Debate about Racism in America« in: David O. Sears, James Sidanius, Lawrence Bobo (eds.), *Studies in Communication, Media, and Public Opinion*, University of Chicago Press 2000, p. 73.

9 Id.

10 Id.

double negation, its object is neither an object of knowledge nor an object of desire.<sup>11</sup> It is this sleight of hand that allows one to think about an aesthetic value as a universal value. But by introducing the notion of ›disinterest‹ Kant also brought the concept of taste into opposition with the concept of morality. At the beginning of his *Critique of Judgement* he illustrates his reasoning with the example of a palace, in response to which aesthetic judgement isolates the form alone, disinterested in knowing whether a mass of the working poor had toiled under the harshest of conditions in order to build it. The human toll, Kant says, must be ignored in order to aesthetically appreciate an artwork.

In its strict meaning, as Peter Bürger notes, the term ›artistic autonomy‹ is an ideological category that blends together an element of truth (the praxis of art is not totally assimilated to social praxis) with an element of untruth (the hypostatisation of this fact, the result of an historical process is misrecognised as the ›essence‹ of art). The category ›art‹ in western modernity could be thus construed as designating the alienation of artistic labour from other forms of labour. In this conception, to quote Nicole Demby: »the formal progression of Western art is both teleological and divorced from history, the product of Oedipal overcoming or individual psychological reaction or the whim of genius.«<sup>12</sup> Contemporary art, lionised as an unassailable realm of cultural expression, functions, by virtue of its manufactured ahistoricity, as a container for this concept of absolute freedom: »a realm of abstract representation in which new subjectivities can hypothetically be imagined«<sup>13</sup>, allegedly able to break free from the constraints of capitalist hegemony, whilst, as David Lloyd argues, through its compensatory qualities naturalising forms of life lived under the rule of property.<sup>14</sup>

The ongoing boundary disputes and attendant panic rocking the art world evacuate the notion of artistic autonomy. But heteronomy is extremely, to quote Andrew Wiener: »difficult to negotiate because it radically impacts not just the form and content of art but its definition, indeed its very ontology«.<sup>15</sup>

### Ironic nihilism

Ironic nihilism is the existential philosophy of the alt-right. But there is a wider cultural convergence between theory, lifestyle and an attitude of scornful or jaded negativity in the genre known as post-irony, which arches back to what Mark Greif termed ›the white hipster‹. The white hipster: »fetishised the violence, instinctiveness, and rebelliousness of lower-middle-class ›white trash‹«, signaling that: »whiteness and capital

11 See Jacques Rancière, »Thinking between disciplines: an aesthetics of knowledge«, in: *PARRHESIA #1*, 2006 pp. 1–12.

12 Nicole Demby, *Art, Value, and the Freedom Fetish*, <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/art-value-and-freedom-fetish-0>.

13 Id.

14 David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics*, New York 2018, p. 77.

15 Andrew Stefan Weiner, »The Art of the Possible: With and Against documenta 14«, in: *The Biennial Foundation*, 14 August 2017, available at <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/2017/08/art-possible-documenta-14/> 26 November 2020.



Fig. 4: A Trump supporter mocking the Black Lives Matter movement. Ironic Nihilism is the (official) existential philosophy of the alt-right.

were flowing back into the formerly impoverished city.«<sup>16</sup> Figures like *Vice* founder Gavin McInnes (who told a *Times* journalist in 2003 »I love being *white*, and I think it's something to be proud of«),<sup>17</sup> or hoaxer Sam Hyde (whose show *Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World Peace* opened on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim with Hyde in blackface), stand at the intersection between stoner, nerd and *white* supremacist.

Like any other cultural modality of expression, irony is context-specific. Contemporary irony must be understood as part and parcel of a wider historical trajectory in which capitalism as world ecology shifted from a weak utopia to a strong dystopia. As David Foster Wallace argued, the attachment to irony reflects a shift from the conceptualisation of art as a creative instantiation of real values to the conceptualisation of art as a creative deviance from bogus values. But this self-congratulatory celebration of one's capacity to see through deception and hypocrisy does not necessarily serve an exclusively negative function. Anyone asking an ironist what s/he really means, will, as Foster Wallace

16 Mark Greif, »What Was the Hipster«, in: *New York Magazine*, Oct 24, 2010: <http://nymag.com/news/features/69129/> (26. Nov. 2020).

17 See i. e. David Beers: Gavin McInnes Said His Proud Boys Were Built for Violence. Now Trump Is Sending Them Signals, 01.10.2020, <https://thetyee.ca/News/2020/10/01/Gavin-McInnes-Proud-Boys-Violence/> (02.02.2021).

put it: »end up looking like a hysteric or a prig.«<sup>18</sup> It is irony's ability to derail ethical questions that facilitates its reversal of social functioning, shifting from authority-challenging to authority-affirming by evacuating the political. Irony affirms the ideology it claims to devalue or disregard by means of a negation of any potential or putative alternatives. This form of diluted and malign irony also serves an individuating function which precludes collective formation by eroding investment in community-building while maximising the subject's (individual) self-contentment and sense of superiority.

Friedrich Nietzsche understood nihilism as a question of *valuation*, a backhanded compliment to truth. Nihilism and love go together, for nihilism could be defined as unrequited love for the absolute truth. Geopolitically speaking, the present moment could be defined as a process of de-Westernisation - the West is rapidly losing its position of dominance - and by the emergence of China as the probable victor in the ongoing dispute over control of the colonial extraction matrix. As pressures on *white* privilege mount, ironic nihilism and the cultural wars fought under its banner could be seen as a proxy for a greater battle around de-Westernisation, Imperialism and *white* hegemony; a means to recover the totalising dimension of *white* eschatology which by means of irony is simply negatived.

### Transgression

Though often associated with a theme of conflict with the social order that defines the counterculture, the desire to subvert or transgress moral codes does not necessarily have a politics, it is, rather, contingent on the current consensus. Whereas the traditional usage of the term ›alternative‹ signals a position that is skeptical of, and in a great many ways incompatible with power, the ›alternative‹ in alt-right is largely unmoored from the politics of transgression as traditionally aligned with a progressive project. Instead it points towards a counterculture that yearns for tradition, or, in other words, a libertarian resistance with an authoritarian programme - a trend that is now known as ›the alt-lite‹. The typical alt-lite shtick, has been to flirt with racist idioms and tropes ironically in order to claim plausible deniability and dodge responsibility for one's choices, aesthetic or otherwise. This strategy hinges on what Gregory Bateson called a more complex form of play. For a game to be a game the participants have to agree on the protocols that frame their interaction. So-called edgelords, to quote John Durham Peters, like to: »claim the prerogative to define an interaction as play when their conduct makes that frame completely unclear«.<sup>19</sup> Their ›game‹ is constructed not upon the premise ›this is play‹ but rather around the question ›is this play?, a type of interaction that finds its ritual forms in hazing or initiation practices. Privilege denotes the prerogative to define and control the frame of interaction: »When a troll bites, he always claims it is a play bite, even if the victim bleeds. Semiotic violence *is* violence regardless of its putative nexus to real, material violence.

18 David Foster Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1997, pp. 66–69.

19 See John Durham Peters, »U Mad?« in: *Logic*, 6, January 2019 <https://logicmag.io/play/u-mad/>.



Ocluding violence is a violent act, albeit one that does not often appear as such because the institutional weight falls on its side. Hence the insistence that chauvinistic epistemes be read as irony, no matter how hurtful or distressing others might experience them to be.

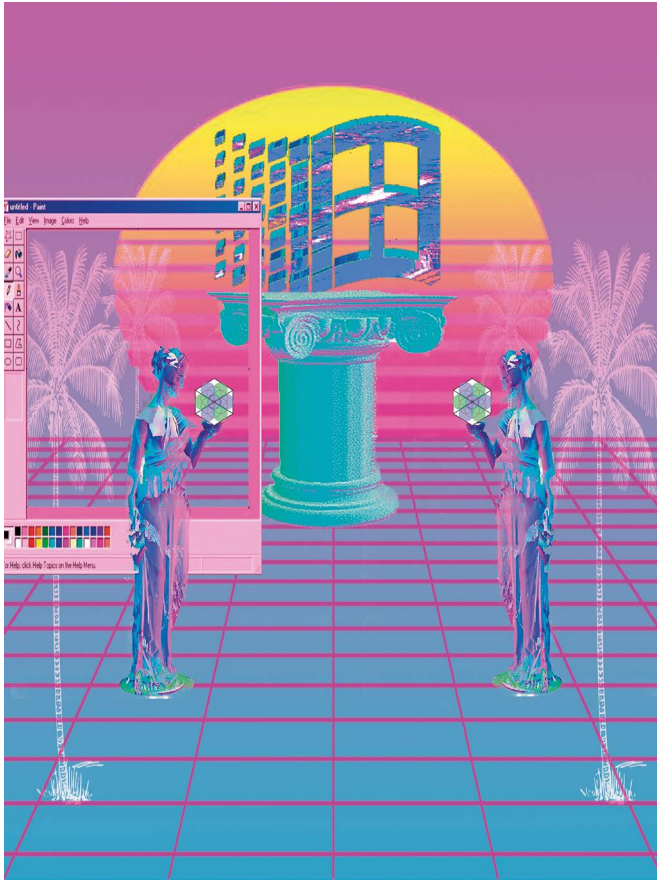


Fig. 5: The Vaporwave style combines images of Greco-Roman marbles with Tron like grids, pastel colours and palm trees, tying the mythical origin of Western civilization to the American dream and the tech industry.

### Overidentification, Pastiche, Affirmation, Mimicry

The movement now known as ›the alt-right‹, which, despite ongoing attempts to forge alliances with the traditional far right still remains intensely supra-structural, was fuelled by its aesthetics rather than by its politics. The contemporary art *milieu* proved particularly susceptible to this far-right creep because several of its conventions of plasticity and meaning-production devices, – e.g. irony, transgression, over-identification, affirmation and pastiche – lend themselves to appropriation by virtue of their ambivalent nature and hence have a use-value for the alt-right. Vaporwave, for example, a genre brimming with selective nostalgia began as a form of postmodern pastiche. As the ethos of the tech industry transmogrified, shifting from the market-besotted optimism championed by Bill Gates to the digital feudalism represented by Bay Area neo-reactionaries and cybermonarchists, Vaporwave transmogrified along with it, spawning two *white* ethno-nationalist subgenres, Fashwave and Trumpwave. Though Fashwave has an ominous feel, most of its constitutive elements are already present in the retro-futuristic imaginary of Vaporwave (the whitest style ever, according to Andrew Anglin the founder of the Daily Stormer) in the way it combined images of Greco- Roman marbles with Tron-like grids, pastel colours and palm trees, tying the mythical origin of *white* civilisation to the American Dream and the joyful promises of the early internet years. Drawing heavily from internet imageboard culture the post-internet style could be construed as a global visual idiom that conflates the vectors of Silicon Valley commodity space with the strategy space of the US empire.

If a great many contemporary artists can at present oscillate between the positions of Andy Warhol and Arno Breker, that is because art audiences have been trained to recognise affirmation as a critical gesture ever since Pop was marketed as a significant conceptual turn. As a result, their works can play two dissonant registers at once, in a back and forth dance that could also be described as the (wholly undialectical) relation between law-making and law-breaking in the social media's carnival.

Contemporary art hasn't been able to think through certain contradictions between what it purports to do and what it inadvertently does because its means and modes of ideation are particularly ill-suited for this task. As Lauren Berlant has argued, the attachments that help reproduce what is damaging in the world are at the same time that which holds the world together as coherent representation. Giving up one's attachments, however cruel or toxic, would mean giving up the world and one's position in it. From this perspective ›freedom of speech‹ can perhaps be best understood as the expression of a wounded narcissism, unable to divest from the pleasurable investment in the (increasingly besieged) notion of its own universality.<sup>20</sup>

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20 See David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics*, New York 2018.

*Moderator Jörg Heiser*

**Jörg Heiser**

There are different definitions of populism: the Laclau/Mouffe faction emphasises the antagonism between the people and the hegemony or the power bloc; the Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde calls populism a ›thin ideology‹ attached to other ideologies. But they seem to agree on the idea that populism builds on the idea that there is ›the people‹ and there is the establishment. But what *is* ›the people?‹ We have the example of Podemos in Spain, which has been described as left-wing populist. And I had to think of the famous piece by Hans Haacke, »Der Bevölkerung«, which is here at the Reichstag, where obviously, especially in Germany, the notion ›Dem Volke‹ [To the People] is a highly contaminated one in the wake of the Third Reich, and Haacke instead uses the term »To the Population«. And then the question, ›who belongs to the people?‹ Sahra Wagenknecht of the German Die Linke made numerous remarks coming from a, let's say leftist-populist position, geared towards an antagonism between ›home-grown‹ workers (whatever that is) and immigrant workers, which points to a kind of impasse in this notion of ›the people‹ for the left. What do you make of that?

**Oliver Marchart**

I would not take Sahra Wagenknecht as ›the left‹. I was once on a podium in Munich at Residenztheater talking on exactly that topic. I made a similar point in defence of populism and I realised afterwards that everyone assumed I was a supporter of Sahra Wagenknecht, which is not at all the case. So, I'm not saying that every kind of populism which is on the left is a good thing, because there is a lot on the left which I do not subscribe to as a leftist. E. g. re. Antisemitism.

However, you can have a democratic populism, that would be my case, which is not based on the exclusion of ›the third term‹ as I called it, which is basically against the power bloc but does not need any other scapegoats such as immigrants. And then the question is, not simply ›where is the people?‹ because in democracy, obviously, there is no such thing as ›the people‹, right, it's a construct based on the democratic idea of populist sovereignty. But nobody has ever shaken hands with ›the people‹. Therefore, Brecht and Haacke have a point when saying: okay let's talk about »Bevölkerung«. Nonetheless, »Bevölkerung« is not the sovereign. Bevölkerung is a sociological category, and you can shake hands with certain members of Bevölkerung, but you cannot shake hands with ›the people‹. So, you cannot have democracy without ›the people‹, and nonetheless ›the people‹ is never there. It's never there as pure presence.

The consequence is that, if you want to have democratic politics, you have to make ›the people‹ present in some way. In that sense, ›the people‹ will have to be constructed. So, it's not a substantive category. It's not an entity that really exists, but it is there, it is there in the fundamental laws of democracy, in the constitutions, and it is there in political discourse. So, we always construct ›the people‹ no matter whether we want to or not. And so, my case would be, you can construct ›the people‹ in a democratically legitimate, populist way, but I would of course not defend a racist or right-wing extremist form of populist construction of the people.

**Jörg Heiser**

I'm picking up the term that you introduced and that comes from Florian Cramer, ›weaponisation of carnival‹, which made me of course think of the famous killer clowns we have in power now in the UK and the US and in other parts of the world. The question that pertains from that is, there seems to be a very successful strategy on the right to defuse and subvert, even invert the logic of ›the people‹ vs. the establishment by making one part of the establishment look like they're part of the people when, in fact, they are not at all. I mean, the Eton boy Boris Johnson as a populist seems a contradiction in terms. The question that comes from that is, okay, we've recognised that mechanism, but what made it so successful?

**Ana Teixeira-Pinto**

I would say there are several layers to this question. On the one hand there is an emotional investment or structural affect that hinges on *whiteness*. The *white* working class is still invested in welfare chauvinism and sees it as their only open avenue to preserve a modicum of social status. This is not completely irrational, because it's easier to, as Sahra Wagenknecht does, advocate for forms of welfare chauvinism than to think in transnational terms, or to try to organise in a global environment, because it's very difficult to scale up movements, and because we live in a world in which there is a differentiation between economic violence and political violence. Economic violence is never seen as violence. This is why, for instance, we have a separation between migrants and refugees. Refugees are entitled to protections, but economic migrants are not entitled to protections, because we cannot recognise that people fleeing starvation or drought are also victims of violence.

**Oliver Marchart**

My first point is in reaction to what you said about Boris Johnson. Stuart Hall, during the time of Thatcherism, coined the notion of ›authoritarian populism‹. Some faction from within a power bloc attacks the power bloc, pretending to be on the side of the people against the power bloc, while actually being part of it. That's very much a sign of right-wing populism. I totally agree with your definition of Boris Johnson as an Eton boy employing a right-wing populist strategy, but you need to have a class society for this to work in the first place, where people actually agree with such a ludicrous exhibition of your own class privileges. People have to buy into that. I don't think that would work in the German system.

**Jörg Heiser**

Let's say the common denominator here is the focus on the question of how to draw the line between a kind of justifiable populism, and the one that is building on cheap affect-gratification by way of fear, greed and xenophobia, and on the authoritarian mechanism you just described. But that brings me to the question in regard to online campaigning, no-platforming, ›cancel culture‹ and so on, where a similar question arises I think, how to draw the line between a justified campaigning against someone or something in or outside of an institution because of, say, their attack on other people's human rights on the one hand; and on the other, a kind of cheap affect-gratification by identifying

scapegoats and lightning rods, while claiming righteousness or irony or ›freedom of expression‹. How do we draw that line?

**Ana Teixeira-Pinto**

Well, I would say it's fairly easy, because you cannot argue that racism is an opinion. Racism is not an opinion, it's a crime, like antisemitism or misogyny. The circulation of these materials does not subtract from them, it adds to them. This is tied to the nature of digital environments. Social media is a huge machine for the elimination of the negative, every time you click on something, every ›Like,‹ contributes to the dissemination of this toxicity. You cannot hate-like something because it just circulates it more and more widely. There is an inability or illiteracy in terms of how to engage with social media. We still are not equipped with the proper tools in order to understand how to actually divest, how to disengage, instead of trying to invest or engage and by virtue of this investment or engagement actually contributing to the problem.

**Oliver Marchart**

I liked your use of Florian Cramer's term ›weaponisation of transgression‹, because it's really what happens. If you look at people like Donald Trump, he's transgressing every boundary, every line that was considered a rule of the game in democracies, every day. And his audience actually enjoys it. So, there is an enjoyment in transgression. Maybe this can happen because there was a problem and there has always been a problem with transgression as well as with carnivalisation in the first place. Because the carnival in this Bakhtinian, romantic idea, the revolutionary idea of turning things on their head, was always there to stabilise hierarchies, to stabilise power relations, because to let people do that in symbolically framed ways for one day a year is precisely a way of keeping things going as they are.

**Ana Teixeira-Pinto**

That would be what I call social sadism, the pleasurable investment in the circulation of this grotesque imagery. It functions as a release, but precisely because it functions as a release somehow it never touches upon the actual political, economic, geopolitical underpinnings.

**Jörg Heiser**

But I think what these two aspects of the same kind of crisis also pinpoint is the question of the legal system. Because, as you mentioned, Trump, Boris Johnson, are constantly subverting the legal system. They're subverting the constitution, they're doing everything and they're actually ignoring a lot of red lines in terms of corruption etc. They do this purposefully and they also do it with a kind of almost unveiled support of their core support group.

And this reminds of another kind of incident when Margaret Atwood, the famous Canadian science fiction writer, intervened into a discussion around the case of #MeToo in Canadian academe and said, what does this actually mean for the legal system if we see it as a kind of broken legal system in the face of hate speech and sexual harassment?

I quote Margaret Atwood: »If the legal system is bypassed because it is seen as ineffectual, what will take its place? Who will be the new power brokers?« She didn't answer that question herself, it was actually answered with a big shit-storm against her. But it also brings to mind the big companies who run social media and who are actually defining the algorithms according to which many of these debates actually unfold. How do we position ourselves to that?

### **Ana Teixeira-Pinto**

That is the most relevant question, but the answer cannot be that we are just going to return to the »golden decades of social democracy,« when things were apparently so good in the West. Because those decades were also conterminous with violent racism at home and imperial violence abroad. We have to accept that there is a huge restructuring ongoing. If the legal system is not adequate, we have to work harder, so that it becomes adequate, so that it can address these questions.

### **Jörg Heiser**

Concerning the legal system, if you mention Boris Johnson, then actually, the disbandment of the parliament was nothing short of a *coup d'état*. And I don't see him punished for that. He should be in jail. I don't know where is the legal system there. And that's a huge problem with what liberals tend to call or tend to defend as »the rule of law«. So, I'm very much in favour of the rule of law, the problem is, I mean, I'm being polemical now, it doesn't exist. I think of it in the same way as what Gandhi said when asked what he thought about English civilisation, he said: »I think it would be a good thing«. So, the rule of law would be a good thing, but if you think of police violence, it goes unpunished as a rule. There are good reasons why there is a movement, Black Lives Matter, in the States. But even here, police violence is never prosecuted. And so, where is the rule of law? And if we start here, I think we have to start with the democratisation of society. We have to start with the legal system, we have to implement the rule of law, we have to bring people to justice, like the police, not only some burglars.

So, I think what we need is a radical democratic politics, a democratisation of democracy in order to get this done. And the problem is (and here we come to the real problem of right-wing populism as we see it now) I think there it does express a certain desire for democracy, it does express a certain desire for popular sovereignty. People feel they do not have a say? They have only vague ideas about it, they don't know what to do with it, but they feel they do not have a say, even though that system is called democracy, but where is the rule of the demos? And I think it is a symptom, if you wish, of the appalling shape of contemporary democracy.

### **Ana Teixeira-Pinto**

It's true, it's a *white* democracy. That image where a protester holds a poster that reads »Green Lives Matter« is clearly a way to degrade or debase the Black Lives Matter movement. We cannot pretend that there is no racial element in this motivation or in these forms of populism. There is clearly a racial element and this has a lot to do with the promises made by capitalism. In moments of degrowth you might not be able enjoy

the promise of wealth acquisition but if you are *white* you can still enjoy your position of superiority in this colonial matrix. In my view this is very much part of this psychology of the new far right.

**Jörg Heiser**

I guess now is a good moment for questions from the audience!

Question from the audience:

What do you think about the direct democracy, the referendum?

**Oliver Marchart**

There is a problem because we see all these right-wing extremist – I tend to call them extremist rather than populist – parties being very much in favour of direct democracy. Because they want to use it as a strategic weapon, and we see that with the populists in power, with Orbán for instance. He would ask the people, but only when it is against Soros or immigrants and so on. So, just as a propaganda tool, in the bad sense of the term propaganda. However, today or the day before, there was a very interesting commentary by Jan-Werner Müller, a populism researcher who made a case for direct democracy. Because what we see is that, for instance in the case of the Brexit referendum, it was not really an expression of the people's will. It was a machination of a part of the elite. So, this is not necessarily an argument against direct democracy, it is an argument against the elite using that tool in order to ›weaponise‹ direct democracy, to take the term up. So, I'm not so sure about it. Maybe in certain countries like Switzerland, where you have a long-standing democratic tradition and people are taking it seriously, you can have that. Of course, from time to time they may vote in the most abstruse ways, I agree, but many times they actually act quite responsibly with that tool.

**Jörg Heiser**

There was for example an interesting campaign after the far-right party in Switzerland wanted to make it basically almost impossible for asylum seekers who had been extradited to appeal to a court. Then there was a half-year campaign by people making newspaper ads and so on to counter that, and they eventually won the popular vote for this, which was kind of a turn of the tide in Switzerland about two years ago in regard to the rise of the SVP. And it's good, but like you said, we have to be aware that Switzerland is a very wealthy, very small country, with a very long tradition of direct democracy, and the counter example would indeed be Brexit, if you think of the way it was heavily ideologically subverted. And we also know that billions in money went into basically a false campaign that was targeted on social media.

**Ana Teixeira-Pinto**

I don't know if you're aware, but there is no archive of what materials are being circulated in social media platforms like WhatsApp for instance. So basically, there is a huge investment in these kinds of ads but there is no way to have any kind of scrutiny or supervision about what is the content of these ads. This controversy emerged around the Cambridge Analytica scandal, but the other social media platforms were never

scrutinised. When you have all of this inscrutable power in the hands of big data companies you have absolutely no way of actually guaranteeing that this is a democratic vote.

***William Messer***

As hard as it is to identify Boris Johnson as a populist, it is unimaginable to identify Donald Trump as a true populist. It turns out that there is a connection between low self esteem and a kind of aspirational connection to power and privilege that skips over all the middle ground. But one of the things I'd like you to address, because you continually remind us of racism, is the issue of *white* victimhood. If you could talk about how that plays into all of this.

***Ana Teixeira-Pinto***

Trump is not a populist: Trump is a fascist. I mean it in a very literal manner because one of the markers of a fascist regime is to create two-tier forms of citizenship, (and this was basically what Carl Schmitt implemented in Germany, and what led to the denaturalisation of the German Jews) in order to denaturalise citizens, that then can be disposed of or deported, then this is exactly what Trump is doing. I would never use the term populism to refer to Trump or any of the other present-day fascists to be honest. Again I think *whiteness* plays a gigantic role, as this whole discourse hinges on fantasies of reversed colonisation, that always entail the subjugation of *white* people. There is an element of truth to it because the West is coming under pressure and is losing control of its position of hegemony, is losing control of the colonial extraction matrix it established. But there is also an element of anxiety in that the West fears being victimised the way it victimised others.

***Jörg Heiser***

This leads us straight to the topic of the next panel.



# The Humboldt Forum and its »Cultural Heritage«

## Panel 2

MODERATION  
JÖRG HEISER

ARLETTE-LOUISE NDAKOZE  
THOMAS E. SCHMIDT  
SARAH HEGENBART



**From Mausoleum to Momentum. The Agenda of Artifacts in Humboldt's Forum*****Performance-Lecture by Arlette-Louise Ndakoze***

In her performance-lecture, Ndakoze questioned (polylingual, and to the sound of a classic hip-hop loop) the Eurocentric concepts of time and history, as well as the corresponding concepts of modern science. To this day, students are told the famous anecdote of Newton, in which, while sitting under an apple tree, an apple fell on his head and he thus ›discovered‹ the law of gravity. What if we take into account in this story, which alludes to the biblical tree of knowledge, that the kingdom of Kush, which according to Genesis was part of the Garden of Eden, was located in today's Sudan? What if we find ideas of immortality in the cultures there that precede the Old Testament by a good millennium? How can we speak of conversations at ›eye level‹ when one side denies the other its own history?

**Decolonisation and German Cultural Policy. Why it is so difficult to restitute colonial art*****Thomas E. Schmidt***

In his lecture, Thomas E. Schmidt attempted to show how the belated debate on German colonial rule in Africa led to new questions being raised about the purportedly reliable policy for dealing with the past with regard to the Shoah. The focus on the aspect of ›art theft‹ also gave sub-Saharan societies a victim status from the outside. He thus opposes the strategy favoured by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, of a comprehensive and rapid restitution of cultural assets. He pleaded for a rejection of a blanket practice of restitution of artefacts in favour of a contextualised and individualised examination of each case. Otherwise, the opportunity would be missed to approach decolonisation as a comprehensive political project in order to deal with the consequences of colonial rule in a multidimensional way.

**A Forum Without Dialogue? A Cabinet of Curiosities of the Failure of Multidirectional Politics of Remembrance*****Sarah Hegenbart***

Hegenbart's lecture posed the question of whether ›dialogue‹ as a central aspect of a forum at the Humboldt Forum is implemented at all. Her analysis of the architecture, the curatorial concepts known up to that point, and the way the public was dealt with, suggested that the Humboldt Forum does not function dialogically but rather as a cabinet of curiosities driven by spectacle. In times of populism, such a refusal to engage in dialogue is

particularly problematic. There are, however, alternatives to the *Kunstkammer* (cabinet of curiosities) approach; the Museum of Vancouver, for example, has developed an exhibition of Haida artefacts together with representatives of the Haida indigenous peoples. Equally conceivable would be an open repository that offers transparency – The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, also in Vancouver, is exemplary in this respect. Here, thorough research, including the preparation of possible restitution claims, is enabled by the museum's website. A multi-directional policy of remembrance, such as that proposed by Michael Rothberg, can only be achieved in connection with museums if they work transparently and in active partnership with various communities.

**Thomas E. Schmidt**

After decades of silence and non-disclosure, for the past several years a debate about the colonial past has finally been taking place in Germany. The debate is being conducted in an open and proactive manner, and for some time now it has been revolving primarily around the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, this large, ambitious museum project, which is about to open its doors and is intended to present Berlin's ethnological collections in a new way, including art from the former German colonies, especially those in Africa. The debate has been reinvigorated by the inventory report which the art historian Bénédicte Savoy and the economist Felwine Sarr prepared for the French government. In German, the report bears the programmatic title ›Zurückgeben‹ (Restitute) and makes a case for the complete restitution of all artifacts from the era of colonisation collected by museums in France and Germany.

Since then, the activities that revolve around decolonisation and claim the attribute ›postcolonial‹ seem to have one centre and only one direction. For the general public, decolonisation is largely identical with restitution, and since the necessity of coming to terms with European colonial history is no longer under discussion, there seems to be only one way to draw practical consequences from it, i.e. the restitution of museum holdings, the restitution of ›African heritage‹.

It is, however, not that clear and unambiguous, nor will it be any easier in the future. The moral aggravation of the topic with regard to museums and their willingness to restitute objects will ultimately not lead very far. It is difficult because, not only does one return something that was previously stolen, but also because, in reality, it is not so much about objects themselves but about the very act of restitution. It is a significant social act with consequences, which takes place under the eyes of the global public. The act of restitution and its circumstances are being monitored. It may find imitators, but it may also provoke resistance elsewhere. It is not only a moral act, but a gesture in the arena of international politics. In reality, the context of the problem encompasses much more than merely museum objects. More and different interests, other than ethical ones, thus come into play.

Since it is clear that the Humboldt Forum will not open in 2020 with empty display cases, no one seems to seriously expect a complete restitution of African art. In France as well, according to the impression of most observers, the process initiated by the president with great aplomb has lost momentum. Felwine Sarr bemoaned this in an interview with the German newspaper *DIE ZEIT* in late July. Why is it not progressing?

To answer this question, one could list a number of reasons. Many have been mentioned, including legal, administrative, domestic and foreign policy-related, and psychological motives. There is, however, an important factor as far as the German context is concerned, which is painfully situated in the decolonisation discourse itself, at least as it is currently presented to the general public, namely in its strong orientation towards social moral standards and its concentration on art and culture.

Savoy and Sarr are certainly familiar with all good and less good arguments, which make restitution a complicated and difficult matter. Strategically, their way out of the thicket of naysaying and delays was by all means resourceful – and, as far as mobilising

the public is concerned, effective, at least for a certain period. However, it also provoked unintended side effects.

Savoy and Sarr based their ideal of the practice of decolonisation on a model that already exists, namely the practice of the restitution of art expropriated during National Socialism to previous Jewish owners or their descendants. The restitution of ›looted art‹ is now institutionalised in Germany, i.e. it is indisputable and socially recognised; it has become an integral part of the German process of coming to terms with its past and – despite exceptions and setbacks – it actually works. As far as state ownership of art is concerned, there is no doubt that all looted art must be restituted. In the late 1990s, the ›Washington Principles‹ had already been transformed into a guideline for the course of action of all public museums in Germany. It is the hope of many activists today that, in the future, the same will be done with colonial art. The return of ›African heritage‹ should likewise be a matter of course.

The correspondences are, however, not very far-reaching. The reappraisal of National Socialism and colonialism are not congruent. Several differences are striking. After a difficult initial phase, the restitution of looted art in the Federal Republic of Germany has developed into a task for society as a whole. Even private art collections, although not legally obliged to do so, are under ethical pressure to trace provenances and, if necessary, to restitute looted objects. The view is that the gravity of the historical crime at the very least implies a responsibility for each individual German, which suggests that he or she should participate in this restitution practice. The ethical responsibility resulting from this unique historical constellation also justifies the encroachment on property rights. Formally, this applies only to museums, but indirectly, via the art trade – which is obliged to conduct provenance research – it also applies to private individuals when they wish to sell art suspected of being looted.

The situation in Africa is different. There, the regulation of the consequences of colonisation affects the relationship between states. The private possession of colonial art would not be affected by legal provisions requiring restitution, and for constitutional reasons it will not be in the future. Colonial regimes were essentially run by states, and although there was participation by the *white* population, it is not comparable to participation in Nazi rule. States are protected from mutual legal claims because they are sovereign, that is, they are considered immune in international legal relations. They can formulate and present demands on each other, i.e. express them politically or ethically, in which case the fulfillment of the demand is a concession or is done out of political expediency. Law is thus not enforced and is not created anew. For foreign policy, and not only for that of Germany, the European colonial regime and its consequences have been conclusively regulated by contract. In contrast to National Socialism, no one in this complex has demanded that legal concord be revoked at some point, that contracts be renegotiated, and that time limits be subsequently suspended. For these reasons, there is also no international agreement in the sense of ›soft law‹ that formulates similar intentions for ›African heritage‹ as expressed in the Washington Principles.

In other words, when it comes to restitution, as far as art and its ownership is concerned, the participating nations act in a symbolic, but not legal field. To make this

even clearer, there is no formal claim to the retransfer of property. The old colonial powers can, however, signal concessions with friendly gestures. The question is then whether this kind of gesture corresponds to a relationship at eye level from the perspective of African nations, or whether an old hierarchical relationship is reproduced in it.

The return of looted art from Jewish property represents the final chapter in the long history of compensation. It is not a matter of symbolism, but of claims for material compensation clearly defined under civil and international law. Such obligatory formulations are precisely what is missing when it comes to colonial art. It seems that the international community is not particularly inclined to agree on such legal or quasi-legal formulations.

Thus, when German cultural politicians claim that African countries can now legally assert their claims for restitution by submitting corresponding requests, this is only half true. For their claim is then merely a civil one and in no way affects the relationship between sovereign nations. Perhaps this explains why so few sub-Saharan states have so far made an official request for the restitution of their art. There is always a remnant of indignity in this, because – and no matter how you look at it – they will not shake off the role of a supplicant, even with a suit in a German court. Perhaps this role will even be intensified as a result.

A restitution of colonial art cannot therefore be derived from the restitution practice of looted art. One follows a firmly framed legal intention, the other remains for the time being a formally undefined project which, in France and Germany, has meanwhile at least attained the status of a governmental project. Any attempt to assert that both types of restitution are essentially identical leads to a dead end. It is precisely here, namely with art, that the desire to stimulate a significant decolonising practice demands a significant moral mobilisation. If international law does not provide an adequate solution, every effort must be made to scandalise the matter. And this, too, has recognisable consequences. The concentration on culture and its particular morality narrows, *a priori*, the prospect of how Europe could enter into a new relationship with sub-Saharan Africa in the future. The focus on art and ethics ultimately depoliticises decolonisation.

At this point, one must also critically ask why it is that works of art have shifted to the centre of our attention. The notion that art – whether as an aesthetic or ritual object – represents the identity of communities in an exclusive way; that it is essential for their self-image and their cohesion, is a very Western concept. One is forced to make a number of identity-political assumptions in order to arrive at the conviction that there is or should be a solid core in collective identities, and that this core consists above all of objects enriched with meaning, which release common memory and thereby create community. Many African societies derive their identities in quite different ways. There, the focus is more on the successful liberation from their colonisers. Their self-images are political and heroic, and the lament about an interrupted continuity of memory is by no means at their core. The focus on art theft unifies the national narratives and political realities of sub-Saharan societies. All of them are thus assigned the status of victims from the outside and on a blanket basis.

Savoy and Sarr would object at this point that their strategy is only a first step and must be followed by others. This strategy does, however, harbour a danger. With it, the issue is artificially elevated from the overall complex of decolonisation, and in the future it will be left to its own dynamics or non-dynamics as a particular cultural policy problem area. Provenance and individual case research will dominate the subject matter for years to come and administer it in this sense. This is already foreseeable. A politicised art history will then establish its own tenacious field, which will remain detached from a multi-dimensional Africa policy.

The opportunity would thus be missed to approach decolonisation as a comprehensive political project, including the foreign-policy, economic, scientific – and possibly also the previously tabooed – dimensions of international law. For the political routine of France or Germany the restitution of art does not represent a serious case of conflict. For the general public however, it is increasingly gaining an overwhelming significance. And there is no reliable and predetermined way that international politics, not even the common European one, will one day, due to public outrage, engage in concerted action merely to change the ownership of works of art. There are no signs of this, but rather only the obligatory symbolic gestures of clemency.

A new, comprehensive Africa policy is in the interest of almost all European nations – and it is also ethically necessary. In some areas, there are indeed minor new beginnings. Culture in the broadest sense must also be a component of a new Africa policy. Surprisingly, formats in which Africans and Europeans discuss with each other about the post-colonial situation hardly exist. Where they have been established, the public has so far hardly been welcome. In the future, their status could become more official, and thus also the scene of public debate. Within such formats, common standards for the restitution of art should also be developed.

The restitution of works of art should by no means be the focus of the postcolonial situation. Artifacts are not identical with ›African heritage‹. Norms derived from identity politics soothe the Western conscience, but they manoeuvre Africans into passivity. We, not they, then organise decolonisation. Such norms do not replace real politics. The post-colonial situation today is a political one.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*





Fig. 6: Christoph Schlingensiefel and Thomas Goerge, *Design for the Berliner Schloss*, 2009

## **Sarah Hegenbart**

From the perspective of the *Löwenkämpfer* (Lion Fighter), we gaze out over the Lustgarten at a strange conglomerate: the dome of the Prussian City Palace rises above the façade of the Palace of the Republic. The palace portal consists of a mud hut, seemingly inspired by all sorts of Western stereotypes of ›Africa‹ and the architecture of this continent. Thomas Goerge designed this collage for Christoph Schlingensiefel as part of the architectural competition for the reconstruction of the Berlin City Palace. Schlingensiefel did not win with this proposal. Certainly not only because he did not adhere to the rigid guidelines that provided for a strong orientation towards the baroque palace designed by Andreas Schlüter. However, this draft does contain many elements that would be desirable for today's conception of the Humboldt Forum: an ironic handling of stereotypes that characterise Western thinking, references to Germany's own colonial history, an emphasis on the GDR's past as an essential part of the overall German historiography, and above all an ambiguity that calls for dialogue (not one, but several!).

This ambiguity arises from the juxtaposition of fragments from various cultures of remembrance: first of all, Albert Wolff's *Löwenkämpfer*, a bronze sculpture from 1861. As Volker Galperin has proven, this motif can be found in sculptures that were created at the same time by the Fon people in the city of Abomey in the West African kingdom of

Dahomey (today Benin).<sup>1</sup> This region was once the centre of the slave trade. While the motif of the lion fight (the strength of the human hero is all the more emphasised by the defeat of the dangerous animal) can also be found among the Sumerians, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in Greek antiquity, and in Persia, it takes on a new meaning in the context of the Altes Museum: the exoticisation of ›Africa‹, whose wild animals are defeated by the white rulers. This stereotype of ›uncivilised Africa‹ is carried to extremes by Schlingensiefel when, in his collage, he juxtaposes a mud hut as a stereotype of ›African‹ culture with Schlüter's baroque architecture. At the same time, Schlingensiefel recalls the history of the Palace of the Republic, which was completed in 1976 by a collective of the GDR's Bauakademie (Building Academy) on the site of the former City Palace and demolished only thirty years later in 2006. Since, in addition to the Volkskammer (People's Chamber) of the GDR, it housed a number of cultural spaces, it was a very popular building, the demolition of which, in the minds of many people from East Germany, was certainly tantamount to a literal act of levelling GDR history. This is all the more painful when one considers that post-colonial discourses in the GDR (as opposed to the FRG) were conducted much earlier.<sup>2</sup>

By connecting these strands of different cultures of remembrance, Goerge and Schlingensiefel establish a space for multidirectional cultures of remembrance. My thesis is that it is precisely this form of multidirectional remembrance politics that the Humboldt Forum lacks and thus prevents a dialogue – or rather dialogues in the plural. In my lecture, I would like to introduce Michael Rothberg's concept of ›multidirectional memory‹ and compare this with the Humboldt Forum's own self-image. I will then make some suggestions on how the Humboldt Forum's orientation could be made more multidirectional. The goal of such a multidirectional orientation is to enable a serious dialogue, which also expresses itself, for example, in acts of restitution.

### The Concept of Multidirectional Memory

The concept of multidirectional memory is based on Michael Rothberg's publication *Multidirectional Memory, Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), the first book that brings together the results of Holocaust research and postcolonial studies to promote a change in thinking about collective memory and group identity. Rothberg is Professor of English and Comparative Literature as well as Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of California in Los Angeles and strives to critically examine whether and to what extent dominant narratives suppress or influence other cultures of remembrance in the formation of collective identity. He argues, for example, that the scarcity of resources (e.g., state funding) has led to a situation in which representatives of

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- 1 Volker Galperin, »Der Löwenkämpfer: Sumerischer Heldenmythos in Westafrika?«, in: *About Africa & the rest of the world*, 26 March 2015, URL: <https://www.about-africa.de/diverses-unsortiertes/470-der-loewenkaempfer-sumerischer-heldenmythos-in-westafrika#zitierweise> [last visit on 24 October 2020].
  - 2 See: Ulrike Lindner, »Neuere Kolonialgeschichte und Postcolonial Studies«, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 15 April 2011, URL: [http://docupedia.de/zg/Neuere\\_Kolonialgeschichte\\_und\\_Postcolonial\\_Studies?oldid=125818](http://docupedia.de/zg/Neuere_Kolonialgeschichte_und_Postcolonial_Studies?oldid=125818) [last visit on 24 October 2020]. For further literature recommendations on the critical reappraisal of German colonial history in the GDR, see also note 49.

certain cultures of remembrance have had to compete with others in order to obtain resources. As an example, he cites the construction of the Holocaust Museum on the Mall in Washington, D.C., which was completed in 1993. This caused resentment among representatives of Black communities, whose injustices experienced through slavery had not yet been dealt with in a museum of equal prominence. This was to change more than twenty years later, when the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened in Washington, D.C. in 2016.

Rothberg warns against seeing cultures of remembrance as competitive and is more interested in showing the extent to which they are linked and influence each other. His multidirectional memory policy is linked to the demand of the ›multidirectional option‹, i.e. ›an ethical vision based on commitment to uncovering historical relatedness and working through the partial overlaps and conflicting claims that constitute the archives of memory and the terrain of politics‹.<sup>3</sup> How important such a demand is for the Humboldt Forum was revealed when Horst Bredekamp, one of the three founding directors, expresses his lack of understanding towards the (postcolonial) critics of the Humboldt Forum in an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* in 2017. According to Bredekamp, there were only ›thirty-four years of [German] colonial rule‹.<sup>4</sup> However, he does not mention how closely the ideologies of colonialism are linked to the racism and anti-Semitism that made the Nazi dictatorship possible in the first place and thus how the colonial period continued during the Nazi era. After all, the first concentration camps were located in South Africa and Namibia. The renewed outbreak of *white* supremacy thinking, which manifests itself not only in the speeches of Donald Trump but also in the AfD (the political party ›Alternative für Deutschland‹), is also closely linked to the colonial era. Moreover, Germany still profits from the neo-colonial structures of capitalism, which would not have been able to function without an exploitation of the Global South. A remembrance of and confrontation with German colonial rule should therefore be high on the agenda of daily politics. Especially in a migration society, into which Germany is increasingly developing, there should be a need for a comparative, relational (instead of competitive) way of thinking that does not shy away from traversing borders of ethnicity and eras.<sup>5</sup> A policy based on the ethics of multidirectional memory requires an idea of transnational, comparative justice that negotiates between conflicting, and at times also mutually exclusive demands.<sup>6</sup> This is especially important in times when migrants in Europe are often confronted with the ghosts of the past and at the same time have to deal with the prejudices of the present.<sup>7</sup> In classical antiquity, the meaning of the forum includes a platform for dialogue. In the Socratic

3 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, 2009), p.29.

4 Horst Bredekamp, »Humboldt Forum Berlin. Bredekamp: Alles bereits in Planung«, Horst Bredekamp interviewed by Anne Seidel, in *Deutschlandfunk*, 21 July 2017, URL: [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/humboldt-forum-berlin-bredekamp-alles-bereits-in-planung.691.de.html?dram:article\\_id=391716](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/humboldt-forum-berlin-bredekamp-alles-bereits-in-planung.691.de.html?dram:article_id=391716) [last visit on 24 October 2020] [translated].

5 See: Rothberg 2009 (see note 3), p. 17.

6 See: *ibid.*, p. 22.

7 See: *ibid.*, p. 28.

sense, dialogue represents a process of *dialogesthai*, in which different actors critically question their own views through the exchange of conflicting perspectives and thereby possibly gain new perspectives. Has the Humboldt Forum so far succeeded in establishing such a culture of dialogue?

### The Self-Image of the Humboldt Forum

The Humboldt Forum presents itself on its website as ›unique spaces for learning, encounters and cultural exchange in the very heart of Berlin.‹<sup>8</sup> The experience-event vocabulary predominates here in a clarity that does not allow for Schlingensiefel's ambiguities. Visitors are to find ›surprising access to the collections‹ and are invited to ›Get involved!‹<sup>9</sup> But in what?

The invitation sounds a bit hollow and simply boring, since visitors do not really know exactly what they are supposed to get involved in. In general, one wonders to whom this invitation is addressed. Certainly not to the descendants of those whose objects are now in the Humboldt Forum. For it is precisely these descendants who are forbidden to stay where their works of art and cultural objects have civil rights – as the former Minister of Culture and Tourism of Mali, Aminata Traoré, so aptly remarked.<sup>10</sup> The description of the Humboldt Forum in a brochure, published on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the installation of the post of German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, is also not without its problems. ›Humboldt‹ stands ›for the tradition of the Enlightenment, for the idea of a self-confident, equal rapprochement of peoples, and for the ideal of peaceful dialogue despite all differences.‹<sup>11</sup> Wait a minute, ›peaceful dialogue‹? Not a word about power structures that force the narratives to be told here? Not a word about the refusal to engage in dialogue with critics such as the coalitions: *AfricAvenir*; ›No Humboldt 2!‹; and ›Berlin Postcolonial‹? Nor a self-critical admission that Humboldt's name, whose research certainly also benefited from colonial power relations, immediately underscores the power dispositive that is set here. Why not Benin Forum, for example? Above all, not a word about Prussia, which is to be inscribed here again prominently in the identity of Germany through the City Palace. Not a word about Bernhard von Bülow, who also demanded ›a place in the sun‹ for Germany, and in whom the Prussian King and German Emperor Wilhelm II had high hopes. With the Humboldt Forum, Berlin wishes to present itself as a cosmopolitan centre with a museum and exhibition concept that has little cosmopolitan appeal, because no real dialogue is sought here. Why? In the following, I will use five examples to show signs of a refusal to engage in dialogue.

8 Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, »What is the Humboldt Forum?«, in: *Humboldt Forum*, URL: <https://www.humboldtforum.org/de/faq/> [last visit on 13 September 2019].

9 Idem.

10 See: Aminata Traoré, »So genießen unsere Kunstwerke Bürgerrechte dort, wo uns allen der Aufenthalt untersagt ist«, in: *No Humboldt 2! Dekoloniale Einwände gegen das Humboldt-Forum* (Berlin: *AfricAvenir*, 2017), pp. 170–5.

11 Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (ed.), *Im Bund mit der Kultur. Kultur- und Medienpolitik der Bundesregierung*, information brochure, Berlin, July 2018, p. 21 [translated].

## Signs of a Refusal to Engage in Dialogue

### 1 Architecture and Urban Planning: Levelling Instead of Open Wounds

The aim is to close a ›wound‹ in Berlin's cityscape with the Palace, whereby this is historically linked to the period before the two world wars, namely the imperial era and the peak of colonialism.<sup>12</sup> Strands of memory are levelled here in order to close a wound that should continue to ooze until the causes for its emergence have been subjected to public criticism. In other words, not in an age in which a far-right political party comes close to winning a majority in various state elections.

The architecture itself counteracts a dialogue.<sup>13</sup> By relating different cultures of remembrance to one another in his rendering, Schlingensief suggests that a new palace can only succeed in a multi-perspective way. Even though this collage may hardly be considered a serious realisation design, it has one thing in common with the submissions of other renowned architects. He does not adhere to the strict specifications, according to which three sides of Andreas Schlüter's façade must be taken on completely, and only one side may be designed independently. This raises the question of why the architecture does not already specifically promote a multi-directional remembrance policy? This could have been taken into account in the invitation to tender for the architectural competition. An example of this is a concept by the British architect David Adjaye, whose construction of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016, is fundamentally characterised by an examination of African cultural history. While Kuehn Malvezzi's design, which only received the special prize, would have been much more dialogical and would have enabled organic development, Frank Stella's rationalist building with formal rigidity is the winner. To what extent a dialogue with the descendants of the formerly colonised is to be initiated remains questionable.

### 2 Cabinet of Curiosities Instead of Workshop

In his text *Die Wiedergewinnung einer Idee* (The Retrieval of an Idea), the art historian Horst Bredekamp justifies the necessity of displaying the ethnological collection in the former City Palace by referring to the *Kunstkammer* (art chamber) in the palace. The *Kunstkammer* emerged from the concept of the cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer*, in which various natural and cultural objects are brought together. However, this insinuates an exoticisation of the objects instead of a nuanced understanding based on a dialogical examination of them. Moreover, this is diametrically opposed to the original idea of the ethnological museum by Adolf Bastian, who wanted to arrange the objects in the form

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12 See: dpa, »Berlins Stadtschloss: Eine Wunde wird geschlossen«, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 April 2007, URL: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/berlins-stadtschloss-eine-wunde-wird-geschlossen-1434220.html> [last visit on 24 October 2020].

13 Although the art historian Peter Stephan insinuates that Stella thinks Schlüter's architecture further, I am sceptical about this. See: Peter Stephan, »Von Schlüters Schloss zu Stellas Forum«, in: *In Situ. Zeitschrift Für Architekturgeschichte*, vol. I, 1/2009, pp. 97–128, here p. 127.

of a scientific workshop in order to make it clear that, to be understood, they require an intensified dialogue.<sup>14</sup> Bredekamp's concept is based not only on the exoticisation, but also on the aestheticisation of the objects, which for the most part, however, originate from an everyday-life context. And the exhibition of fifteen highlights hardly contributes to a better understanding of indigenous cultures.<sup>15</sup> Rather, it is reminiscent of the *Schaukabinette* (cabinet of displays) that Adolf Bastian had already rejected. Instead, Bastian suggested that the objects should be dealt with as in a research workshop and that this blank space of knowledge about them should also be openly presented in order to encourage others to conduct further research. Instead, exhibitions such as *Vorsicht Kinder! Geschützt, geliebt, gefährdet* (Caution Children! Protected, Loved, Endangered) reveal a superficial arrogance that does not allow for a dialogue with the descendants. Instead, the objects are arranged arbitrarily for pseudo-societal themes. One alternative would be joint curating with descendants. One model could be the *Haida Now* exhibition at the Museum of Vancouver, which was developed in collaboration with the Haida Gwaii Museum and co-curated by the Haida curator Kwiahwah Jones and Viviane Gosselin.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, it is essential to make the depot of the collections exhibited at the Humboldt Forum (especially the Ethnological Museum) accessible to the public. Viola König, for example, already demanded this in an essay in 2011 and repeated the demand in her lecture in the context of the lecture series »Perspectives in the Plural« at the Technical University of Munich in 2018.<sup>17</sup> One model for this again comes from Vancouver, where the Museum of Anthropology makes its collection accessible in glass display cases instead of closing it off in the depot. This includes a digital disclosure of the holdings so that it is easier for descendants of colonised ethnic groups to assert restitution claims.

### 3 Cultural-Industrial Complex Instead of Expertise

The interconnection of the Museum of Anthropology with the expertise existing at the University of British Columbia could also serve as a model for the handling of the collections at the Humboldt Forum. There are already approaches in this direction, such as the newly founded Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage, which could be expanded. In addition, more staff at the Ethnological Museum would be needed to be able to deal more intensively with the origins and provenance of the objects and to enter into a dialogue with the descendants of indigenous peoples. Instead, however, the Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH, whose managing director Lavinia Frey has already

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14 See: for example: H. Glenn Penny, *Im Schatten Humboldts. Eine tragische Geschichte der deutschen Ethnologie* (Munich: Beck, 2019).

15 See: Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, »Humboldt Forum Highlights«, in: *Humboldt Forum*, URL: <https://www.smb.museum/ausstellungen/detail/humboldt-forum-highlights/> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

16 See: Museum of Vancouver, *Haida Now. A Visual Feast of Innovation and Tradition*, URL: <https://museumofvancouver.ca/haida-now> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

17 See: Viola König, »Die Konzeptdebatte«, in: *Humboldt-Forum. Der lange Weg 1999–2012*. Baessler-Archiv. Beiträge zur Völkerkunde, ed. by Viola König and Andrea Scholz, Berlin 2011, pp. 12–62.

made some missteps, was the main recipient of financial support.<sup>18</sup> While numerous new staff positions in the Ethnological Museum would be necessary for the conception of the collection and its reorganisation, such positions were only advertised for the Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH. Although the Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH no longer exists, since it was transferred to the Foundation in January 2019, the ethnologists remain understaffed. Dialogue is denied by a form of cultural industry that relies solely on spectacle and overwhelming instead of courageously opening up to multi-perspective scholarly debate. Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH propagated a politics of identity for German cosmopolitans, but this is expressed in little more than euphemistic gestures. A dialogue with critical perspectives is refused here in order not to disturb the event experience.

#### 4 Lack of Transparency Blocks Fair Dialogue

Looking at the organisational chart of the Humboldt Forum published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2017, it becomes clear that a self-referential dialogue is taking place.<sup>19</sup> The so-called ›Expert Advisory Board‹ has no voting rights, and it seems as if Black scholars have been included in the dialogue as stooges only at a late stage, but actually have nothing to say. Critical voices such as those of Kwame Opoku, for example, are not allowed to participate in the ›dialogue‹ or are only included relatively late. In this context, it should also be the task of feuilleton journalists to not only conduct interviews with the founding directors, but also to offer critics equal space for discourse. While Kwame Opoku publishes numerous essays on this subject in his own newsletter, critics like him have hardly had a chance to speak in public. On 15 September 2019, Niklas Maak once again pointed out the discrepancy in the funding structure between prestige buildings such as the Humboldt Forum and underfunded institutions such as Savvy Contemporary, which has everything ›that the Humboldtforum does not have in terms of post-colonial, intellectual, world-enlarging turbulence despite all the millions it has received.‹<sup>20</sup> More transparency of financial flows is called for here.

#### 5 Restitutions as a Sign for the Beginning of a Dialogue

In September 2019, ICOM proposed a new definition of the museum that emphasises the importance of museums working in a participatory and transparent way in active partnership with various communities, guaranteeing ›equal rights and equal access to heritage‹ for all.<sup>21</sup> This is precisely what the Humboldt Forum does not yet do. What

18 See: Jörg Häntzschel, »'Ganz nett', würden Besucher bei einem Provinzmuseum sagen«, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11 July 2017, URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/berliner-stadtschloss-gutes-muesli-schlechtes-muesli-1.3582470-0> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

19 See: Jörg Häntzschel, »Verstrickung als Prinzip«, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 November 2017, p. 11.

20 Niklas Maak, »Jenseits von Schloss und Scheune«, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 15 September 2019, p. 41 [translated].

21 ICOM, »Museum Definition«, in: *ICOM-international council of museums*, URL: <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

kind of symbolic politics is it, for example, if a boat that was ›bought‹ from the island of Luf (at the time, German colonial territory) is walled in at the Humboldt Forum and could thus only be restituted if the Humboldt Forum were to be at least partially demolished?<sup>22</sup> The Journalist Jörg Häntzschel has refuted the argument that the objects are better kept in German museums.<sup>23</sup>

In order to determine possible restitutions, an even more intensive dialogue with communities in the former colonies and descendants in the diaspora would have to be sought than is currently the case with the Benin Group. This would help both the curators in Germany and indigenous communities, who have praised the fact that objects from their own cultures can still be studied today thanks to the efforts of German ethnologists.<sup>24</sup>

Just as important would be targeted exchange programs with universities in the Global South for the mutual transfer of knowledge, possibly also including the Goethe Institut, as proposed for Humboldt in the context of the 250th anniversary celebration. Of immense importance would also be a reappraisal of the links between German colonial history and the racist ideologies that recur today. An exhibition analysing the connection between (neo-)colonial power asymmetries and migration movements would also contribute to a dialogue. However, instead of critically examining its own colonial past, the Humboldt Forum will open in 2020 with an exhibition on the indigenous OMAHA nation in North America.<sup>25</sup> OMAHA was never a German colony. Although the concept of partnership is being promoted here, partnerships would be relevant where it hurts most, namely with regard to restitution. There is a huge backlog demand here. A willingness to retribute would at least be a gesture that the much-cited dialogue at eye level is really taking place here.

### Summary

At the moment, it seems as if the main actors of the Humboldt Forum are refusing to participate in a dialogue in order to stabilise a German identity seamlessly based on the Enlightenment. As François Jullien noted however, this one identity does not exist, but only fluid forms of identification or resources. The Humboldt Forum would benefit from a multidirectional dialogue that critically examines various aspects of German history from other perspectives (beyond the narrative of a pseudo-cosmopolitan German cultural policy): colonial history as the precursor of a perfidious racism that culminated in Nazi terror and its racial mania. This is particularly relevant in the age of newly emerging

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22 See: Thomas Loy, »Das Südseeboot ist im Humboldt-Forum angekommen«, in: *Der Tagesspiegel*, 29 May 2018, URL: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/umzug-der-dahlemer-museen-das-suedseeboot-ist-im-humboldt-forum-angekommen/22619126.html> [last visit on 25 October 2020]. (13.09.2019).

23 See: Jörg Häntzschel, »Verseucht, zerfressen, überflutet«, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 9. July 2019, URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/ethnologisches-museum-raubkunst-1.4516193> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

24 See: Penny 2019 (see note 14), pp. 263ff.

25 Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, »We are still here. The Omaha speaking«, in: *Humboldt Forum*, URL: <https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/events/we-are-still-here-the-omaha-speaking-en> [last visit on 13 September 2019].



right-wing radicalism fuelled by populist parties. Here, the Humboldt Forum could learn from Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional politics of remembrance. Only when various cultures of remembrance are juxtaposed in a multidirectional way can new readings of history, or rather histories, open up and allow for a more in-depth examination of these. Only then could different narratives of remembrance be placed in relation to one another, as in Schlingensiefel's collage. There is no doubt that ambiguity and friction would arise, but it is precisely these that enable the Forum to develop its actual function as a platform for polylogue.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*



**Moderator Jörg Heiser**

**Jörg Heiser**

In preparation, I noted two quotes, and I have the feeling that they now fit well into the discussion. The first quote is from the philosopher Achille Mbembe, stated in an interview in June 2019: »The risk is that by restituting our objects without giving an account of itself, Europe concludes that, with the restitution complete, our right to remind [Europe] of the truth is removed. If new ties are to be woven, Europe must honour the truth, as the truth is the teacher of responsibility.« What do you think about this?

**Arlette-Louise Ndakoze**

Yes, there's nothing to add. It's like this: my statement, the very essence of my performance, is to ask why it should even be a question. That is my point of view. Because it is obvious.

**Sarah Hegenbart**

Yes, I agree that there is little to add. Perhaps one could add however, that there is not the one truth, and they are always truths that are then shaped by certain subjects. I think it is really important to try to do what I have attempted to emphasise with my lecture, namely to seek dialogue. You don't give something back and say: »It's finished, now we no longer need to talk about it again; case closed«. You must really look and ask: »What have we done there?« You work it through. I was very shocked when I returned to Germany from Great Britain in 2017 and found that my students here were not even acquainted with the term »post-colonialism«. Maybe you can't even blame them, because it's not taught in schools. But you have to insist that it becomes part of the Western curriculum. And this can be initiated by restitution. But it should not be completed – it should be the starting point.

**Thomas E. Schmidt**

Yes, Achille Mbembe is, of course, absolutely right when he says that this whole fuss about restitution in Europe, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, has something incomprehensibly self-righteous about it, because the *white* woman, the *white* man, can, of course, use it to buy themselves a clear conscience by packing everything into a container and throwing it at the feet of the Africans, so to speak. Let me get more to the point. The problem that concerns us today are the »new ties«, that is to say the new relationships he wants to establish quickly. And we in Germany are indeed very late in doing so, because we have suppressed this colonial history or overshadowed it in favour of our coming to terms with the Nazi past. We are a long way from having this anchored in our curricula, and now time is running out for us. Africa is impatient, and we have, so to speak, no dispositives, no institutions, no articulate counterparts that can enter into a new relationship with Africa today. All that is still to come, and that is why I call for institutions that offer common ground. It doesn't matter to me whether they are called round tables, conferences, or whatever. But this civic cooperation between Europeans and Africans has yet to be institutionalised. A lot of imagination and a great deal of money is still needed.

**Arlette-Louise Ndakoze**

May I disagree with you briefly? Because I believe there is much that needs to be corrected. There are many articulate counterparts, but there are many that are muzzled and many where one still insists upon the right to interpret them. That's the first thing. I let one of these voices have its say in my performance-lecture: Fatima Sy, Head of Cultural Mediation at the Musée des Civilisations Noires in Dakar, Senegal, who can convey a great many perspectives. It is said that there is no debate, but while we discuss this, there are artists in Senegal who continue to create, and we want to enable them to do so. We want to give them this space. There are very many points of view, and it's just very encouraging because it helps to regain control. The second thing is, we are far from embedding this in our curricula. Why? You can simply do something. Institutions can act on their own accord. It's still the case in Germany that those who continue to shape certain institutions that convey knowledge, like the University of the Arts, are marked by a resistance to so many ways of thinking, as well as by the notion that thinking was created here.

**Thomas E. Schmidt**

May I make a small correction, so that no misunderstandings arise? The complaint about the lack of articulation was not directed at the African side, but rather at the German side, which, beyond universities, beyond art programmes, beyond the Goethe Institute, must also involve individuals from political practice who can conduct these discussions. This must not be an aesthetic discourse, so to speak, or a purely academic exchange conducted by individuals. I would like to see an institutionalisation and, as I said, also a politicisation of the whole thing.

**Jörg Heiser**

Since University of the Arts (UDK) was just brought up, I would like to mention that the Institute of Art in the context of the UDK has the working group ›Decolonise M21‹ (M21 stands for Module 21, a planned exhibition segment in the Humboldt Forum), supervised by my colleague Kristina Leko as a teacher, in which a large number of predominantly Latin American students participate. In an artistic way, these students deal quite resolutely with questions regarding the restitution of cultural assets and the decolonisation of museums against the background of Latin America's colonial history.

**Arlette-Louise Ndakoze**

I know Kristina Leko very well. She also explained to me how it came about that the Humboldt Forum did not assume that there was a faculty or institute where there were students who were ›non-whites‹. ›Non-whites‹ in the sense of those who redefine and question Western thinking. That wasn't expected. I also took part in the research, in the works; I also sat with the students and made comments, and had a conversation with Manuela Fischer, the curator of the South American collection of the Ethnological Museum, in which she did not understand much about the points I was trying to make. But we did indeed enter into a dialogue, and I think that is very, very important. So, something is in fact happening – not because of, but nevertheless.

**Jörg Heiser**

Yes, something's happening. And this brings me to the second quotation that I want to share and discuss with you. It comes from the report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy for Emanuel Macron, which was published in 2018: Report on the Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. In this report, they oppose the concept of geo-cultural origin, knowing full well that this would by all means please European legal identities. »Hamady Bocoum, the director of the Musée des Civilisations Noires [Museum of Black Civilizations] in Dakar, is even of the opinion that the cultural heritage and legacy of African museums is not merely limited to African objects. Other civilisations must also be represented in African museums. Furthermore, as Benoît de L'Estoile has noted, the return of objects to Africa does not imply resigning them to a new form of an enslavement to a cultural identity, but rather bears the promise of a new economy of exchange.« This brings us, I believe, to the idea of multidirectional memory, that it is, of course, not a one-way street. Have I understood that correctly? Is it possible to interpret what Sarr and Savoy say here in reference to Bokoum and L'Estoile in this way?

**Sarah Hegenbart**

They always emphasise the concept of ›relational ethics‹, that is to say thinking very much in terms of relationships, dialogues and exchange, and in some cases, the idea of having something like ›shared heritage‹ has been toyed with, where it moves from one museum to the next, so to speak. But then again, the question is: is this fair? Yes, because I also see it more like this: If only ten percent of the cultural heritage is on the African continent, and your own youth cannot grow up with it, you first have to give it back and cannot say that we want to exchange it a little bit. Instead, you have to leave it there for the time being, and then you can consider Europeans asking politely whether they could borrow it back. But in general, I think the idea of exchange, dialogue, and relations is very important, which is greatly emphasised in the report.

**Thomas E. Schmidt**

I don't know; it goes without saying that European objects would then also be shown in the African museum. But this concept is – sorry – somehow very old, it's somehow post-war. Whether you call it multidimensional or not, the question is how to charge it with meaning. But the more consistently one thinks it through, the less relevant the question is as to where the property rights remain and why the property rights are such a fetish? So, to answer the question of who should own it: you can let the objects float, you can find intelligent solutions. I believe there are no limits to the imagination. That is why I don't see any conflicts of principle here. I believe that we can reach a pragmatic agreement.

**Arlette-Louise Ndakoze**

I would like to say something that is important to me. The views taken by Sarr and Savoy in their report are not new. Nor are the views on the concept of a museum new, and they are diverse. I mentioned briefly that there have been various speeches that have been made in institutions such as universities or forums, which have conveyed knowledge and thus also set the agenda. For example, there was a lecture by Edmund Husserl in

1935/36, when the Viennese Federation invited him to speak about the crisis in Europe. The lecture is ground-breaking, if one wants to understand what you said, that it would encourage the right-wing if one talked about a concept of culture that goes beyond regions or geography. Husserl's lecture is ground-breaking in helping to understand why European thinking was so strongly oppressive, and moving ever further in the direction of that one ›race‹, the ›white race‹. Husserl makes certain statements about what Europe is, and he says quite clearly that it is not necessarily located geographically, but rather mentally. There is Europe here and then there is the USA, and he excludes some of them.

**Jörg Heiser**

Eurocentrism, yes.

**Arlette-Louise Ndakoze**

Yes, but what I mean is that, now, it is not *geographically* set, but rather mentally. And you can look that up in Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of the mind. I wanted to say to what extent that which is called Europe is very much based on the ideology of a spirit, and if you want to open up today you should also open up what is sent out in spirit. You have to allow ideas from the outside, otherwise it won't work. To come back to the initial question: You can't just give something back and think that it's done; you have to really take in more perspectives.

**Jörg Heiser**

Thank you all for a very focused afternoon.

*Translation: Gérard Goodrow*

# Art Criticism and Society

## Panel 3

MODERATION  
CATRIN LORCH

HARRY LEHMANN  
KOLJA REICHERT





### Art and Art Criticism in Times of Political Polarisation

**Harry Lehmann**

Harry Lehmann explained the political polarisation of contemporary society as a ›CIPP model‹, in which a realignment of the party system takes place. While our party-political space used to be permeated by an economic conflict axis on the one hand and a cultural conflict axis on the other, and this was reflected in an arrangement of parties in a social to liberal and left to right spectrum, a transformation has taken place in the meantime. The new line of conflict between voters and parties now runs between the national and the global, the winners and losers of globalisation, who define and shape the economic and cultural fields differently for themselves. The political space is thus viewed by two groups of voters from such different perspectives that there is hardly any common basis left for the view of reality and the core problems that are jointly regarded as relevant.

In this situation, art and art criticism would be faced more than ever with the choice of spreading *politically* substantive messages and taking sides or *pre-politically* reflecting the upheavals »in the medium of perception and in the medium of the texts and thus also help to generate a new, sustainable self-description of society«.

### The Autonomy of Art is not the Autonomy of the Artist. Possibilities of Art Criticism in a Society of Singularities

**Kolja Reichert**

According to Kolja Reichert and Andreas Reckwitz, our social reality is full of ›singularities‹ – that is to say, unique events, works, persons, and identities – each of which signifies its ›own world‹ with its own criteria of evaluation, similar to a work of art, which is characteristically always open to interpretation, consequently also to appropriation and exegesis, appreciation, and devaluation. Politics today is also increasingly done aesthetically and with the help of culture and its allocation to certain identities. Instead of breaking down this initial situation with its strengths of describing decidedly *artistic* forms of expression, art criticism is increasingly becoming ›attitude criticism‹. Works of art are either treated as equivalent to other (digitally) circulating images or as expressions of opinion by their creators. According to Reichert, in both cases, the works are thus ascribed a decisive (image or opinion) power, which in turn can only be broken if the aesthetic interpretation of a work is defended against its (purely) political exegesis. Instead of reducing a work solely to a private, singular, or public, representative character, it is important to relate the specific manner of making an expression, the individual gesture, and even rhetoric within an artistic technique to the subjects and contexts of a work in order to concretise and open up the discursive debate.

Survey of the party landscape of political parties before the 2017 federal election in Germany with the *Federal Election Compass*

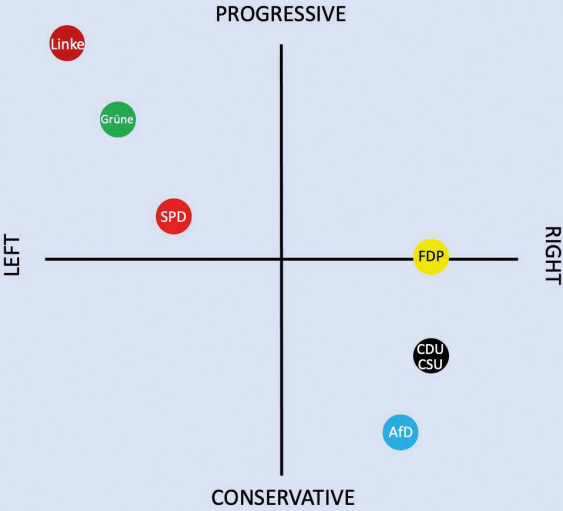


Diagramme 1

## *Harry Lehmann*

Within just a few years, the situation in the arts has changed dramatically. We all know the examples, pictures are removed from museums, poems are painted over, political criteria supplant aesthetic ones, and the freedom of art is no longer defended from the left but from the right, as Wolfgang Ullrich recently criticised in *Die Zeit*.<sup>2</sup> The question I wish to discuss here is what implications this politicisation of the arts has for art criticism.

My lecture will be divided into two parts. First, I will examine where this politicisation of society actually comes from, and why it has such a strong impact on the arts. Accordingly, I will begin with a political part and present a *Model of Political Space* that can be used to analyse the political situation in Germany in 2019. In the second part, I will then discuss the role of art and art criticism on the basis of this model. In this lecture, I would like to convince you that, as a result of the political polarisation of society, art and art criticism today face two diametrically opposed options.

### 1 Model of Political Space

Here, you can see the party positions for the German Bundestag election in 2017 as determined by the *Federal Election Compass* (diag. 1).<sup>3</sup> It is a representation of the political space in which we find ourselves in recent years. This Federal Election Compass is based on a standard model of political science, which consists of a coordinate system with two conflict dimensions – one economic and one cultural. Correspondingly, in this representation, there is both the typical left/right distinction on the horizontal axis and a distinction between progressive and conservative cultural attitudes on the vertical axis.

My initial thesis, which I derive from political science and sociological studies, is that in Germany, as in the USA and Great Britain, a *political realignment* is now taking place – that is to say, a reorientation of the party system in the political space in which democratic elections take place. Such transformations occur at intervals of several decades and are based on fundamental changes in the political attitudes of large groups

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- 1 This is a slightly revised text version of the lecture presented; I developed the model in more detail in: »Kunst und Kunstkritik in Zeiten politischer Polarisierung. Ein Kippmodell des politischen Raumes«, in: *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, no. 853, June 2020, pp. 5-21; available online at: <https://www.merkur-zeitschrift.de/2020/05/29/kunst-und-kunstkritik-in-zeiten-politischer-polarisierung-ein-kippmodell-des-politischen-raums/?fbclid=IwAR0YpwQdyCAP29GT4FgmrxIipBAQtsb0bklc6UcFrGDrOX5D67hVaOWjQZs> [last visit on 22 May 2021].
  - 2 Wolfgang Ullrich, »Auf dunkler Scholle«, in: *Zeit online*, 15 May 2019, URL: <https://www.zeit.de/2019/21/kunsthfreiheit-linke-intellektuelle-globalisierung-rechte-vereinnahmung/komplettansicht>; see also my reply to this: »Die dritte Option der Kunstfreiheit«, in: *Zeit online*, 28 May 2019, URL: <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/kunst/2019-05/rechte-kuenstler-kunsthfreiheit-autonomie-afd-konservatismus-demokratie> [both last visit on 31 October 2020].
  - 3 The graphic was adapted from: Niko Switek, Jan Philipp Thomeczek and André Krouwel, »Die Vermessung der Parteienlandschaft vor der Bundestagswahl 2017 mit dem Bundeswahlkompass«, in: *Regierungsforschung.de*, 5 September 2017, URL: <https://regierungsforschung.de/die-vermessung-der-parteienlandschaft-vor-der-bundestagswahl-2017-mit-dem-bundeswahlkompass/> [last visit on 31 October 2020].

of voters. They arise as a result of fundamental social transformation processes and are often accompanied by a generational change when a new generation of voters with different social experiences, expectations and values enters the political arena. The decisive indication that we are actually dealing with a realignment of the political system today is the successful emergence of right-wing populist parties.

The idea that I would like to present to you here is that the *political realignment* that we are experiencing today can be represented by a renaming of the two coordinate axes that span the two-dimensional political space. The new designations lead, in other words, to a reconfiguration of the political space. This results in two different coordinate systems, which can be used to represent the two political spaces between which we oscillate today. Strictly speaking, the effect of an ambiguous figure (Ger.: *Kippbildeffekt*) can be seen here, which is why I would like to speak of an ambiguous figure model (Ger.: *Kippmodell*). The two questions that first arise are: how was the political space configured in the last decades, and how has the meaning of these two coordinate axes changed in the meantime?

Since the 1970s, the political system in liberal democracies has been faced with the task of resolving or at least defusing two basic conflicts – one economic and one cultural. The *economic conflict* consisted in the fact that liberal democracies are based on a market economy that is, on the one hand, capable of generating wealth but, on the other

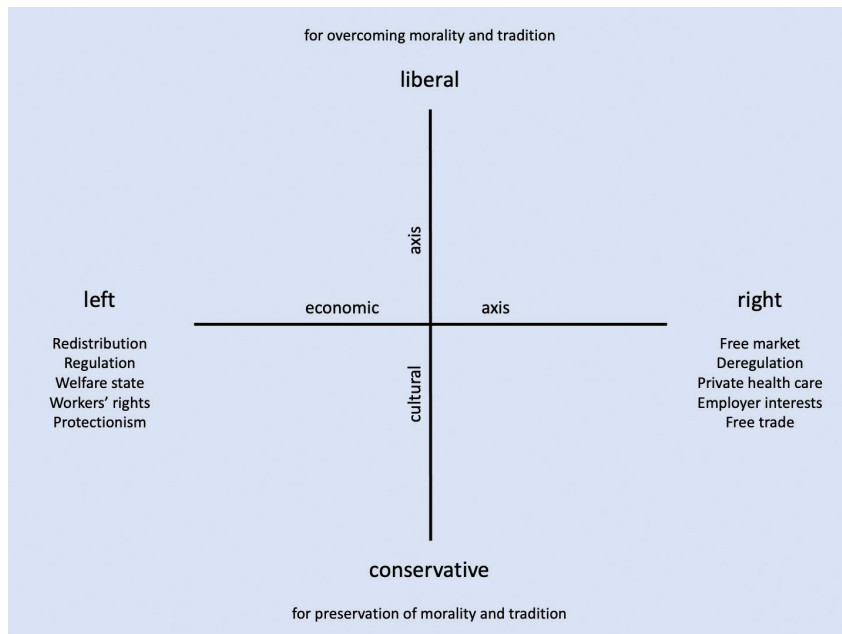


Diagramme 2

hand, distributes this very unevenly. This distribution conflict was represented in the political system by both left-wing and right-wing parties. The *cultural conflict*, in turn, unfolded after 1968 between those who had an interest in preserving tradition and morality and those who wanted to override and overcome traditional ways of life and traditional moral concepts. Democratic elections ensured that a majority in society could live with and accept both the given economic conditions and cultural changes. The political system of liberal democracies has thus had to solve a double optimisation problem over the last half century, between a social and liberal economic policy and a conservative and liberal cultural policy.

This is how the political space has been configured thus far (diag. 2). For more than ten years, however, political scientists have suspected that the political space in which we live is undergoing a serious and lasting transformation. Hanspeter Kriesi formulated the decisive thesis as early as 2006 when he wrote that a new structural conflict is igniting between globalisation winners and losers.<sup>4</sup> The questions that arise in this context are then: how do the axes of the political space change under these conditions? And what should they be called when first the voters and later the political parties begin to orientate themselves along this new line of conflict?

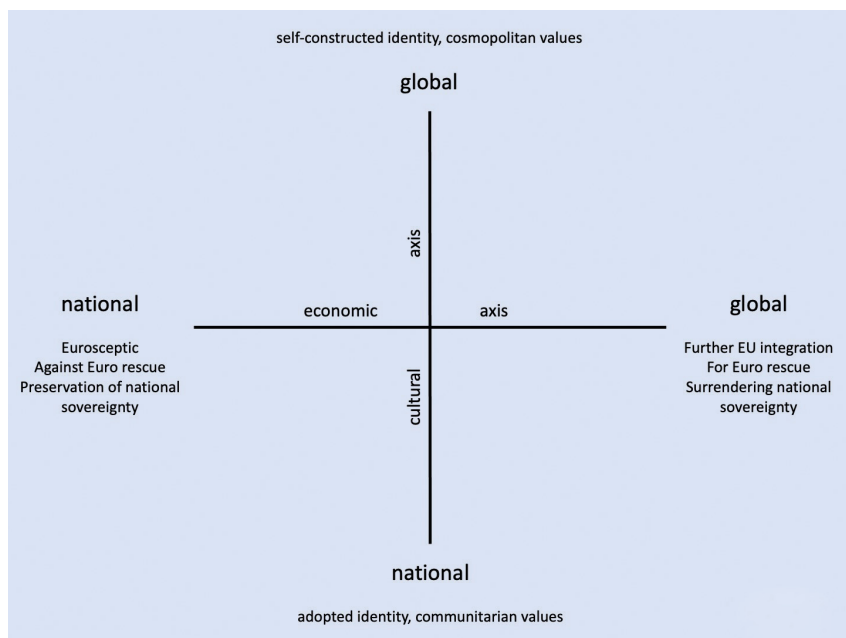


Diagramme 3

4 Cf.: Hanspeter Kriesi, »The Populist Challenge«, in: *West European Politics*, no. 37/2, 2014, pp. 361–78.

The left/right difference on the former economic axis is transformed by preferences for a national versus a globally oriented economic and foreign policy, of which the slogan ›America First‹ exemplarily marks one side of this newly established political distinction. National economies are increasingly determined by transnational factors – that is to say, by free trade agreements, labour migration, or a European financial policy. Due to globalisation, central economic issues are less and less decided at home. For this reason, in the European political context, a position that is critical of the euro and of Europe is establishing itself on one side of the economic axis, while on the other side a position that stands for a deepening of European integration, for a rescuing of the euro, and for free trade, is being consolidated.

The new cultural conflict on the vertical axis is no longer an intercultural conflict – that is to say, it no longer takes place between progressive and conservative attitudes in one and the same culture. Instead, it is now a globalisation-induced identity conflict between those who benefit from the new work and life opportunities in a globalised world, and those who remain rooted in a national culture and whose living conditions are deteriorating as a result of globalisation. The number one conflict topic where the spirits of the cosmopolitan and regionally-rooted, communitarian milieus differ most is that of migration (diag. 3).

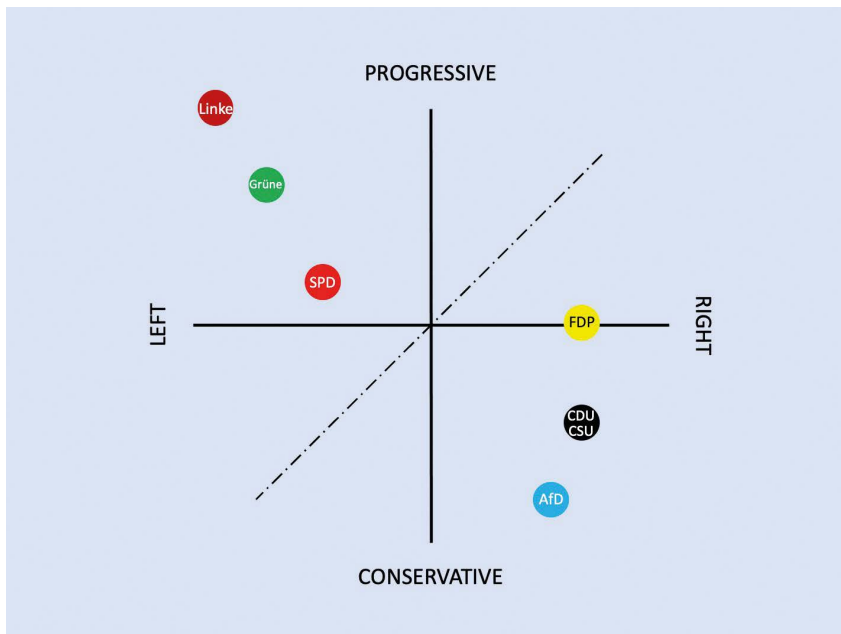


Diagramme 4

When the coordinate system changes in this way, a realignment of the political system occurs, as shown in diagramme 5. This graph is not calculated like the party positions in the Federal Election Compass (diag. 4), but is rather my own graphic projection of the party positions, based on the premise that this new line of conflict between the winners and losers of globalisation has developed in liberal democracies. Parties cannot define this line of conflict themselves but are forced by voter migration to successively realign their programs and personnel to it. In concrete terms, this means that, under these conditions, first of all the Linke, the SPD, the CDU/CSU, the Greens, and the FDP, all find themselves in the same quadrant in the upper right-hand corner, since they all stand equally for a transnational economic policy and for a transnational identity concept due to their pro-European preferences. The AfD is the only party that combines a national identity policy with a nationally orientated economic policy and strives to implement this program as a protest party with populist means.

Times of *political realignment* are extremely unstable and ambivalent for all parties involved, because one is in a transitional phase where two coordinate systems compete with each other, so that there are permanent ambiguous images in the minds of voters, party officials and political observers. This can be illustrated by switching back and forth between the two representations of political space (diags. 4 and 5). The inserted dotted

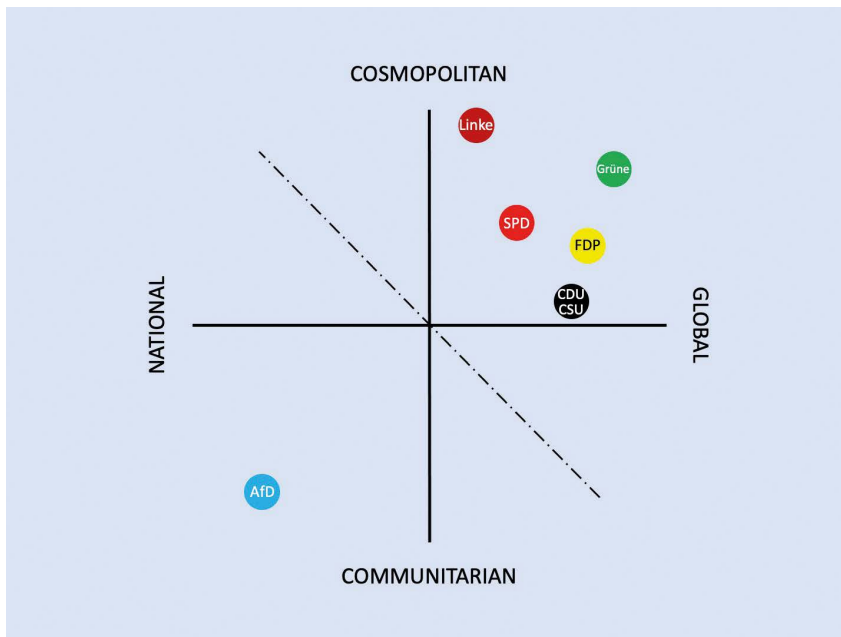


Diagramme 5

line of conflict, according to which the party system aligns itself binarily, rotates ninety degrees, and the parties no longer group themselves in the first and third quadrants but are now split between the second and fourth quadrants. In phases of realignment, the political space seems to be present in both versions of the discourse at the same time, switching from one to the other.

*Political realignment* brings forth entirely new political alliances. The Linke and the CDU are now on the same side of the line of conflict, while the Grüne and the AfD become antipodes, which also reach new voter strata due to the new conflict issues. Accordingly, the former major parties – SPD and CDU – are losing votes to these two parties. Moreover, the distinction between left and right, which was previously defined primarily along the economic axis, no longer functions; instead, the cultural axis is now becoming the primary axis of political debate. We are now dealing first and foremost with two contrary concepts of identity.

## 2 Art and Art Criticism in *Political Realignment*

So much for the first part, in which I outlined the CIPP model of political space. In relation to this model, I would like to, and can now discuss the question of what role art and art criticism can play in times of such a reorientation of politics. You are all familiar with the Böckenförde dilemma, according to which the liberal secularised state lives from preconditions which it cannot itself guarantee. If one modernises this dilemma somewhat and reformulates it in terms of system theory, then one could say that the political system in liberal democracies lives from self-descriptions of society that politics cannot produce itself. The political system in liberal democracies presupposes a minimum consensus on what the central political problems and conflicts in society are. It is only in relation to this social consensus that complementary political positions and parties can develop and compete with one another. The emphasis here is on *complementary*, because the political positions available for election must mutually complement each other and be recognised as legitimate positions.

Before the current realignment, that is to say before Donald Trump and Brexit (as well as, to a certain extent, the regional elections in East Germany in the fall of 2019), the basic political conflicts were clearly defined. The issue was a balanced relationship between free and regulated markets and an equilibrium between conservative and liberal values in Western democracies. Within this self-description, the political system operated in normal mode. Society was not polarised, and national populist positions such as those advocated by the AfD could be considered an anomaly.

If a *political realignment* takes place then precisely this self-image of politics is lost. There is no longer a consensus on what the central political conflict is that is up for election, and the political space is perceived by different groups of voters from two very different perspectives. As a result, political ideologies simultaneously construct the perception of what is regarded as social reality. The strong social polarisation during times of realignment occurs primarily because the conflicting political ideologies are no longer linked by an overarching social narrative. They are, so to speak, no longer embedded in a consensus of world views, and accordingly can no longer relativise each other. This loss of



a shared description of reality brings with it the strong political polarisation in which political opponents in democratic disputes increasingly perceive themselves in the friend/foe schema outlined by Carl Schmitt. The friend/foe schema is a typical indication that a society is in a phase of political reconfiguration, where the political crisis is ultimately also a crisis of worldview.

In such exceptional situations art and art criticism play a special role, because they can reflect the political upheaval in the works and in the texts about the works and thus also help to generate a new, sustainable self-description of society. Ultimately, art is capable of seeing the world »as it is« and thus to literally »see through« ideologies. Art does not do this however, in an abstract way like the social or political sciences, but rather carries out this reflection in many different fictional experiential situations. This is the provocation of art, namely – even in the politically extremely polarised times of realignment – to observe society beyond left-wing and right-wing world views.

Such art does not fulfil a political function, but rather a pre-political one. »Pre-political« does not simply mean »unpolitical« or »apolitical«, because such a pre-political art can by all means address political issues, whereby it then reflects the preconditions of the political in the sense of Böckenförde. Such »pre-political art« thus does not make a direct contribution to the political debate, but rather questions the conditions of the possibility of prevailing political attitudes and discourses.

Today, as mentioned at the beginning, a completely different development can be observed, namely towards an art that itself strives to become directly politically effective and that one would most likely associate with the label of »political art«. In times of strong political polarisation, it might be especially important to use a term that is as discriminating as possible. My suggestion is that one can speak of *political art* in a strict terminological sense precisely when art not only articulates a political conflict but also takes sides in that conflict.

The presence of this kind of political art, which has been observable for several years now, is probably unique in liberal democracies, which up to now have been guided by an ideal of autonomous art. I think there are two important reasons for the current politicisation of the arts. First, the artists themselves have become the avant-garde of a cosmopolitan way of life: they have become nomads in the global village and exemplify what it means to form a cosmopolitan identity detached from traditional ways of life.

Second, in recent years, artists have also reconciled themselves with the ideals of neoliberalism. We live more and more in a knowledge-based society, where creativity, border crossing, and openness have become central values of the working world and where the image of the artist merges with that of the entrepreneur. The *political realignment* of today thus catapults artists from their original outsider position into the position of globalisation winners, making it very difficult to be critical of society or capitalism – in the end, one moves in the same quadrant as the CDU and the FDP. With its concept of national identity, the AfD is a natural enemy under these conditions. It is this repositioning of artists as a social group that allows the political polarisation of society to spill over so strongly to the art scenes.

Art criticism today has two options, on the one hand it can write about political art, which, however, is not dependent on criticism. If the call to get involved is part of the essence of political art, then it cannot be interpreted. Criticism can at most bring the clear political message into text form and spread it further. On the other hand, art criticism can deal with art that operates in the realm of the pre-political, which reflects the conditions of possibility of political discourse and thus also makes its contribution to creating a new, problem-orientated self-description of society. Art criticism then makes its own genuine contribution to reforming the existing political space, and this art is also dependent on strong interpretations of criticism.

One example of this would be Ruben Östlund's film *The Square* (2017), which is particularly revealing for art criticism because its protagonist, Christian, is responsible for running a large museum of contemporary art. Here, fundamental questions of the grammar of our world view are negotiated, especially the relationship between openness and unity, between setting and crossing boundaries. Openness, as is repeatedly evident in this film, is not simply a positive value, as Christian and the social milieu from which he comes think in the spirit of the avant-garde; and the ideal of crossing borders has also apparently reached its limits. The film demonstrates this in relation to both art and life (of this museum director). I do not have the time at this point to go into this very enigmatic film in more detail, but you can find a lecture on my YouTube channel titled *The Politicisation of Art*, in which I analyse and interpret the individual episodes of *The Square* in detail.<sup>5</sup>

For art criticism, the times of *political realignment* – and here I come to an optimistic conclusion – are actually very exciting times, because in these moments, art criticism, with its texts on art, simultaneously contributes to the new self-description of society in a state of emergence.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*

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5 I don't have the time here to go into more detail about this very profound film, but you can find a lecture on my YouTube channel entitled *Die Politisierung der Kunst*, in which I analyse and interpret the individual episodes of *The Square* in detail; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6d2w8xp1NTA&t=864s> [last visit on 10 May 2021].

# THE AUTONOMY OF ART IS NOT THE AUTONOMY OF THE ARTIST. POSSIBILITIES OF ART CRITICISM IN A SOCIETY OF SINGULARITIES

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**Kolja Reichert**

With my lecture, I would like to make a plea for art criticism. This may sound somewhat redundant at a conference of art critics, but it seems to me that today it is crucial to rediscover the political power of precise observation and differentiation, at a time when, while we are still arguing about how politically effective which work of art is, politics and art have long since swapped positions.

Art criticism has a tendency to become a critique of attitudes and a distribution of speaker positions, who may say and show what and how? And politics, at least in the new populist logic as propagated by Steve Bannon, is made with culture; with simple offers of identity; with constructed and asserted identities purportedly derived from the past and natural prerogatives derived from these, but above all, and as a result of this, in offering a simple form in which followers and voters can experience themselves as authentic, vital, and self-effective.

## **Why is this so? Where does this identity boom come from?**

On the one hand, of course, through an infrastructural revolution, through smartphones and social media. Everyone is now a potential cultural producer and critic and has the chance to participate in the struggle for cultural interpretative sovereignty. This means that he or she is ultimately in competition not only with all the others, but also with the institutions that have thus far maintained and administered cultural hegemony, such as newspapers, television stations, theatres, and museums. Their power can no longer be taken for granted; it is constantly being challenged. This explains part of the moral furore that museums and artists have been experiencing the past three years – if you consider Hannah Black's open letter against Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* at the Whitney Biennial in March 2017 as the beginning of a new quality of iconoclastic controversy.

There is, however, also a more far-reaching explanation that is directly related to this, and this was delivered by the Berlin-based sociologist Andreas Reckwitz in his book *Society of Singularities*. There, he describes how, in what he calls »late modernity«, the logic of the general, as it determined modernism with its industrial society, is increasingly overlaid by a logic of the particular, the unique, the non-copiable, the non-exchangeable; he calls this singularity.

Singularities can be: famous people (for example, Michael Jackson or Kim Kardashian); atmospherically charged places such as Paris, San Francisco, or China; subcultures, for example the mod culture, which cannot be simply compared with the rocker culture under the register »subculture« because both produce their own complex role models and values. Then there are novels, festivals, rituals, events; the iPhone; and, of course, works of art. Works of art are the paradigm for singularisations.

Singularities are incommensurable; there is no common measure which could mediate between them. Singularities are created socially. Everything can become a singularity. And every singularity can also be de-singularised or negatively singularised, as has been tried with Kevin Spacey, Michael Jackson, Plácido Domingo, and Dana Schutz.

Reckwitz's model of singularities can be applied to the recent culture wars. Indeed, these can be described as wars for valorisation. Scandals play the role of negative celebrations. We find ourselves in an economy of aggressive cultural revaluation and devaluation, in which there is a struggle for positions within the cultural space, as well as for the power of valorisation in general, and thus for cultural hegemony. If it is true that these cultural wars are about singularisations, then they take place within a space without fixed coordinates. The old institutions maintain their power, but it is no longer given to them as a matter of course.

There are no criteria for singularities. Every singularity is its own world and insists on its own laws. This means that our social reality is interspersed with all kinds of unique things, full of their own complexity, which are as open to analysis, appropriation and interpretation, selection, revaluation and devaluation as works of art. At the same time, it can be observed that works of art are treated less and less like works of art. Instead, they are treated like other digitally circulating images – digital reproduction on the screen is the primary form in which works of art today assert their ›pictorial power.‹<sup>1</sup> It was also a digital reproduction in the case of the painting *Thérèse Dreaming* by Balthus, against which, in 2017, a petition was circulated by the art historian Mia Merrill. When I stand in front of the painting, the petition is not at all plausible to me. The painting cannot be reduced to a paedophile depiction, whereas the stamp-sized reproduction can. The work of art is thus treated like any other picture, but a bit more aggressively. Because it actually exists. It exists only once, it has its fixed place, and – this has always been the threat posed by the work of art – it lays claim to still existing in a hundred years' time. What will happen to our children if we do not contain its power?

But works of art are also increasingly being treated as expressions of opinion. When Axel Krause was excluded from the annual Leipzig exhibition, no one analysed his art. The debate revolved solely around the question of whether an artist should be excluded because of his political views. In her commentary, Catrin Lorch actually rejected the responsibility for viewing pictures: »Must one now take the trouble and – just because the painter is pushing right-wing theses – have a go at a rather trivial work with all the power of interpretation? [...] Krause's somewhat lame works are not really suitable for debate, have not been for decades.«<sup>2</sup> Lorch denies Krause the honour of art criticism. The analytical view. But at the same time, perhaps precisely because of this, Krause's political market value rises, simply on the level of image power. Through debate, his pictures have acquired a cultural market value. Although they do not represent much more than childish dreams of power of disposal over the history of European painting. They adorned, for example, an entire issue of the right-wing intellectual magazine *Tumult*, in which, in an essay, Krause also ruminated on the clichés of the solitary artist-hermit committed solely to art.

At this point, one can no longer speak only of political sentiment. It is precisely the consolidation of identification with a political camp that further enhances the cultural

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1 cp. David Joselit, *After Art*, Princeton, 2012

2 Catrin Lorch, »Schuld sind naive Kuratoren«, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung online*, 11.06.2019, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/leipzig-afd-kuenstler-ausstellung-axel-krause-1.4481118> (07.11.2020).

value of Axel Krause's art. But when Ana Teixeira Pinto, as in her lecture yesterday, shows and critically analyses an exhibition view of works by Mathieu Malouf, she can actually lower Malouf's pictorial power. It all depends on the constellation in which the pictures are shown. They are not simply what they are.

No one has made a detailed analysis of Banksy's *Love Is in the Bin*. And what happens then? Then it hangs next to Rembrandt in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. It is our task as art critics to strengthen the faith of the art historians at the Staatsgalerie in the value of their own work so that they do not succumb to the logic of the spectacle that can be measured solely in numbers.

In an essay published this spring in *Die Zeit*, Wolfgang Ullrich cautiously discussed Neo Rauch and his art in the context of right-wing thinking. A few weeks later, also in *Die Zeit*, Neo Rauch responded with the picture *Der Anbräuner* (The Brown-Maker), in which a painter releases his excrement into a pot and intercepts it with a brush to complete with the brown mass a crudely executed figure, under which is written in large letters: *W.U.* Expressionist jags hang down from the ceiling; behind the bare buttocks, the *TAZ* lies on a pile of newspapers, and a cheeky Adolf Hitler peeks in the window behind a shadow figure which functions as an eerie void. Title: *Der Anbräuner*.

In its anality, the picture is beyond comprehension. It seems as if the artist lacked the composure to sort out his material in peace. It is impossible to decide whether it is the painter who is sitting on the pot and painting the critic, or whether it is the painter on the canvas, who in turn cannot imagine the critic in any other way than as a painter, that is to say as a revenant of himself.

*Die Zeit* described *Der Anbräuner*<sup>3</sup> as a caricature, but in fact it is an oil painting of an opulent format, which Rauch submitted that summer to an annual charity auction in Leipzig to benefit a children's hospice. There, the real estate entrepreneur Christoph Gröne was disappointed that he could not find any more bidders at 550,000 Euros and added 200,000 Euros. He then explained that the picture would hang in the foyer of a yet to be founded ›Verein für gesunden Menschenverstand‹ (Association for Common Sense), which intends to provide ›objective data‹ on topics such as CO2 and migration.<sup>4</sup>

The real estate entrepreneur thus enhanced the value of this painting by purchasing it. This is a cultural act that has become possible at auctions over the last fifteen years, since these have been transformed from discreet salons into arenas of global attention. The real estate entrepreneur makes himself an advocate of artistic freedom through the power of his financial capital. He owns the singular *Anbräuner* by the singular Neo Rauch. And he even has common sense on his side and an overview of the objective facts. This is a highly political act, albeit with the means of culture. It is political as a result of its populist promise; the facts will soon be on the table, and they are culturally legitimised by a painter who is on the right side, without it becoming clear who is actually standing here on which side of what. Ullrich's analytical view no longer plays a role in the result. The discussion on

3 <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/neo-rauch-gemaelde-der-anbraeuner-fuer-750-000-euro-versteigert-a-1279415.html> (Last 31 March 2021)

4 See: Kolja Reichert, »Kunst, Markt, Geld«, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 27 September 2020, p. 36.

art is smeared in the shit of the privately personal. But this is the object of speculation for a radically public manoeuvre. It is not about the intrinsic logic of the image, not about what it is, but about speculations on its political meaning. Did Wolfgang Ullrich's criticism contribute to the creation of this political meaning in the first place? I believe so.

What do we do with the fact that Neo Rauch and the real estate entrepreneur are now the advocates of artistic freedom? While in art and art criticism, artistic freedom is currently constantly being weighed up against the concerns of subjects and groups who are allegedly victims of the exercising of this artistic freedom, or who have never benefited from the blessings of artistic freedom? It is perhaps crucial to uphold that which distinguishes artistic endeavour from the efforts of politicians, activists, and philosophers, but it is rather the opposite that happens. The work of art is reduced on the one hand to its private character – here is this unique person or social group, and we need to hear his or her story, this was done at the last *documenta*. And on the other hand, the work is reduced to its public character – who says what where and when?

However, what is decisive about the work of art, namely the difference it introduces, thwarts both the private and the public. It is up to art criticism to work out its inherent logic, to introduce the difference. To support autonomy does not mean simply to invoke artistic freedom. It means sharpening one's sense of what is at stake in the work of art, which cannot be reduced to something already known, an existing identity. As far as works of art are concerned, we indeed need as many singularities as possible. If, on the other hand, art criticism is limited to the allocation of speaker positions, then it gives up on art. Art then becomes stale, meaningless, and empty. It capitulates then to the general cliché that art is about allowing anyone to express what he or she thinks. Of course, this must be possible, and one must fight to maintain this possibility, but if art criticism exhausts itself in this, it loses its meaning.

We must repeatedly demonstrate why it is worth defending one work of art against another, and the aesthetic exegesis of the work of art against its political one.

The provocation of the painting *Open Casket* by Dana Schutz may not have been primarily that, as a *white* artist, Schutz dared to paint a picture of an icon of the Black Civil Rights movement, but rather in how she did it, namely, as a celebration of the power of painting to control its means and its responsibilities. Schutz buried the original gesture of Emmett Till's mother – the gesture to publicly exhibit the massacre of her son by racists. She buried this gesture under a strange blob of paint that bulged out of the picture surface.

Hannah Black's political argument that Dana Schutz cannot do this because she is *white* and because she is rich must be rejected, but her rejection of the image must be made useful. It helps to give meaning to art and debate, to give it a meaning in the first place, for it helps to understand the meaning of each individual painterly decision in interaction with its subject. It is about this specific task, about the removal of political abstractions, the path to the concrete, the concrete relationship between artistic material and people.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*

**Moderator Catrin Lorch**

**Catrin Lorch**

Harry Lehmann, your lecture was about the fact that art has become so politicised that we actually negotiate politics when we talk about art. Or, that it is suddenly possible to talk about art and, in doing so, to talk about politics; whereas Kolja Reichert's position, in contrast, is that singularity is also anchored in artworks or an entire oeuvre. But where the discussions themselves were concerned, it quickly became clear that we are talking very much about people. The debates about Michael Jackson and Plácido Domingo, for example, are not about the content of their works, but about personal transgressions. Here, we are actually always talking about the singularity of an artist. And now I see a friction between the two positions and would like to ask how one can perhaps build a bridge between them?

**Kolja Reichert**

Yes, that's true, people are always talking about names and authors. Personalisation is the dominant form. Society is no longer a productive frame of reference, so to speak. Today, everything is dealt with via profiles, faces, and people. But no one stops us from zooming out and putting the people in context with what is happening. A criticism like Hannah Black's of Dana Schutz, that the painting *Open Casket* is inadmissible because Dana Schutz is *white* and rich and has no right to use an icon of the Black civil rights movement – such a politicised argument must of course be rejected. But you cannot simply reject it by proclaiming 'artistic freedom!'; you have to look at how Dana Schutz made this picture, that she recreated the massacre of the fourteen-year-old boy by racists in the 1950s almost sculpturally with paint in a colourful self-celebration of painting, where, in the place of the massacred face, the paint is then once again virtuously applied as a swelling into the space. Klaus Speidel was the first to explain in classical, level-headed, calm art criticism, what was wrong with this painterly gesture. And then, suddenly, the person is only a node in the discussion.

**Harry Lehmann**

My concern was to show that the politicisation of art is dependent on the social transformation processes that lie behind it. It is therefore also a plaything of these transformation processes. That was the first point. And the second was that, in the constitution of the works and of art, one can still make a difference, whether art, like such political art, is directly involved in the political debate or whether these works are about something that underlies the processes of political transformation. I wanted to make this difference visible.

**Catrin Lorch**

But does that work? After all, you also demanded that a more discriminating term be introduced.

**Harry Lehmann**

Of political art, yes.

**Catrin Lorch**

Which sounds like it was something new. But if I look back, for example, to the founding of the Green party by Joseph Beuys, how does that differ from what happens today when artists actively found NGOs and are active in them with or as part of their art? Take Jonas Staal, for example, who is designing a parliament building for the Kurdish autonomous government in Rojava.

**Harry Lehmann**

In my opinion, art now operates in a completely different mode. In the twentieth century, art history could be written according to an inherent logic, a logic of material progress and the dissolution of the boundaries of the concept of art. This resulted in a parallel world: art had its own logic and was judged according to this, and beyond that one could still be politically active, as Beuys was. And whoever wanted to, could then make the connection. And those who didn't want to do so simply accepted Beuys as an important milestone in art history. Things are different today, the progress of materials, the dissolution of the boundaries of the concept of art, and all the inner-aesthetic criteria in general have been exhausted; in a certain sense, art has become postmodern. Then you need new criteria for innovation, which is no longer produced through aesthetics, through aesthetic material, but rather through new aesthetic contents. And there is now the alternative – and here the option is hands-on, so to speak – that one also becomes directly involved in politics, and there is no longer any misunderstanding. Then the works come across directly with their political statement, without one being able to judge them differently from an art-historical point of view.

**Catrin Lorch**

What would be an example of such art?

**Harry Lehmann**

The Centre for Political Beauty does something like this.

**Kolja Reichert**

I see a fundamental difference between us. What you are describing sounds to me like another developmental story or finalism: art has exhausted its possibilities of creating difference or concreteness or its own logic. Now it must speak the language that everyone understands. That makes my hair stand on end.

**Harry Lehmann**

No, that was not the point. It is not the language everyone understands that has changed, but the criterion of innovation. In the twentieth century, innovation was created through new aesthetic material, through the dissolution of the boundaries of the concept of art. That was an art-immanent logic. When this is exhausted, there is still the possibility that art refers time and again to the social context in new ways. And this can, of course, be made more or less complex and more or less clear and more or less politically engaged.



**Kolja Reichert**

But this is something that is achieved, as in the past, through the choice of forms and materials. I have always experienced innovations. For example, this permeable, immaterial lightness with which Arthur Jafa stages his things, which insist on identity and thus create a new friction, which frame Black identity in a completely different way and above all encircle *white* identity in a highly exciting way and define it from the outside. That's where a kind of innovation takes place. And that's where it all comes down to how the things are edited and what he appropriates. But, of course, the subject is then identity. In this respect, I would meet you halfway by saying that innovation is produced through the object. But the formal means are already decisive. Like Nicole Eisenman, for example, who works in a similar way to Neo Rauch, but the images are so open. This is not only because, in her paintings, women love each other, but also because the choice of colour is incredible. The precision in the materials, this bright, almost sober inclusion of, for example, a desktop background of a computer. How the things are interconnected there. And it may be that the unique selling proposition that an intrinsic logic is asserted in art is lost; and today, intrinsic logic is really being created everywhere. But art is, I think, the place where this can become concrete, and art criticism is the place where this concreteness can be articulated, where, basically, the present can be regained by agreeing on what is really there. You described that earlier.

**Catrin Lorch**

What I missed in both lectures was that perhaps not only the art discussion has changed, but that the fact that the person of the artist has become more important is also intertwined with the emergence of the new media. As a result of which the authority of art criticism suddenly finds itself in a completely different position to a blog that posts Michael Jackson and has an opinion about it. To what extent does this not perhaps stir things up, both in the discussion about Axel Krause and about why art might suddenly take up political positions much more strongly or much more actively than before?

**Harry Lehmann**

That is of course true, the shift in media is changing the art world. What is decisive is that it democratises the art world and also leads to a strong de-institutionalisation of, among other things, art criticism, because many more people can talk about art directly. This creates a new competitive situation, that's true. Perhaps one could already say: if there had not been a digital revolution there would not be such a politicisation of art.

**Kolja Reichert**

Yes, I think so too. The relationship between concrete place and addressee has become so frenetic, and perhaps this explains why arguments are always so inquisitorial, so martial. After all, the argument about a mural in a school in Chicago could potentially take place anywhere in the world. And it affects everyone, so the stakes are always absolute in advance and are suddenly in conflict with each other. But if you agree that the crucial thing is to defend good works of art against bad works of art, then you get back a little bit of freedom, which in this frenetic logic allows you to stand still and find a *common*

*ground*. The fact that one gets out of these political oppositions, which in their logic of contradiction – right-wing artist, left-wing artist, right-wing artist – simply increases the whole thing immeasurably. This can only be achieved by a subjective setting, and this can happen on a blog just as easily as it does in a newspaper. In any case, the written word finds itself in a certain competition. Today, image power is stronger than the argument. But I think that even if fewer people read long texts to the end than in the past, the joy and clarity and sovereignty that one creates when writing is very great. And the power that you can usurp is also great enough to completely break through financially legitimised positions such as Banksy or Neo Rauch.

### **Catrin Lorch**

Whereby I would also like to doubt that there are actually fewer readers of long texts than before. It's just that those who prefer to read short texts have suddenly become more visible. We have here an audience full of art critics who are equally involved in precisely these issues. Do we have a microphone for the audience?

### **Thomas Sterna**

I am not a critic, but rather an artist. I recently had an argument on Facebook with a friend who said that Neo Rauch's *Der Anbräuner* is a problematic painting, but it is well painted. But because it's actually only posted on Instagram or Facebook, I can't really tell if it's a good painting or not. I became preoccupied with this issue, namely to what extent problematic content can be well painted.

### **Kolja Reichert**

I am sure that is possible, and *Der Anbräuner* is, of course, a particularly apt case for discussing what is meant by ›well painted‹. On the level of the combination of motifs, I find it poorly painted. Because it is simply chock full of polemics. Nothing is thought through to the end. What is the relationship, for example, between Adolf Hitler, who looks in so boldly at the window, and the painter or the figure? What does this pile of newspapers behind the painting critic stand for, with the leftist daily newspaper *taz* on top? It seems to me to be no more than a collection of material. When it comes down to that, what is the brushstroke like? I only saw the reproduction, but I was appalled at how sloppily I found it painted. How the unwillingness to give the opponent's face a form is shown by this strange, pocked, dissolving facial skin. So, for me, nothing really fits together in this painting.

### **Harry Lehmann**

I would imagine that that is exactly what is intended. After all, it was not at all intended to be part of a cycle of works. It was a highly political, polemical response, because Neo Rauch obviously felt very offended that he was now being associated with right-wing politics. That's why I think that, from the beginning, this was not intended as a painting that would stand up to the highest standards of art criticism. It was a political act.

**Catrin Lorch**

Is it conceivable that artists say: ›I paint this picture this way because I'm in a bad mood, and I paint that other picture for my oeuvre?‹

**Harry Lehmann**

Sure, why not? It is, of course, quite obvious from the context.

**Thomas Kuhn**

I wonder if we can broaden the discussion about the singularity of the work of art, or the politicisation of art by reintroducing an older distinction that has to do with two very different, competing definitions of culture. On the one hand, there is an anthropological understanding of culture, in which culture is everything that a group of people do: their cuisine, their clothing, their gestures, their language. And on the other hand, there is the description of culture by the Enlightenment. It even goes back to Johann Joachim Winckelmann, where culture means the transcendence of the particularity of a group of people and their forms of expression. So one way of understanding the present moment might be to think about the critic as someone who has to articulate an attitude in his own understanding of the role of culture: what part of culture does a critic explain? To play the devil's advocate for a moment, it might be perfectly legitimate for me as an individual to claim that the culture I want consists only of the works that are the expression of my people, my group, or my singularity.

**Kolja Reichert**

I am very glad to hear you say that, because you point to the central weakness of my contribution. I was aware of this, and I think it is really central to analyse the relationship between these two notions of culture – the more cultural-scientific view and the enlightenment understanding of an autonomous work that transcends identity, this is a *fait social*, as Adorno calls it.

But it is really difficult, I think. It is more difficult to do this than it was ten years ago and certainly more difficult than it was fifty years ago. Because we see how much art becomes ›tokens‹ in these identity struggles. So again, to come back to the example of Arthur Jafa – I think his work is amazing and fantastic – it is fast, it is poignant, it is sharp, it is good autonomous art. But one of the reasons is the choice of his material – namely the politics of identity. In a way, he transcends this identity politics. But where is his work located between these two notions of culture? I think that is really difficult to say. This is a point I would like to continue working on.

**Harry Lehmann**

I would like to add that, in such phases of political re-alignment art criticism itself must also conduct a kind of self-reflection. It has to make sure: what are the criteria by which art is judged today? How has the social system of art changed? These are all meta-reflections that are part of the process of getting back into calmer waters. Because many disputes are also empty arguments. They have nothing to do with art. They do not open up the works. It is pure polemics, they are political positionings. It is understandable why

this happens, but it is precisely in this situation that a meta-discussion is needed: What are the criteria, what has changed, where do you actually stand within art history? I think these questions are important.

**Liam Kelly**

Harry Lehmann mentioned today that political art takes a certain side. And in fact, yesterday, Oliver Marchart did indeed associate political art with propaganda. Over the years I have been interested in writing about artists who are socially and politically active, and working with them curatorially. In their works, which are usually multi-layered, these artists agitate and provoke and ask questions about political issues, for example. But they rarely offer solutions to a problem. They leave it up to the viewers or participants to bring their own cultural and educational ›luggage‹. And they believe strongly in the principle that art does not fill a given space. That art finds its own space. And I don't think that the critical distinctions between ›good‹ and ›bad‹ will return, like the word ›beauty‹.

**Harry Lehmann**

I think that what you describe is exactly right. Of course, political issues can be used to articulate predetermined breaking points. I just think that art becomes uninteresting and redundant at the moment when it clearly positions itself politically. I think it is important to make a distinction, and that is why I have introduced this clear-cut concept of political art. It articulates a political conflict, and beyond that, it positions itself clearly; it takes sides. Then the ambivalence you speak of is no longer there. But you can articulate exactly the same issues in art by pointing out the ambivalence in relation to these political positions and standpoints. And here, art can make its own contribution.

**Catrin Lorch**

I think it would help us if we were to talk very specifically about concrete works of art. We could clarify a great deal. That would easily be another hour that we don't have. But I would be happy to continue this on another occasion.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*

# The Public and the Popular

## Panel 4

MODERATION  
ALEXANDER KOCH

PAUL O'KANE



**The Carnival of Popularity: Wrestling the Popular from Populism*****Paul O'Kane***

Paul O'Kane is a critic, musician, and author. In both his practice and his lectures, he connects criticism and popular culture; in doing so, he stands for a perspective that knows and reflects class struggles and seeks a dissenting voice, with which the power of the popular opposes the calls to power of populism. O'Kane presents the carnival – or, more methodologically speaking – the carnivalesque as a historical form of cultural production ›from below‹ and asks about the possibilities of transferring carnivalesque practices into today's culture and class struggles. In addition to cultural-historical examples, concepts by thinkers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Rancière and Walter Benjamin are also brought into focus. Finally, the question arises as to whether carnivalesque strategies are also suitable for an art-critical practice, and whether they are advisable to position the popular against the populist.



Fig. 7: Old Norse Vikings Festival, Shetland Islands, *BFI* Filmstills, 1927



**Paul O'Kane**

What do I mean by the title, *The Carnival of Popularity*? And how exactly does it fit with the theme of our congress? *The Carnival of Popularity* grew up around a single initial stimulus. It was a 1.5-minute film clip, from 1927, found on social media, showing a pageant or carnival conducted by Shetland Islanders in a poor, rural community in the far North of the British Isles.<sup>1</sup> What made me write about, around and in response to this clip was a certain hunch or intuition that here might lie some clue, maybe even some possible solution, to one of the biggest cultural and political problems facing us today, i.e. the erosion of a once progressive and optimistic, post WW2 model or ideal, of an increasingly mobile, multicultural and international society, the threatened collapse of that ideal into today's increasingly divided societies. I'm talking about the corruption and diversion of democracy's promissory trajectory by the rising forces of populism. I'm talking about trying to rescue that trajectory.

Thinking along these lines it seemed to me that we might need to wrest or rescue popularity, pop, and the popular (in all of which artists have a stake) from populism, and so we might first try to distinguish the popular from populism.

We could perhaps claim, with some confidence, that democracy is popularity, with the rule of the people, *by* the people – the populace – at society's heart. Artists meanwhile surely have something to say about popularity, as they/we variously, avidly and artfully, either cultivate popularity, or treat it with a kind of *avant-garde* disdain while surreptitiously and simultaneously courting it, perhaps even becoming popular by making unpopular art.

*Populism* however is *not* democracy, we are quite sure of that. It reminds us too much of fascism – the enemy, the nadir, the flip-side or antithesis of democracy. And yet, both Populism and fascism (are they the same thing? is one a prelude to the other?) clearly *exploit* popularity, as did the German National Socialists when organising the *Degenerate Art*, and *Great German Art* exhibitions in the late 1930s, which remain, I believe, the most ›popular‹ art exhibitions in the entire history of art exhibitions. However, we also know Nazism's ›popularity‹, and thus the apparent ›success‹ of those exhibitions, was achieved by cultivating collective fear and hatred, and by suspending and overriding democracy.

In the video clip of the Shetlands parade, it is crucial that everyone is masked, costumed, or both, and is thus in some way acting as other than their usual, ›real‹ or authentic self. Soldiers, signed-up to serve a nationalist ideology, also dress-up in uniform, and in this way surely set-aside or repress some aspects of personal identity. But one promising aspect of the ›Shetlands‹ parade is that, despite evoking and mimicking the militaristic attributes of a uniformed march, it is always parodic, hyperbolic, fanciful and playful, never threatening or violent.

This might then suggest an extended, amplified, or fanciful version of democracy, in which it is no-longer ›the people‹ who rule, but their masks, their costumes, their play.

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1 See: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1943763908999092>

It is a *mask-ocracy* in which costume, art, play, mischief, difference and *misrule* rule – at least for a day. Any allegiance demonstrated here, is neither to personal authenticity nor to national identity. Any allegiance in this parade is rather an allegiance to fun, art, play, and carnival.

Through greater acceptance of the fluidity, uncertainty and unknowability of identity (both personal and collective); and by detaching identity from any devotion or aspiration to authenticity, we might begin to glean, regain or reclaim a more promissory and progressive alternative to the society in which currently, and, it seems, increasingly, ›we‹ or ›people‹ seem all-too willing to identify ourselves, or themselves, in immutable terms, i.e. as one thing and not another, as one nationality, race, gender, colour, sexuality, class, age etc. and not another (that way lies war), while, correspondingly identifying others all-too rapidly as immutably other.

Today, when we talk about populism, fearing that it is a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of, or *entrée* to fascism, the ›we‹ in this sentence tends – I suspect – to be a middle-class perspective (the perspective of people, ›we‹, who would accept that they, or ›we‹ could justifiably be described as such). Meanwhile the populists that this ›we‹ fears, tend to be, either themselves working class, or maverick members of higher classes who are in some way manipulating, pandering to, and reliant upon groups of working-class supporters, to achieve greater positions of power and influence.

Thus, hopes of a peaceful conciliation, of a middle-class / working class divide, a divide that has lingered in our democracies ever since 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutions began to promise a more equal, fair and just modern world, may today seem further away, less attainable than ever. And this, despite the efforts of the noble arts to ›reach out‹ across the class divide, to ›open their doors‹, provide opportunities, educate, include, regionalise, pluralise etc.

However, it shouldn't be forgotten that, as I state at the very start of a previously published version or chapter of this enquiry:

»...Professional artists and art critics might assume that art has a progressive influence on wider society, but it is difficult to deny that the evaluation of art also plays a significant role in establishing and maintaining class divides.«

The image of the Shetland Islanders' pageant interests me because it does *not* represent a potentially patronising image of a relatively privileged, but possibly misguided middle class, sharing the relative abundance of its particular brand of ›cultural capital‹ with those less fortunate than itself. Rather, the Shetlanders' pageant seems to show a long established, we might say ›classless‹ tradition, and one that does not appear institutionalised, other than on its own traditional terms.

Just as it obscures or obfuscates class divides, this masked and costumed pageant, parade or carnival also eradicates the division between art and life (Bakhtin called carnival a ›theatre without footlights‹) and provides an example of a kind of art that resides at the heart of a community.

This of course requires a community that still *has* a heart, and in this clip, in this parade, we see a community that is perhaps yet to ›have the heart ripped out of it‹ by the

voracious 1980s, 90s and noughties globalisation and financialisation of local, vernacular, traditional and national economies.

If we return to the political and cultural disaster that many say (and that ›we‹ say) is facing our societies and nations today under the sign of Populism, what ›we‹ or I, might be trying to say here is that, given the models and examples above, we might begin to see that one way forward for the aforementioned ›we‹ – i.e. the relatively privileged and self-assured middle classes, whose art and culture has resided, structurally and formally at the heart of its very own ›modernity‹ for over 200 years now – might be to look for ways, possibly uncomfortable, to begin to cede, relinquish, and exchange, power, territory and status with, and to, other cultures, but always, ethically and holistically including, if and however possible, *all* other cultures, i.e. including (given the ethical model of a holistic aspiration, as per the universal declaration of human rights), including those we *least* relish embracing.

Only a truly *holistic* politics, culture and philosophy will ever satisfy our commonly expounded aspirations to universal peace, equality and justice.

But from where does this universal vision, this progressive aspiration arise? Perhaps in the ancient tradition of carnival itself. And how will it ever be delivered? Again, perhaps only through and *as* carnival.

In its evocation of a wholesale relativism, carnival implies or suggests, in temporary, symbolic form at least, the *possibility* of a fair, just, and happy society in which all – albeit costumed and masked – encounter and embrace all.

To aspire to this holistic relativist vision, our ›we‹ needs to cede, relinquish and exchange, not in a patronising, ›door-opening and sharing‹ manner, but in some more substantial, reciprocal demonstration of our ultimately equal status as human beings who do, and must all have the same basic rights; rights which are perhaps the greatest progressive achievement of all of our modernity's achievements.

This might also involve a demonstrative acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the temporary settlements with which, and by means of which, the formative modern revolutions (themselves perhaps embodiments of carnival) of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, concluded. Those great revolutions, like so many wars, ended or resolved themselves by establishing crude borders drawn between peoples; including class, economic and cultural borders that are every bit as unsatisfactory as physical, land and geographic borders, and all of which seem bound to produce further, subsequent anguish and conflict until the day when – again, given a holistic ideal – those borders are finally erased.

Today, those modern revolutions and their legacies smolder on, their flames easily fanned by populists, their grievances inadequately assuaged by progressive political representation. We see them carry on, in stuttering, spluttering, newly complex and confused forms, evidenced by the hi-visibility ›*gilets jaunes*‹ in France, but also by *all* the socio-political turmoil currently coming from Left, Right and Center almost wherever we look in the world.

If we begin to conclude now by returning to the image of the Shetlands parade, we have to assume that what is depicted there is *not* a modern phenomenon but rather a pre-modern, possibly ancient tradition. This might, in turn, suggest that possible solutions to

today's increasingly stark class and cultural divisions may lie in the as-yet under-explored archives of the early modern and pre-modern past. There, myriad ideas and images, capable of making unexpected suggestions, have had decades, or centuries, to marinate unseen, and thereby develop their special ability to surprise and inspire possibility today.

Mikhail Bakhtin seemed to think as much when, writing in the Cold War climate of a nervous and stultifying Soviet Union, he may have implicitly embraced and promoted the model of carnival as a pre-modern alternative to achieving equality, alleviating *inequality*, or at least providing a pressure valve by means of which to make an apparently intrinsic and inevitable *inequality* more tolerable and endurable.

In doing so, he inadvertently, yet presciently and precociously, suggested a future society in which the division between work and play might itself become a ›thing of the past‹, along with those divisions between the modern classes founded upon, and maintained precisely by work – the nature of work, the price of work, the rewards of work, the value of work.

And today we already hear increasingly about a ›basic minimum wage‹ and a ›post-work society‹.

If we look, one last time, at the clip of the 1927 Shetland Islanders parading and performing in their masks and costumes, we might then see there, *not* the past, but some vision of a possible future, where and when art and politics, art and life, the working and middle classes are subsumed by and into a more playful and collective life and art, a way of pursuing art, culture, life and politics in which entrenched, ›true‹ and authentic, identities, loyalties and allegiances give way to masks, costumes, play and ›plays‹ of various kinds.

But the playful pageant, carnival, gala or parade are clearly also important and serious, and it is their art – the extent and quality of evident care, imagination, preparation, conceptualisation and craft – that alerts us to the fact that all of this is just as serious as it is comical.

And here lies, perhaps the key to the particular fascination of this particular image.

Carnival reminds us, and has always reminded us, that society does not have to be the way that it currently is. i.e. ›another world is always possible‹.

It also reminds us of contradictions and ambiguities that have the ability to expose the reasoning, platitudes, and syllogisms on which current society is constructed, as both mutable and risible. Carnival always promises to rescue us from taking a single and simple side and in doing so crudely consolidating conflict and division.

And so it may be that carnival and the carnivalesque offer us hope of wresting popularity from populism, perhaps by augmenting or supplanting democracy with what we have here called a ›maskocracy‹ (the rule of the mask, *by* the mask) that slips ›the people‹ and democracy out of the populist's grip and awakens ›the people‹ from the populist's spell.

The traditional carnival, documented and historicised by Bakhtin, marked the end of the season of hard work. Today, communities that once found pride, identity and meaning through the annual or seasonal oscillations of work and play, lost that pride, identity and meaning as 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism morphed into late 20<sup>th</sup> and early

21<sup>st</sup> century globalisation and financialisation. Populists are ›making hay‹ with this opportunity to capitalise on the resentments of the disenfranchised. But perhaps our promised ›post-work‹ futures will finally allow us to place, or re-place carnival and the carnivalesque at the center of our societies, and no-longer, as in work societies, treated as something rare, exceptional, reserved for special days.

After all, isn't the promissory progress that ›we‹ are most proud of and most prize, necessarily and always, inevitably and inexorably, leading to, greater and greater rights and freedoms, and ultimately a *holistic* outcome, in which *all* difference is *always* represented, always in-play, and at play, so long as it is represented in a way that is mitigated and mediated and thus not harmful to others.



**Moderator Alexander Koch**

**Alexander Koch**

Paul, was that a public lecture that we were hearing from you? Our panel is about the public and the popular, and I think you have ambivalent feelings about the role you are playing in the art world, that we all are playing here. You are aware that we are acting in a silo and continuously contributing to class distinctions, since contemporary art is one of the mechanisms that draws these distinctions. At the same time you also hold the other vision that we may contribute to overcoming the divides that capitalism has created. It's quite hurtful to see the double role we play, and it seems to me that in your practice, in your writing, in your use of popular music and media, you are trying to negotiate that uncomfortable situation. Is that correct?

**Paul O'Kane**

I think that this idea of ›holistic relativism‹ that I use there, and that I used in the title of another paper that I published in Third Text Online a year ago (which was actually quite directly about Brexit and Brexit was in the title); well that title finished with the clause ›Towards a Holistic Relativism‹, so I suppose that concept is something that I hold dear and try to allow to guide me or undermine me or something like that. I think it's very challenging. To me, maybe I'm naïve, but it seems to me that maybe that's the ultimate challenge, this ›holistic relativism‹ of the progressive project.

When I was working on the final versions of this paper, it seemed to me that, although it's a pessimistic period, and we're in fear, ›on the back foot‹ as they say in English, something that *can* seem to rally hope is to remind ourselves of what the progressive project is in its biggest sense, and what it has been, where did it come from, where is it leading to, what is the point of it? etc.

This idea of holistic relativism reminds me of all of that. It threatens to make everything valueless, but at the same time it's the ultimate goal of our society, is it not? That we achieve *universal* rights, *universal* freedom, *universal* justice, *universal* equality, you see what I mean? And just remembering that this is the project, and that we have achieved some of those things. We do live in a society which is in some way successfully progressive, and we should celebrate that.

**Alexander Koch**

In your lecture you were also quoting Rancière who said that the left is always struggling from a marginal position. It tries to expand the notion of the we in order to establish new rules of equality, but it actually never provides the government. Which brings me to a problem I had with the concept of the carnival and the carnivalesque, as you described it and as Bakhtin describes it. It's an exception in the order of the game. It's basically a day, you said at least a day or in some cultures a longer period of time, when all hierarchies become non-existent in a playful exchange of masquerades and identities. Yet it seems to me that even in ancient times the carnival has, as a precondition, the hierarchical struggle that is within a society as its backdrop. A struggle that is suspended for a moment, when the king can be playfully de-crowned and re-crowned and de-crowned. But this never changes the fact that the king actually keeps the crown on his head at the end of the day. So, it's a kind of social peacemaker, keeping the status quo in place. In that

respect, if we think about the carnivalesque in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from a holistic utopia maybe, how far can we get with that concept, as beautiful as it is?

**Paul O’Kane**

I really enjoy Bakhtin’s essay and I think I have a different reading of it to the readings made yesterday (in Panel 1) when it was quite strongly criticised there as well. First of all, I imagine Bakhtin looking at the kind of disaster of equality that the Soviet Union perhaps became. Maybe seeing that the attempt to reify equality turns into some kind of monster. But within that he starts looking around for other models of equality and seeing, oh, there’s carnival, this is a kind of equality, even if it’s for a day, it’s a way of raising up the image of equality. As we know, as artists, an image, a symbol, at least allows us to believe that something is possible. And so, it’s very important in that way. That’s part of my answer, just the beginning of it really.

But the other thing I wanted to say is that we should think of the carnival in a much longer curve of history. I started to think this relates to what Nietzsche was interested in about Dionysus and the Bacchanalian. These were obviously the roots of carnival. And so maybe we can think of it in much longer terms, that the carnival morphs, and Bakhtin did say this, the carnival morphs according to its different contexts, to changing historical circumstances, it dissipates and breaks-up, but little traces are still found here and there, in odd places. You see bits of carnival here and there, for example when we protest against Brexit all the newspapers talk about is the clever, funny signs and costumes we wear. So, I think of the carnival in that very long and broad way.

The last part of my answer is that, one of those changing historical contexts is the one that I mentioned in the paper about the post-work society. And if it’s true that the carnival is related to servitude, and that in a certain historical context it may have been abused by the lord, by the king, it wasn’t always necessarily that way. It may have been different before that time and it could therefore be different again. And so the post-work society may ... I even think that the amount of freedoms and play that we are already allowed in these rich Western countries etc. is a kind of carnivalesque everyday of a different kind.

**Alexander Koch**

I will just express a worry that I have: that the playgrounds of the future carnival could be controlled and owned by Facebook, YouTube and all these other commercial stages on which the carnival might happen and therefore actually not lead to more equality, because equality, as you also wrote in another piece, is actually about ownership. There’s a famous quote by Benjamin who said that fascism is bringing the people behind one idea without ever touching the rule of who owns what. And that leaves the class divide actually in place ...

**Paul O’Kane**

›Without changing property relations‹ (as Benjamin said).



**Alexander Koch**

Yes. Which is something you could also say about today's cultures of participation and the invitation that everybody can be part of something. Because a lot of the time it's more like a simulacrum, since the containers in which this participation happens are owned and controlled by some people, or by a museum as an institution for that matter.

I want to speak about something we need to bring into the discussion because you're an author. You say you're not an art critic, yet you write very sincere reviews. And talking about critique, there is something I want to clear out somehow. Critique for me is mainly the making of criteria. Criteria of judgment, criteria of what is important to describe and what not. And it seems to me, since criteria are not given to us, that we have to make certain choices. What are helpful and valuable criteria? And here, with regard to the notion of the public and the notion of the popular, I feel a certain tension or dilemma between them. It seems that the public is something that rather appears, arises from struggle, from conflict, from the need to debate. It's not just there because people love each other and share a broader conversation. Often, there is a serious reason to have this conversation. Whereas the popular may be based more on criteria of what is understandable for many, what is likeable for many, and maybe not so conflictuous. As a writer and artist, do you tend to contribute to a conflictuous kind of conversation, or are you tending to create, say, agreement and understanding among people?

**Paul O'Kane**

This is a personal question, isn't it?

**Alexander Koch**

Well, you're also a pop musician, you're a critical intellectual, so I also want to address your practice.

**Paul O'Kane**

I didn't expect to be asked such a personal question. What I will say about it is that my career, if I can call it that, immodestly, has fluctuated between fine arts and pop music and back again, and for most of my younger life I found that very difficult and quite painful, these conflicts, crashing between what seemed to me two quite distinct cultures, even though they seem so porous and so liberal and so free. In actual fact you do come up against cultures, silos, borders, edges. And all I can say is that I've strived, and I continue to strive to eradicate those borders, both outside myself and also inside myself. Because I'm not sure whether they lie outside or inside. And I think that is exciting, when I make progress with it. Writing about popular music is one way that I've been trying to do that.

**Alexander Koch**

I think it is very valuable and important to not hide or suppress these inner conflicts or this inner negotiation that's going on between these different spheres of political ambition and then a more abstract utopia that you also embody.

**Paul O'Kane**

It's kind of uncompromising, in my own modest way I refuse the borders.

**Alexander Koch**

Another question. What if populism was actually the carnival of our time? Because it's anti-elite, it's disruptive, it's de-crowning and re-crowning, it turns moral orders upside down, it implies the opposite of what is actually said, it presents itself as the exception of what is established. Those are all criteria coming from Bakhtin. All of those apply wonderfully to populism.

**Paul O'Kane**

Yes, it came up yesterday, in Panel 1, and it scared me because I hadn't really thought enough about the Alt-Right carnival, and it was a quite shocking idea to me. Although I had considered of course that many of our elected presidents and prime ministers etc. in the last few years have been bombastic clowns. I mean, Nigel Farage reads like a clown, Boris Johnson reads like a clown, Beppe Grillo is a clown. And the Ukrainian president is a comedian, no?

**Alexander Koch**

We have more and more of those.

**Paul O'Kane**

Yes, so we do have a kind of 'age of clowns' which was always on my agenda. I was always interested in the fact that there's a carnivalesque happening somehow in that peculiar way, which is frightening as well as terrifying, but these things are also, from our point of view as cultural theorists, fascinating. I re-wrote some of my paper last night after hearing more about the conservative version of the carnival and after thinking about it a bit more.

But also, what is probably the most difficult part to say in the paper is that, if we truly believe that the progressive project leads to some kind of ultimate goal, to this universalism that I talked about, then somehow, we do have to exchange and cede and incorporate and discuss with *everyone*. Everyone has to be in play in this universal progressive vision, which seems like a paradox. But obviously, everyone has to be there, otherwise it's war.

**Alexander Koch**

This is something that is very dear to me. You quoted, I think it was also Rancière, saying that 'the normal people' have competence, have experience, have responsibility, they have criteria, have discourse, have resources, all of which rarely ever are considered in the art world as being trustworthy or valuable. They are not really coming into the conversation, other than something that is being talked *about*. You wrote that there is actually no gaze back or no speaking back from the working class, if we stay in class metaphors. And I think with regard to critics and intellectuals, who have usually a different set-up of resources and competences and social standards, this is maybe a political challenge to integrate into the future making of criteria.

**Alexander Koch**

Now, let's open up to the floor.

**Reuben Fowkes, London, UCL and Translocal Institute:**

One thing that was most striking in the film were the costumes, the walruses. I was thinking how carnival is breaking down barriers between different societies and different social identities, but how it might also be about going *beyond* the human. It's interesting to see that these people are putting so much effort in posing by the sea as walruses, and you can't help thinking that today you might not see this in the Shetland Islands anymore because of climate change and the sixth extinction. When you said that this local cultural activity has been destroyed by three decades of globalisation, it made me think that what we are talking about might not only be globalisation but the rise of an extractivist model of industrial capitalism and the great acceleration which really starts in the 1930s. So the carnival might reveal *this* tension, too.

**Paul O'Kane**

Your question makes me think that the most universal of rights we are pursuing is not just the rights of *all* human beings but of animals and the planet itself, which are now on our agenda every day.

**Belinda Grace-Gardner**

I was thinking here of Jeremy Deller's approach, how he has actually imported a popular culture into the world of arts in a powerful way I think. It was one of my favourite exhibitions when he first showed his archives. And my idea of what you are transporting here is actually an anarchic spirit of the carnivalesque, which is maybe more prevalent also in popular culture, and thus may be not so easily usurped by populism.

**Paul O'Kane**

Yes, one of my favourite artworks too is the video that Jeremy Deller and Allan Kane compiled by going around Britain and all these tiny villages, finding their strange rituals and rites. It's astounding to watch. I love that kind of thing because it steps outside of the usual institutions of art etc. But just to say regarding the 'anarchic', I'm not sure where that sits within it to me because the carnival is always disruptive by nature. Isn't it always anarchic?

**Belinda Grace-Gardner**

What I mean to say is that it's not so easily controllable.

**Paul O'Kane**

Yes, hopefully these cultures are so deep-rooted and strange, and the people themselves can be loyal and then disloyal, and so hopefully, we're seeing (with populism) something that the more ancient tradition of carnival can nevertheless refuse and transcend.

**Sasha Craddock, art critic and curator from London**

I want to mention that many countries still have carnival, and then it's strangely surprising to see these other things that happen, for instance the Alt-Right having its own carnivalesque. The fact that colonies and other whole parts of the world have actual carnival is massively important. I'm not saying that for very liberal reasons, but in order to talk about the idea that another world is possible and the fact how quickly things always get absorbed and controlled.

**Sarah Wilson**

Firstly, the expert on globalised carnival is Claire Tancons, a contemporary of Jeremy Deller. Secondly, when you're talking about the future society without work, the actual problems of work as so-called leisure, *Les loisirs de l'ouvrier*, were discussed as early as 1895 in the context of the Second International. An administrative and policing perspective asks 'what the hell are we going to do with these human cogs in the wheel when they're not actually in their machinery?' This is a question that people have been thinking about since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Susanna Sulic, art critic from France**

I think the film speaks about Viking carnival, which means it was something that came from far away. I remember the rituals of ancient people and how they were related to a sun festival, to something religious, once a year at the beginning of Spring. This was then superimposed on some occidental rituals in religion and then superimposed on the festive days of the end of the year. And what about Brazil's carnival? I remember, the Brazilian carnival was a popular event not for the working-class people but for the lower class, for people out of class. And it was showing all that was hiding in the society. It was not such a rich carnival, the people worked for one year to make the costumes. I agree that now we are in a global carnival. But what does it mean? A lot of carnivals everywhere? It was poor – now it becomes a brilliant palette of a new brilliant society. Artists like Hélio Oiticica were using the carnival as a revolutionary aspect of art, and of participation.

**Alexander Koch**

Thank you very much. Unfortunately, we have to come to an end.

# Art Criticism and Gender

## Panel 5

MODERATION  
ELKE BUHR

MIGUEL RIVAS VENEGAS  
BELINDA GRACE GARDNER



**»Yihadismo de Género«: Anti-Feminist Lexical Arsenals of Spanish National-Populism*****Miguel Rivas Venegas***

In his contribution, Miguel Rivas Venegas analyses populist currents in politics, especially on the basis of the language used by the protagonists concerned, using the example of Spain with parties such as Podemos, Vox, and the Partido Popular. Friend-foe schemata and constructions of a ›people‹ based on exclusion, as well as the ›will of the people‹ along rigid notions of gender roles, determine the communication of these parties in public and especially in digital social media. The verbal downplaying of violence against women – at least with reference to their own ›in-group‹ of the national ›people‹ – is an integral part of this rhetoric. Rivas Venegas traces the motives behind this discriminatory speech of gender equality issues as ›gender ideology‹ and reminds us of the need for our constant vigilance for the rights of women and minorities.

**RE/WRITING HISTORY. Art Criticism as a Vehicle of Change in the Era of #MeToo*****Belinda Grace Gardner***

From a review and overview of key historical positions and actions of feminist art and art criticism, such as the Guerrilla Girls, Lucy Lippard, and Cindy Nemser, Belinda Grace Gardner's lecture builds a bridge to the debates around #MeToo, as an amplification of already existing voices against discrimination of women, and the kind of presence of women artists in their field of activity, in exhibitions, magazines, and leadership positions. In the wake of the discussions, Gardner sees a breaking open of male dominance in the art world, which is also reflected, for example, in the posthumous re-evaluations of the works of women artists – a gesture that can, however, also be viewed critically as oriented towards a market hungry for new discoveries. Nevertheless, the status quo of a masculine ›preponderance‹ in the ranks of the represented and representative in art must continue to be overtaken, and increasingly so, through a public engagement with women artists of the past and present.



Fig. 8: Demonstration in Granada, 8 March 2018



*Miguel Rivas Venegas*

The exponential growth of the Spanish extreme-right, represented both by the recently formed radical party *Vox* and a refounded *Partido Popular*, reinforced and stimulated the expansion of national-populist politics at both sides of the political spectrum. Long-time established left-wing nationalist parties, such as *EH Bildu* in the Basque-speaking territories, as well as the progressive party *Podemos* in the rest of the Spanish State, represent, on the other hand, the left-wing counterpart in a political scenario in which the vindication of patriotism and concepts such as ›fatherland‹ and ›national pride‹ are no more patrimony of the conservative forces. The Catalan crisis, the still escalating situation after the results of the repressed referendum of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 in Catalunya, reinforced nationwide a political scenario characterised by strongly dichotomy-based worldviews and language use. Clear-cut self-representation and political-performative strategies, which accompany the radicalisation of the lexical arsenals of national-populist political movements, define the difference between ›us‹ and ›them‹ and reinforce the Schmittean conception of politics as war-like confrontation, which characterises the so called ›momento populista‹ (Chantal Mouffe 2018) in Spain.<sup>1</sup> The ›populist Zeitgeist‹,<sup>2</sup> as Cas Mudde named it years ago in his widely-known publication (2004), seems to be regaining strength in a political arena in which the echoes of the so-called ›rhetorics of the Civil War‹, and its old lexical arsenals articulate again political communication of Spanish politics.

To analyse the Spanish case, deeply connected with the current expansion of populist tendencies worldwide, requires a brief mention of the main methodological stances – to be articulated in three main groups, as stated by Gidron and Bonikovsky (2013) – which grasp the study of this expanding political phenomenon through different angles. Without aiming to enlarge the already vast debate on the nature of populism, I will briefly describe them, acquiring at the same time a stance towards the study of a political feature that seems to regain relevance and reappear, as stated by Loris Zanatta (2014), like a phreatic source.

The first one, presented by the highly-influential works of Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Kaltwasser (2004, 2012), faces and categorises populism as a ›thin-centered ideology‹, whose ›thinness‹ allows populism to develop itself both in left-wing and right-wing political contexts.<sup>3</sup> A second tendency, presented by the works of Kenneth Roberts (2006), Kurt Weyland (2001) and Robert Jansen (2011), approach populism by conceiving it essentially as political strategy, as a form of organisation and mobilisation. A third stance, mainly presented by the particularly well known works – since they were used as guidelines by some political parties in Spain such as *Podemos* – of Ernesto Laclau (1985, 2005), Chantal Mouffe (1985, 2018), Francisco Panizza (2005) or Michael Kazin (1995), conceives

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1 Chantal Mouffe, ›El momento populista‹, auf: *El País*, 10.06.2016, [https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/06/06/opinion/1465228236\\_594864.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/06/06/opinion/1465228236_594864.html) 2018 (07.11.2020).

2 Cas Mudde, ›The Populist Zeitgeist‹, in: *Government and Opposition* 39,4/2004, S. 541–563.

3 Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Kaltwasser, (Eds.) *Populism in Europe and the Americas*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012. p. 544.

populism as a »way of making claims about politics«, giving particular relevance to its rhetorical dimension. This is – due to the essentially rhetorical characteristics of populism as political phenomenon – the stance towards populism that interests me the most.

Independently from the three major tendencies that grasp populism, »one of the most contested concepts of social sciences«<sup>4</sup> from different perspectives and methodological angles, there are certain core characteristics that have been almost unanimously identified as basic elements of populism. We will briefly list some of them to justify why we label parties such as *Vox* and the *Partido Popular* as paradigmatic examples of national-populism: the development of a very particular language use – something that can be identified, following the work of Tolmach Lakoff (1990), as a »special language«; the sharply defined elaboration of a national »self«, to be confronted with a typified »other«, which is depicted as out-group, and presented as pathological in highly *Freund/Feind* Schmittian terms; the understanding of the political as a war-like scenario, and the in-group as holistic community; the simultaneous sublimation of the »people« and its will, which shall eventually surpass or transcend the relevance of democratic results; and the deification of the political leader, who is presented as the »voice of the people« and as lone fighter against the tyranny of the traditional political caste. In the specific case of right-wing populism, the assemblage of this aforementioned holistic community implies as well the construction of stiff, radically defined gender roles for those identified as part of the in-group, and for those who articulate their nemesis.

### **The »true Spain« against the »feminazis«. Building a national enemy.**

[The gender equality and protection law] promotes and funds the war between genders, ideologically corrupts language and will poison, until their effective extinction, heterosexual relations with an unacceptable judicial intromission in the private sphere of the citizens. It starts from the premise of presumption of the male's guilt in sexual relations, which are de facto consensually agreed.<sup>5</sup>

*Vox España* was founded in 2013 following the example of European parties such as *AfD* or the *Front National*. It defines itself as the only alternative to »the coward right with complexes« and as revulsive to Catalan and Basque nationalism, »gender ideology«, and »gender yihadism«. In the period from the end of 2016 to the beginning of 2019, the radical national-populist party turned political irrelevance into nationwide success: the 47.000 (0.20%) votes of 2016 general elections became 2.6 million in April 2019 (10.26%) and granted the extreme right-wingers 24 seats in the Congress. There are clearly two aspects that provoked, during these three years, the escalation of a political »alternative« whose values are based on the defence of *white* male privileges and national-unionist radical populism. The polarisation of Spanish public opinion in relationship with the Catalan

4 Hans Georg Betz, »The Radical Right and Populism«, in: Jens Rydgren (Ed.) *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*, New York, 2018. pp. 86-104.

5 *Vox*, *Communiqué on the wrongly called gender-based violence law*, July 2018. <https://www.voxespana.es/noticias/comunicado-de-vox-sobre-la-mal-llamada-violencia-de-genero-20180717> (14.09.2019).

political crisis has been accompanied by the growth of the paranoid discourse regarding the so-called »feminisation of society«. The everyday stronger mass mobilisations against gender inequality and violence against women – to take a revealing example, on the last 8<sup>th</sup> March 450,000 people demonstrated in Madrid and 200,000 in Bilbao – have been interpreted by this radical ingroup as a threat to male equality. On the other hand, the outcome of the trial against the self-labelled »Manada« (Wolfpack), a group of five Men – some of them police officers and soldiers – who mass-raped an 18 year-old girl during the celebration of San Fermín Feast in 2016 provoked a chain reaction of certain violent sectors of the patriarchy towards the »feminazis« – as they call them. Certain conservative, anti-feminist sectors of male public opinion reacted in social media to this trial as if it was a »political or politicised trial« against men. The results of the trial were, as we will explain later in detail, used by *Vox* to stir up hatred against the gender-based law. The majority of the voters of this party, as official statistics reveal, are men between 35 and 44, living in small villages (less than 2,000 inhabitants) and who self-identify as extreme-right wingers.

Most of the political success of *Vox* is to be directly related with their fake news campaigns in the social media, which also counted with the support and assessment of the already well-known alternative-right media guru Steve Bannon. Their propagandistic formula presents no great differences to those of similar national-populist political actors worldwide: a strongly anti-elite discourse is accompanied with a clear-cut definition of an »external enemy« – in this case, some unclear form of extreme-left complot-like interventionism, an internal »other«: the nationalists and their so-called »allies«; the centre-left parties from the Social democrats (PSOE) to *Podemos* – and a radical defence of »Spanish cultural values«, considered »in danger« because of the corrosive action of peripheral nationalisms, »totalitarian feminism« and immigration. The fight against the so-called »gender ideology« is also, in the Spanish case, a factor which implies the development of extremely aggressive lexical arsenals, articulated through a very simple, but extremely effective idea: the heterosexual male, and with him, the mere survival of the national community, is in danger. This paranoid idea of extinction has been, in fact, the core of the official discourse of the most radical wings of Spanish Catholic church for years. Such narrative achieved until recent times limited success amongst the lines of the *Partido Popular*, but the escalation of *Vox* has also radicalised the discourse of the long-lasting right-wing Party. Pablo Casado, President of the *Partido Popular* and presidential candidate since June 2018, stimulated this paranoia by frontally charging against women's rights, claiming that the abortion law should go back to its most restrictive version of 1985. The reason: to stop the »abortion happy-hour« promoted by the left.

It is not a big surprise that the same rhetorical gurus – we make reference again to Steve Bannon – who gave support to the *AfD* and similar platforms in Germany, recommended to codify and reinterpret violence against women as if they were »importierte Gewaltexzesse«, as claimed by German *Identitäre* in Augsburg (2018). The declarations of Santiago Abascal, co-founder and actual President of *Vox* are, in this regard, particularly revealing: eventual forms of violence against women may exist, but they are perpetrated by »the other«. An argument that simultaneously justifies closing the frontiers and abolishing the »ley de violencia de género«:

»We do not want a law that criminalises men. We want an intrafamilial violence law that protects women, but also men (...) We know that this form of violence is related with the presence of certain kind of immigration, and we affirm this with no shame.«<sup>6</sup>

Pablo Casado made similar declarations in relationship with violence against women, as it was a label to abolish. »In a democratic, free country like ours, it makes no sense to talk about violence against a certain gender or age; it makes no sense to underline if it is committed against women, elderly people or children«.<sup>7</sup> The political decision of eradicating any mention to violence carried against women motivated the overuse of rhetorical pirouettes, extremely vague concepts and euphemistic creations such as »violence occurred in the specific ambit of the family«. Warnings of Pablo Casado to »Muslims« related barbarism, violence against women and radicalism in a way which perfectly fitted the political agenda of the extreme right: »in this country we don't do clitoris ablation, we don't slaughter lambs at home, we don't have [unless imported] home security problems (...) either you are able to adapt to our way of life or it means you are in the wrong country.«<sup>8</sup>

The deployment of certain narratives around the idea of »losing the national identity« is strictly connected with the above-mentioned key-concept of »feminisation of society«. A notion constantly present in the discourse of the fascist and ultra-conservative intellectuals that gave consistence to the political *Weltanschauung* of the Spanish counter-revolutionary forces of 1936's coup d'état. We will quote, in this case, the words of Vox MP Rocío Monasterio in relationship with the Spanish »ley de violencia de género«, approved in 2004 to guarantee more protection for women. This protection could be related with aggressions carried by unknown perpetrators, but also and particularly, by intimate partners, ex-husbands or ex-boyfriends. The strategy of the extreme right is to deny the very concept of violence against women, and to talk about an »indoctrination« process carried by the State through the implementation of this law:

»The law of gender ideology not only destroys the very simple principle of equality, it also badly violates the rights and freedom of the Spaniards. It is a law that is based on non-scientific parameters; it is a law that claims that our gender identity depends on our desire and will (...) it prosecutes everyone who dares to question this totalitarian ideology, it frontally attacks the freedom of, for example, the media, which is obliged to follow certain protocols, certain language use, which is obliged to tell this doctrine.«<sup>9</sup>

The victory that Vox and their political allies from the *Partido Popular* are looking for, is strictly a rhetorical victory: the imposition of terminology such as »violencia intrafamiliar« or »ideología de género« permits to blur the differences between violence motivated by male chauvinism and any other form of violence. Extreme right-wingers from Vox

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6 Public declarations of Vox MP Santiago Abascal, December 2018.

7 Public declarations of PP Presidential Candidate in Ceuta, January 2019.

8 Pablo Casado, as stated during the campaign for the Andalusian elections in Granada, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

9 Vox MP Rocío Monasterio, interview with *La Contra TV*, March 2018.

and parallel political organisations were, during the above-mentioned trial against the self-called Wolfpack, making a propagandistic effort to relativise the crime. The rhetorical battle was articulated as a confrontation between the supporters of a narrative based on a more or less consented »abuse« and those who wanted to label and identify the crime with the appropriate term »mass rape«. The victorious implementation of one concept or the other would change the whole narrative. Reactions of a Vox representative in Andalusia, who happens to be a retired judge, to the result of the trial are self-explaining: men are in danger. Even those who do not »perform well in bed will be denounced by unsatisfied women and go straight to jail«. <sup>10</sup> When a similar case occurred in Manresa – where a 17-years old girl was mass raped by five youngsters of Moroccan origin – the extreme-right immediately took advantage of the situation, building a discourse that resembles the narratives of the *Rassenschande* and the myth of the *Kulturzerstörer*, and asking for the comeback of death penalty. The body of the »national« women is often perceived by national-populism as an artefact that guarantees the survival of the nation, therefore objectified and associated with the common metaphor of »the nation is a body«. This perception of the nation as a harmonic body permits both the construction of a holistic community and unlocks a narrative that can be traced at least until the Spanish Civil War nationalist discourse, where republican fighters were categorised as »drunk rapists and barbarians« and women loyal to the government as »libertines and prostitutes«. Francoist legionaries committing war crimes were, in words of the same generals who are now praised and remembered by the extreme right: »true men showing women what is to be a real man«. According to this logic, patriots do not abuse women, patriots do not rape, foreigners and »otherised« enemies do. National men are »seducers«, migrants and political enemies are »rapists«. Migrants are not even humans but political artefacts, according to the president of the radical right-wing party:

»Open Arms [a Spanish NGO focused on Sea Rescue in the Mediterranean] is not an NGO, it is an operative base of the extreme left working in connivance with multinational corporations and banks. When they attack Italy, they attack, in reality, sovereignty, identity and harmony in Europe. Immigrants are their political merchandise. Nothing else.«<sup>11</sup>

Vox partisan rhetoric is articulated, as this example shows, through a strongly warfare-like dialectics in which dysphemism plays a central role. Rhetorical manipulation, political euphemisms immediately construct a new reality, in which veracity of facts seems to be, at least for the supporters of post-truth, completely irrelevant (Müller, 2017:113). Turning, by the simple fact of repetition of these selected disphemisms, human lives into »political merchandise« and gender crimes into »men who are maybe not treating women that well«, according to Casado's words, pursues the same goals underlined by Viktor Klemperer (1946) in his pioneer study of the »bureaucratic rhetoric« of the Third

10 Francisco Serrano Castro und José Riqueni Barrios, *Guía práctica para padres maltrados. Consejos para sobrevivir a la dictadura de género*, Córdoba, Almuzara, 2019.

11 Santiago Abascal on his Twitter account, 19th August 2018.

Reich.<sup>12</sup> Turning deportation in an act of »transport« followed the same objective as the »elimination of surpluses« stated by Spanish fascists as soon as they entered the city of Bilbao in 1937. The task of the »*Lingua Quarti Imperii*« (Griffin, 2014) used by the contemporary populist extreme right, in its attempt to objectify ethnical and political enemies, differs little from that of Klemperer's *LTI*. The discourse of *Vox* during the electoral campaign in Andalusia included the following terms associated with women who were not fitting under the radical worldview of the party: »radical transgenic pleasure-seeking feminists«, »psychopathic feminazis«, »totalitarian« »psychotic witches«, »ideological-burka-carriers« and a long list of similar hate-speech items. Simultaneously, the political discourse of the *Partido Popular* increased the use of certain terminology strictly »guerracivilista«, accompanying the political performances of Columbus square in February 2019, when the three right-wing parties marched together asking for new elections and labeling the social democratic government as »traitor«. Words such as »felon«, to be considered as marginal in Spanish politics since the comeback of democracy, returned to the first line of political communication. Many understood the selection of this term as a strategic decision: calling the actual president a »traitor to the fatherland« and a »*putschist*«, or elected politicians such as the former mayor of Madrid, Manuela Carmena »communist witch«, is not simply a resource to elevate the tension in the congress and to increase the polarisation of public opinion. It triggers powerful narratives deeply present in the shared memory of the Spanish society: the words of Casado and Abascal echoed those of right-wing extremists such as CEDA<sup>13</sup> politician José María Gil Robles, who were using similar rhetorical arsenals to likewise label elected politicians and legitimate governments in 1936, calling for popular revolt, identifying traitors and perpetrators, and amongst them, women who forgot »where they belong«. Stimulating again the »ghost of the two Spains«, that of the »good Spaniards« and the »señoritas«, and that of their mortal enemies.

Progressive women were often typified as »too masculine«, »too independent«, »too powerful«, »vulgar« and promiscuous«, »authoritarian«, »cruel«, or simply »bad looking«. Women were presented, as the rhetorical arsenals of classic right-wing extremism and fascism show, as if a different matter composed them. Their bodies, as post-war literature production claims, were formed by a different substance, as »red« women were not cold – quoting Francoist writer Concha Espina (1941) – in situations in which »real ladies« would tremble. The rhetorical deployment of Francoism was attempting to achieve the same goals as the »*Lingua Quarti Imperii*« of contemporary extreme right: the vocabularies may have changed, but the programmatic objectives remain strictly the same.

Well-known reflections of Simone de Beauvoir (1949) seem to now acquire more significance during the rise of nationalism and its dichotomist worldviews: »Never forget that a political, economical or religious crisis will be enough to cast doubt on women's rights. These rights will never be vested. You'll have to stay vigilant your whole life.« It is our duty as democrats, as scholars and as feminists to keep these words in mind.

12 Victor Klemperer, *LTI Notizbuch eines Philologen*, (Kursiv) Berlin 1947.

13 The CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas) was a Catholic conservative coalition founded in 1933 and dissolved during the Spanish Civil War in 1937.

## **Belinda Grace Gardner**

Referring to themselves as the »conscience of the art world«, the Guerrilla Girls kicked off a poster campaign in 1985 entitled *Guerrilla Girls Talk Back* that expanded into a 30-piece portfolio. It was directed against art institutions, curators, art dealers, critics, and artists who they deemed to be actively engaged in, or passively sustaining a system of keeping women and non-*white* artists out of museum collections, gallery spaces, publications, and other venues of representation.<sup>1</sup>

The feminist artist and activist group was initially formed as a response to the *International Survey of Painting and Sculpture* presented at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1984. This exhibition featured works by 169 artists, of which less than ten percent were women. Shielding their individual identities behind their meanwhile emblematic gorilla costumes, the Guerrilla Girls launched a long-term performative, multi-media art project in the mid-1980' s that radically questioned the exclusion of women in the art world, with irony and a biting sense of humour and that is still going strong decades later.

One of the first posters in the portfolio, published in 1985, railed against well-known art critics of the day (some still active now) in bold letters: »THESE CRITICS DON'T WRITE ENOUGH ABOUT WOMEN ARTISTS.« Another poster published in 1986 was dedicated to the question: »WHICH ART MAG WAS WORST FOR WOMEN LAST YEAR?« According to the Guerrilla Girls, the latter category applied to *Flash Art* and *Artforum*, which only featured women artists in 13 to 16 percent of their articles between September 1985 and the summer of 1986.<sup>2</sup> Apart from prominent male writers, those listed also included female art critics, who themselves, of course, constituted – and, in fact, today still constitute – a minority in the upper echelons of art publishing.

Over a decade earlier, the feminist art critics Lucy Lippard (whose seminal book on conceptual art, *Six years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, was published in 1973) and Cindy Nemser (co-founder of the *Feminist Art Journal* in 1972 together with the artists Pat Mainardi and Irene Moss) were unsuccessfully pitching articles on little-known women artists to *Artforum* magazine. As stated on Nemser's website, the New York based *Feminist Art Journal* »sought to expose misogynist discrimination that dominated the arts and advocate for women artists both past and present.«<sup>3</sup> The quarterly ran between 1972 and 1977, reaching a circulation of 8,000 with subscribers throughout the United States and other parts of the world. Unfortunately, this was not enough to enlighten a broader public. Despite the burgeoning feminist movement of the 1970s, the works of female artists such as Helen Frankenthaler and Georgia O'Keefe were still being belittled as »emotional« or »soft«, and, in O'Keefe's case, as trivial in their incorporation

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1 Cf. Guerrilla Girls' first press release, May 6, 1985: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects> (last visit on 11 March, 2021).

2 Ibid.

3 Cf. website of Cindy Nemser: <https://www.cindynemser.com> (last visit on 11 March, 2021).

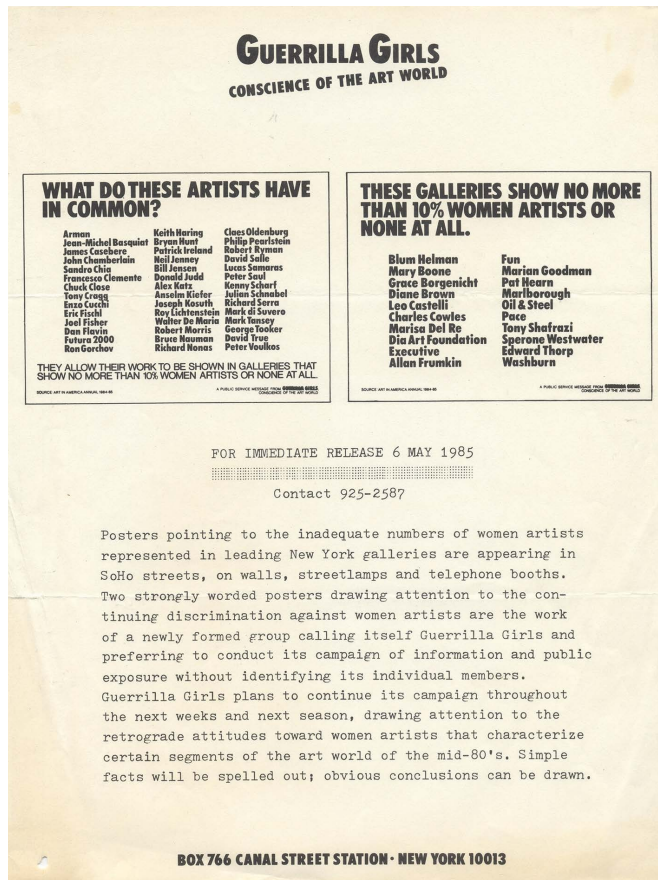


Fig. 9: Guerrilla Girls' first press release, May 6, 1985.

of »body parts«. The former assessment was voiced by famed Minimal artist Donald Judd, the latter by the influential critic, artist, and novelist Peter Plagens, who disparaged O'Keefe in one of his many articles for *Artforum*.<sup>4</sup>

Nemser's text, dedicated to »Stereotypes and Women Artists« and which was included in the first issue of the *Feminist Art Journal*, had earlier been discarded by the prominent editor of *Art in America*, Brian O'Doherty, author of the hugely popular book *Inside the White Cube* (1976). In an article entitled »Criticism: A Feminist Reckoning«, published in spring 2019, in an emancipation-wise more evolved *Art in America*, the author

4 Cf. Olivia Gauthier, »Criticism: A Feminist Reckoning«, in: *Art in America* (via [www.artnews.com](http://www.artnews.com)), April 1, 2019: <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/criticism-cindy-nemser-63624/> (last visit on 11 March, 2021).



Olivia Gauthier points out how, long before #MeToo, Nemser and other feminist activists were already calling out the exclusion and discrimination of women in the art world. Gauthier cites a letter from the late 1970s in which Nemser outlines the journal's ethos, stating: »We believe that art has the power to change people's thinking and their lives for the better and that, at this moment in history, women's art is moving quickly and forcefully in this direction.«<sup>5</sup> Both Lucy Lippard and Cindy Nemser were driving forces in championing women's art production, breaking through, in their writing, the deeply entrenched chauvinist agenda of looking at and discussing art created by women. Still, it has taken decades, and arguably the vast circulation made possible by the emergence of the internet and online media, to trigger the major shift that we now see as a consequence of #MeToo.

For centuries, the male gaze has permeated all possible framings of women's art production and reflection, encompassing the exclusion of women from university programs and the pages of publications dedicated to the reception and discussion of art, right up to their banishment from the museum space, where the institutionalised rejection and systematic ignorance of female art production has manifested itself with particular blatancy. As Griselda Pollock – pioneer of feminist art history and author of the groundbreaking 1977 article »What's Wrong with Images of Women?« – noted in 1988, with regard to the lack of female presence in both art history and academia at large: »Women have not been omitted through forgetfulness or mere prejudice. The structural sexism of most academic disciplines contributes actively to the production and perpetuation of a gender hierarchy.«<sup>6</sup> This omission reaches back through time and has become deeply ingrained in our culture.

Fast forward to the present: Since its inception in autumn of 2017, the #MeToo movement (the term is being used here synonymously with related initiatives such as »Time's Up«) has travelled from the abysses of Hollywood in the aftermath of the Weinstein scandal to other creative fields, also landing right in the misogynist heart of darkness that sets the pace in the art world. In this context, #MeToo has led to a dethronement and expulsion of male transgressors formerly in charge of art publications, galleries, and fairs, due to their harassment of women, extending from editors and curators to lenders, sponsors, and to artists themselves. Meanwhile, the movement – if it indeed turns out to be more than a short-lived moment in time – has also brought about a massive restructuring and re-coding of museum collections in its wake, as well as a reconsideration of art works created by women, their representation in the exhibition space, and their reception by the media and the public, reaching from the United States to Europe and other parts of the world. In the process, male artists who have defined western art history are being toppled from their pedestals and ejected, at least temporarily, from their predominant position(s).

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5 Quoted after Gauthier, cf. *ibid.*

6 Cf. Griselda Pollock, »Feminist Interventions in Art's Histories«, abridged version of »Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction«, in: Pollock (ed.): *Vision and Difference. Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, London and New York 1988, publ. in: *Kritische Berichte - Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1988), p. 5.

## The #MeToo Age: Power and Gender Equity in the Art World

Fig. 10: *The #MeToo Age: Power & Gender Equity in the Art World*, invitation to the discussion event, Feb. 21, 2018

On the Power 100 List 2018, annually compiled by the London-based magazine *ArtReview* and indicating the most influential current forces in the art world, #MeToo was awarded 3<sup>rd</sup> place for profoundly changing »the prevailing climate in which curators are appointed, prizes awarded and exhibitions framed.«<sup>7</sup> Although one might rightly consider Power 100 Lists, or any type of list of this kind, generally somewhat dubious, in this case the assessment was appropriate. Indeed, #MeToo triggered a surprisingly swift and even dramatic shift in a state of affairs that was still in a slow-motion, or even in »no-motion« mode, when Lippard, Nemser, Pollock, and other critics addressed it in the 1970s; and that has only haltingly progressed since the Guerrilla Girls systematically began attacking it with their art activism in the mid-1980s. The #MeToo movement, which unquestionably has its problematic aspects of collective prejudice, over-zealousness, and lack of differentiation, has nevertheless induced a radical, and comparatively immediate reassessment, even a reckoning, with the hitherto male-controlled status quo in western society, politics, and culture, spanning national and institutional boundaries. In this sense #MeToo can be seen as an amplifier of already present voices that, through increased convergence and proliferation, are now finally being heard.

Meanwhile, male artists have become subjects of controversies, ranging from the well-documented demand for the removal of Balthus's sexualised painting of a young girl (*Thérèse Dreaming*, 1938) from presentation at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art in late 2017; right up to a confrontation of art-historical giants such as Picasso or Gauguin for the sexist treatment of women evident in their works. This has cleared the way for a more universal reckoning with the male-defined history of art through the ages and through changing cultural contexts, bringing with it a denigration of its

7 In 2019, #MeToo dropped down to 21st place on the *ArtReview* Power 100 list, moving up again to 4<sup>th</sup> place on the list in 2020.: <https://artreview.com/artist/metoo/?year=2020> (last visit on 11.04.2021).

traditional male heroes and incunabula. While former aesthetic traditions and discourses are increasingly being challenged in the process of their feminist and post-colonial reassessment, the sexist, misogynist and racist subtexts, governing the art-historical narrative and its blatant lack of diversity, are being revealed, leading, in turn, to the necessity of re-evaluating and recontextualising the holdings of museums.

In the course of this overturning of male dominion in the art world in the wake of #MeToo, female artists are now, at long last given priority in the politics of institutional art presentation. As a case in point, London's Tate Britain highlighted contemporary British art from 1960 to the present for one year, starting in April 2019 with an extensive exhibition of 60 works by 30 female artists (no male artists were involved), including Susan Hiller, Sarah Lucas, Bridget Riley, and Monster Chetwynd. This renowned institution is working on expanding its holdings of women artists and also planning to more decisively and prominently showcase art created by women in the future. Tate Modern, in turn, had a head start in consciously and massively expanding the presence of women and non-European artists, particularly since Francis Morris became its first female director in 2016. In 2019, it dedicated major solo exhibitions to women artists, including the largest-ever UK survey of the Russian avant-garde trail-blazer Natalia Goncharova, followed by the first UK retrospective of the work of Dora Maar, hitherto known first and foremost as Picasso's muse and model. Lee Krasner, formerly outshone in her role as a pioneer of Abstract Expressionism by her husband Jackson Pollock, had a momentous retrospective at the Frankfurt Schirn Kunsthalle in autumn of 2019, succeeding a large exhibition at London's Barbican Center Art Gallery earlier that year. Meanwhile California-based painter Luchita Hurtado, born in 1920 in Venezuela, and the mother of internationally acclaimed artist Matt Mullican, held her first significant solo exhibition at Hauser & Wirth in New York City in early 2019, aged 98.

The trend to honour women artists in their later years, and oftentimes only belatedly, following their demise, has been going strong for a while now, including the relatively late international recognition of Louise Bourgeois and, more recently, the (re)discovery of the Romanian conceptual artist Geta Brătescu. As the first woman artist to be invited for presenting a solo exhibition in the Romanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017, Brătescu was already over 90 at the time of the show and died a year later, in 2018. On the one hand, the growing interest in formerly underrepresented women artists is a desirable phenomenon. And yet, on the other hand, it also conveys a sense of opportunism at a time when the works of women artists are becoming hot items and swiftly being usurped by the market.

Still, despite the dialectics that accompany #MeToo in this respect, the beneficial impact of the movement on the monetary appreciation of women's art production is not to be underestimated. This not only applies to more established female artists, such as Louise Bourgeois, Georgia O'Keefe, Agnes Martin, Joan Mitchell, and Yayoi Kusama, but also to representatives of younger generations such as Jenny Saville, who are currently being enthusiastically embraced by the market and whose works are fetching increasingly higher prices. Born in 1970 in Cambridge, England, Saville has recently risen to star



Fig. 11: Jenny Saville, *Propped*, 1992

status with her radically de-idealised monumental representations of female nudes. In the autumn of 2018, Saville's nude self-portrait *Propped* (1992) sold at Sotheby's London auction for a record-breaking price of 9.5 million pounds, or roughly 11 million euros, rendering her »the world's most expensive living female artist.«<sup>8</sup>

The substantial change in the institutional framing, and the reappraisal of art created by women, does not only affect the present-day situation; these shifts are also altering and widening readings of the art-historical past that are finally taking into account women whose contributions to the ever-expanding field of art have not yet been adequa-

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8 Cf. Nate Freeman, »Jenny Saville Becomes Most Expensive Living Female Artist at £67.3 Million Sotheby's Sale«, *artsy.net*, Oct 5, 2018: arts <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-jenny-saville-expensive-living-female-artist-673-million-sothebys-sale> (last visit 11 March, 2021). In May 2020, Saville still held the record for »most expensive living female artist«, see: Elena Martinique, »Who Are The Most Successful Female Artists in Auction?«, on: *widewalls.ch*, Jan. 27, 2020: <https://www.widewalls.ch/most-successful-female-artists-in-auction/> (last visit 11 March, 2021).

tely perceived and acknowledged. However, this not only calls for the recognition of those artists who have been excluded from the art-historical narrative, but for a deconstruction of the very parameters upon which this narrative is based. As Griselda Pollock determined some decades ago: »Art history itself is to be understood as a series of representational practices which actively produce definitions of sexual difference and contribute to the present configuration of sexual politics and power relations. Art History is not just indifferent to women; it is a masculinist discourse, party to the social construction of sexual difference.«<sup>9</sup>

The »masculinist discourse«, which has prevailed for centuries, and still broadly defines art-historical frameworks today, determined as they are by »patriarchal logic, representation, history and justice«<sup>10</sup>, is in need of a rigorous dismantling and reformulation. This can only be achieved by way of new, comprehensive, multi-dimensional forms of analysing the previously disregarded art production of women and other marginalised groups, both in the past and in the present; i.e. an art criticism that goes beyond mere reaction and description, and that triggers a reinvention of the art-historical saga, while revealing the power structures that engendered this narrative and kept it going for so long. In its most radical consequence, this would lead to a re-writing of art history as an open narrative recording the consistent excellence and significance of those hitherto sidelined in the realm of art, while conceiving, in the words of the feminist scholar Peggy Phelan: »a language alert to the movement at the edge of the frame, across the hybrid border that marks the distinction between the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown.«<sup>11</sup>

Surely, the comprehensive questioning of the status quo should not result in museums being emptied of their collection holdings or the history of art being entirely depleted of its former (male) stars. The objective should rather be to heighten awareness of previous blind spots and to transcend ideological aesthetic framings that have too narrowly defined our (Western) concept of art for far too long. We might thus, finally, develop more richly textured, inclusive and expanded versions of the former narrative; versions that make visible, perhaps for the first time, the many overlooked and disregarded female art producers, who took action to forge change, long before the current moment, and who paved the way, with great courage and vigour, for current movements.

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9 Cf. Pollock, *op. cit.*, pp. 11f.

10 Cf. Peggy Phelan, »Survey«, in: *Art & Feminism*, ed. by Helena Reckitt, London and New York 2001, p. 17.

11 *Ibid.*



*Moderator Elke Buhr*

***Elke Buhr***

First, I would like to come back to you Miguel. I'm just wondering, your formation is that of an art critic, so does that help you in any way in this kind of research, or is that something that doesn't have much to do with what you're doing now?

***Miguel Venegas-Rivas***

Yes, actually, it's very convenient because I'm not only working with ›lexical arsenals‹ (of the Spanish extreme right), I'm not only working with texts. I'm also working with visual communication, which is not part of what I wanted to present today, but it's part of this research that I am doing right now in relationship with a national populism – not only in the case of the extreme right, but also in the case of the so-called patriotic left, which is something that might sound a little bit new for some people here, but in the Basque country it has a long tradition.

So yes, I would say the second main part of my doing is to work specifically with images, which could be images in the social media or political posters, or what I call political performances. And in this case, logically, being an art historian is quite useful, because many political scientists, or many people working as political scientists, maybe do not have or do not often use the tools, the analytic tools that you can develop as an art historian or as a scholar working with political iconography.

***Elke Buhr***

And, thinking the other way around, if you look at the discussions that art critics have – e.g., about how political a work can be, or if it has to be more open – how do you feel about those discussions, coming from the political field? Do you think that art can do something with this problem of populism?

***Miguel Venegas-Rivas***

Of course, I'm pretty sure that art could and maybe should fight against populism, somehow building the necessary narratives to counter these nationalist tendencies.

***Elke Buhr***

So, Belinda, you also, in the end had an optimistic view about the agency of art criticism. It sounded as if you think that art criticism can really make some change. But how does this translate into your daily work? Do you consider feminist implications when you decide what you want to write about, whereas we cannot always even decide what we want to write about?

***Belinda Grace Gardner***

Indeed, as a freelance author, these decisions are not always in your own hands. I think I've become increasingly sensitive to how the narrative in the art world has been informed by a male-dominated discourse. A concrete example in this context is the title chosen for an exhibition in 2019 at the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, which was first shown in Stuttgart, called ›Die jungen Jahre der alten Meister‹ or ›The Young Years of the Old

Masters« referring to four big names in contemporary German art: Richter, Polke, Kiefer, and Baselitz. Referring to male artists as ›old masters« once again cemented this notion of the eternally celebrated male genius. Why is there a necessity, I wonder, to re-celebrate artists who are already firmly established on the market and have been so for many years with yet another exhibition focusing upon their earlier work? So yes, to answer your question, I am much more aware of these issues and of the fact that there is still a great need of debates and explorations regarding the art production by women and other marginalised groups at this point. As an art critic, I thus try to focus on opening up a more extensive and inclusive discussion of art in my writing.

***Elke Buhr***

I think an interesting fact is also that there have been so many discussions in the art world about feminism, and now we have the first biennials where there's 50% women and so on, and men are kind of getting defensive about the fear of being excluded that you also explained very well. So, one could think, well, women have already won the game. But then, when you look at the numbers, and also at the prices, they haven't. So, maybe this is my question to you, are we too naïve sometimes to think that feminism has already won so much?

***Miguel Venegas-Rivas***

Yes, very much. I mean, I think we have to remain optimistic but at the same time we have to be very conscious that we're facing again the comeback of this populist Zeitgeist, which also implies the comeback of this fear of the feminisation of society, which is at least, referring to the Spanish case, a discourse of ›the society becoming too feminine‹, whatever that means, according to these men. So, we're facing, because of this, some form of decline, some form of decadence. This is the discourse of the extreme right of the 30s I believe in Germany and in Italy.

The fact is that this discourse is coming back and the fact that this discourse is part of the discourse of the governments in many countries. I mean, we take a look around, we have people like Trump in power, we have Boris Johnson, we have Fidesz in Hungary, we have this Spanish extreme right growing pretty fast, we have Salvini which is right now not in government, but he's there, and the list continues. So yes, I don't know if it's about being naïve, but I think it's about thinking about fighting back against the return of this discourse. If it at any moment was marginal it is definitely not marginal anymore, because the extreme right is *de facto* back in power.

***Belinda Grace Gardner***

I totally agree with this. I think that #MeToo is also part of fighting back, in the case of the United States against the rise of right-wing politics with a president who is openly misogynist and racist. I think that Donald Trump's empowerment really triggered a larger movement. I hope that the current political moment and the right-wing surge will actually lead to a much more aggressive form of backlash through women and through other marginalised groups. This might even create the opportunity, also for art critics, to



become much more assertive in championing a rigorous resistance against retrograde cultural concepts and exclusions, including resistance against the usurpation of previously marginalised or unknown artists as a market commodity, which in capitalist societies quickly happens.

***Elke Buhr***

So, this is interesting because in a way it also contradicts what Kolja Reichert said earlier today (Panel 3) because he actually insists on talking about good and bad art, whatever that may be. But I think this is a discussion that will also go on tomorrow when we're talking about identity politics and censorship and questions like that.

***Elke Buhr***

I would like to open this to the public now.

***Sabine Maria Schmidt***

I have one question: Do you think that the #MeToo movement has arrived in Germany yet? I honestly have no idea of cases, of struggle, but you just said we should be more aggressive. Somehow I think it never arrived in Germany, and I heard that many people are a little bit astonished that we are not showing solidarity with such movements.

***Elke Buhr***

I do think that many methods of those activists are being copied and used, also by groups in Germany. I'm mentioning the group Sub Toujours in Berlin who are also acting in quite an aggressive manner. We've had cases of German curators that were kicked out of their jobs, not in Germany but in the States. So, I think we have been watching the American discussion and thinking we are taking part in it because we are so interested in it. But also, I don't really know any #MeToo case in Germany. I think the feminist movement is there. Do you know a case?

***Sabine Maria Schmidt***

Sorry, this is a very important difference. We are not talking about feminism in this case, just in the sense of the #MeToo movement, in a sense of sexual abuse and all this stuff. It was about quotes in exhibitions, so this is the feminist debate you mentioned. But I was wondering, it's amazing that we have in Germany no cases concerning #MeToo. It's just a question.

***Jamie Kiesling, AICA USA***

I want to ask a question about the limitations of contemporary feminism and gender identity-based political movements right now as you've framed them. And it's also a question about the limitations of liberal political imagination, in the face of right-wing populism gaining traction as well as in general.

So, for #MeToo specifically, many criticisms levelled against #MeToo were that it calls on women to identify on a level of victimhood. And I think this is something that

is also present in your presentation Miguel, in terms of how we're framing right-wing nationalist criticisms of law. Of course, they're correct insofar as all citizens should be equal in the eyes of the law. So, there is no coherent left argument to present that idea. So basically, my question is, in general, what is the limitation of this political imagination? That of #MeToo but also other contemporary feminisms? Particularly, I'm thinking, simultaneous with #MeToo in the United States there was an organisation of women workers at McDonald's who were consistently facing sexual harassment in their jobs, but that did not get a lot of press. So, if there's no kind of coherent organisation to create systems in which poor women can leave their marriages and their homes without the fear of destitution; if poor women cannot have children without the fear of destitution then what is #MeToo, what is feminism other than competition for access to the market?

***Belinda Grace Gardner***

That's an important point and a problem we face as being part of an art world scenario, which is *per se* to a certain degree already an elitist situation. Of course, #MeToo and other forms of activism, as well as writing about art, are not going to completely change deeply unjust social structures or emancipate an oppressive political system in its entirety. I think that's something we have to face when writing about art, which is definitely something that not everybody has access to and in itself reaches a rather exclusive circle, despite the fact that we are part of a global art world. I don't know how this can be solved. As an art critic, I try to address these issues specifically in the field of art, focusing on the inequality that has been rampant there for so many centuries. However, this is definitely just the tip of a very large iceberg that extends into all social and cultural spheres.

***Sonia Recasens, critic and art creator based in Paris***

I think here of Linda Nochlin. She said that the main goal of feminism in art is not the valorisation of old mistresses that we forgot but the deconstruction of the concept of artist as genius. Because it's a concept based on colonialism, on patriarchy, on imperialism, and on capitalism. So, for me, it's also important to have it in mind, and it's also maybe why we failed, for example during the 70s. Because then we had progress with women appearing on the artistic wall, they had exhibitions, but then the 80s arrived and they disappeared. This was the case for example in France. They had very strong exhibitions in art institutions in France, but the 80s arrived and we forgot them completely, and now we are in this movement of re-valorisation of the works.

But Lucy Lippard also said that, in the 70s, when she saw the biennial where there was 20% women, it's a 'glass ceiling' and so, if there is a second wave of feminism they have to fight to break this glass ceiling. And so she says if (if because some women artists seem to be satisfied with the situation) there is such a contradiction at that moment, between the idealism of a socialist art world and the ideal to sell work, to have the art world accessible for everybody, and also to have their own work in the market, there is a dilemma, there is a paradox in the movement. It was so in the 70s, but I think now that the old mistresses are bankable we have the same paradox and in the same dilemma, and it's crazy.

# **Arts and Politics between Avant-Garde and Propoganda**

## **Panel 6**

**MODERATION  
CATRIN LORCH**

**MAREK WASILEWSKI  
SARAH WILSON**



**From Self-Defence to Counterattack. How the Populists in Poland reclaimed the Language of Contemporary Art**

***Marek Wasilewski***

In his paper *From Self-Defence to Counterattack*, Marek Wasilewski investigates the change in the orientation of political interventions in art and culture. From an iconoclastic tradition, a progression towards political art can be observed which itself uses avant-garde visual languages and formats to convey conservative and anti-democratic messages. The contribution traces this development for the populist circles in Poland, in a country where post-communist democracy is strongly contested by two different ideological visions: secular-republican and religious-conservative. In the process, visual culture becomes the arena for public debate over tradition, religion, and individual autonomy, with, increasingly, images and works no longer providing an occasion for reflection but rather threatening to become weapons in the political struggle.

**Crowds and Power? Two Polish Artists in London: Marcin Dudek, Ewa Axelrad in the context of ›Brexit‹**

***Sarah Wilson***

At the end of 2017, two simultaneous exhibitions in London, Marcin Dudek's *Steps and Marches*, and Ewa Axelrad's *Shtamah*, addressed the relationship between masses, power, and violence in relation to Polish nationalism. While Dudek, influenced by his own biography, investigated the phenomenon of football hooliganism, Axelrad dealt with the display of a strongly male-dominant group affiliation. In her contribution *Masses and Power? Two Polish Artists in London in the Context of the ›Brexit‹*, Sarah Wilson analyses the visual languages of both artists in the context of classical theories of the masses and propaganda, for example in Hobbes, Le Bon, Benjamin, or Müntz. The exhibitions invite art-critical analysis, but also seem to become a mirror for the contemporary British public.



Fig. 12: Coven & Dziejczynstwo, *Bedtime*, Berlin 2018, Exhibition view

# FROM SELF-DEFENCE TO COUNTERATTACK. 125 HOW THE POPULISTS IN POLAND RECLAIMED THE LANGUAGE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

**Marek Wasilewski**

## **Introduction – art as politics in Poland**

In 2000, in an essay titled »Art according to politics«, Piotr Piotrowski wrote: »The political system created in 1990s Poland maintains the authorities' policy, which is neutral but in fact reactionary or even repressive towards identity-searching strategies. Conflicts around our body and gender reveal a war going on between the political establishment and open-society groups, whose art according to politics is one of the few forms of expression. Culture, including art institutions (museums, galleries, art criticism), is a territory of war between advocates of a conservative society and supporters of a liberal, free and open society.«<sup>1</sup> When he was writing about the authorities, Piotrowski did not have any particular party in mind. What he meant was a political and intellectual group that came to power after the overthrow of communism and combined economic liberalism with, broadly interpreted, faith in the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Nineteen years ago, Piotrowski, one of Central Europe's most perceptive art historians, wrote that culture in Poland is a territory of war, and art is one of the few forms used by representatives of the open society in their struggle for democracy. Today, Piotrowski's words have lost nothing of their relevance, and the points made below can only complement and elaborate on his ideas. It is worth adding that this war – which could be called a Thirty Year's War, because it has been waged since the fall of communism in 1989 – like any prolonged conflict has been full of ostensible truces and violent clashes.

At present, we are experiencing one of the most heated moments of this struggle, in which the conservative side has an institutional, financial and political advantage. In his essay, Piotr Piotrowski presented the idea of creating art as a way of conducting political discourse. However, at the time he published his observations, only the liberal side used this kind of language. Conservative populists seemed to be passive, only responding to provocations from avant-garde artists. This attitude changed as populist ideas moved into the political and media mainstream. We can see conservative populists' evolution from accusing art of rejecting traditional aesthetic values and offending religious feelings to promoting their own artists who will express right-wing ideas using the language of contemporary art.

## **1 Hurt – insulted – reactive**

Jan-Werner Müller defines populism as »a particular *moralistic imagination of politics*, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified [but fictional] people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior.«<sup>2</sup> The central message spread by the conservative populists holding power in today's Poland is that mysterious and harmful forces, that are undermining our cultural

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1 Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, Krakau 2007, p. 207.

2 J.W. Müller, *Co to jest Populizm?*, Warszawa 2017 p. 26.

identity, endanger us. Such messages are usually grotesquely clumsy, but at the same time powerful and dangerous. To give one example, Maciej Mazurek wrote on *wPolityce.pl*, a right-wing news and opinion website, that:

»the fierce fight taking place for cultural institutions seems to suggest that they are very important, perhaps the last Polish bastions of a cosmopolitan leftist international, which is a new incarnation of a communist party network, and activists who live by wreaking havoc and provoking conflict. Sexual scandals and attacks on all religions, which are part of a strictly political strategy, should be treated as such, and tales about artistic freedom are just a pipe dream. Anyone who knows something about the first stage of the Bolshevik Revolution will see that we are simply dealing with neo-bolshevism.«<sup>3</sup>

The author raises the alarm that cultural institutions in Poland have fallen into the clutches of a leftist cosmopolitan international that is introducing the first stage of the Bolshevik Revolution. This type of reasoning has ceased to be absurd or funny, because it is reaching a broad audience that interprets such words literally, and easily absorbs inverted meanings and paranoid conspiracy theories.

If you present the situation in this way, you can interpret your actions as justified self-defence. Such self-defence frequently consists in resorting to legal repression under the pretence of violation of article 195 of the Penal Code, which punishes what is called »offence of religious feelings.« Pursuant to this article, if at least two people have an impression that their religious feelings have been offended, and report the fact to the prosecutor's office, the latter launches an investigation into the matter. Needless to say, the category of offended feelings is extremely vague and, in practice, prevents any criticism of religious beliefs, especially in the field of visual culture: art, theatre and film. Instigated by the media, activists present themselves as an injured party defending itself against aggression, and resort not only to legal measures but also often to physical attacks involving acts of vandalism. This is what happened at *Zachęta – National Gallery of Art* in 2000, when an MP, in a daring action, removed a meteorite from a sculpture of Pope John Paul II by Maurizio Cattelan titled *La nona ora*. A strong protest also took place during an exhibition at the *Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art* in 2013, when a group of praying protesters threw paint on the screen showing a work by Jacek Markiewicz, titled *Adoration*. The work, which depicts a man leaning on a crucified Christ, was condemned as blasphemous and sparked protests by high hierarchs of the Church.

## 2 Counterattack by means of fake news

The fake-news strategy, in all its glory, became part of the arsenal of Poland's right-wing populists in 2010. The turning point was the crash of a presidential plane near Smolensk airport. Anyone familiar with history and the mechanism of conspiracy theories,

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3 <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/328840-lewactwo-w-galerii-w-poznaniu-mamy-kolejna-odslone-wojny-kulturowej> (last visit 18.10.2020).



such as those concerning the causes and the course of the JFK assassination, could easily anticipate subsequent reports generated by politicians and activists whose main aim was to generate fear, suspicion, as well as sharp political and social divisions with the help of an avalanche of increasingly fantastic reports and theories. Their awkward implausibility at first provoked laughter and shrugs of the shoulders, but later they caused only disgust and fear of their unexpected effectiveness and impact on the audience. Fake news is an international offensive weapon used by populists of all persuasions, with Poland being no exception in this respect. After the populist government took over the public media, a casual attitude towards facts and all kinds of innuendo, manipulation and distortion became an accepted standard among their employees, rather than a deviation from the norm. Victims of such an information policy included those artists and art institutions that do not support the ruling party. The strategy used by the official media towards art is to create a scandal and to make cultural institutions responsible for hosting extremely tasteless and indecent events. The strategy is to adopt the so-called common man's point of view, sympathise with his ignorance, and present this deficit as a virtue, which should be a reference point for corrupt intellectual elites. When Jerzy Miziołek, the newly appointed director of the *National Museum in Warsaw*, removed from the exhibition a work by the Polish avant-garde icon Natalia LL, he in all seriousness invoked a letter that the museum had allegedly received from a mother shocked by the fact that her kid had seen a painting she considered obscene.

News that is false, or partly false, or probably true, usually has its origin in a grey legal area so that it will be as difficult as possible for the injured party to defend itself, place a disclaimer or win compensation. This is a technique brought to perfection by tabloids. An item of news does not usually appear as the author's direct product, it is a report from a third source. If you take the risk of not citing other sources, you add question marks or edit the text so that its content will be logically inconsistent and that the necessary associations will be made only in the reader's mind. Properly fabricated information can be enhanced with a commentary by an expert with an academic degree, whose opinion is based solely on the absurd thesis presented by the author. Another effective method is to add howls of outrage from representatives of 'common people'.

Such operations can be stepped up by cooperation of populist activists and politicians as well as Catholic priests with pro-government local and national media. Fake news in the form of a city councilor's absurd accusation is announced on local television, quoted by a radio station, commented on by a columnist of a weekly published in Warsaw, and then it goes viral in social media. Thanks to this, the fabricated content circulates continuously at various levels, and its impact reverberates like an echo. On the basis of frequently quoted information whose source has long been forgotten, the prosecutor's office may take action to investigate the case, which makes the report even more credible. The narrative in right-wing media is to present progressive and avant-garde activities in culture, particularly in theatre and visual arts, as a leftist conspiracy which – with the help of Marxist ideology supported by secret sponsors from cosmopolitan communist-capitalist circles – wants to undermine the traditional family and culture, as well as the healthy national and Catholic foundations of society. What makes this narrative effec-

tive is referring to Stalinist propaganda paradigms – deeply rooted in the older part of society – according to which the cause of all evil was always a demonised stranger in two incarnations: an external sponsor and an internal enemy who is an agent of hostile forces. This was the mechanism of a campaign launched in Hungary by Viktor Orbán against the open-society promoter George Soros. Identical techniques are used in Poland. To illustrate the working of this mechanism, let me give three examples of media operations directed against the work of *Poznań's Arsenal Municipal Gallery* over several months in the years 2018 and 2019.

The target of these attacks was not art as such but, above all, the liberal local-government that funds the gallery. The attacks took place in the time of local elections, which the populist right wanted to win at any price. In 2018, the fiftieth anniversary of the Polish March, Prague Spring and Paris May protests provided the gallery with an opportunity to hold a series of events titled *Revolution Workshops*. The purpose was not to reminisce about what happened 50 years before, but to discuss how revolutionary ferment forms in today's world, how societies organise resistance to threats they face, and how today's dreams and utopias come true. Right-wing Radio Poznań, which used to be a very popular and well-liked public radio station before Jarosław Kaczyński came to power, used a 40-second fragment of a performative lecture delivered by the Gyne Punk group on the history of gynecology to accuse the gallery of instructing the audience how to abort pregnancy at home, which is prohibited by Polish law. Despite the absurdity of the accusation, the matter was picked up by right-wing politicians and the Poznań archbishop – who devoted part of his sermon to the gallery during a Corpus Christi procession – and investigated by the prosecutor's office. The fake news fabricated by right-wing propaganda functionaries was then spread by Catholic newspapers and government television stations.

Another excuse for attack was *Bed Time*, an exhibition created by the artistic collectives *Coven* from Berlin and *Girlhood* from Poznań. As early as two months before the scheduled opening of the exhibition, radio Poznań reported that the gallery wanted to corrupt under-age participants with an anal sex workshop. This wild accusation was picked up by a local television station which devoted a special program to the subject. As a result of the *Coven* group's artistic intervention, and to the delight of the public, the television program itself became part of the exhibition. An attack on *A Ten-Minute Break*, an exhibition by photographer Bownik and painter Zbigniew Rogalski, coincided with a debate about pedophilia in the Polish Catholic Church. As part of whitewashing the topic and diverting the public's attention from the heart of the matter, government media reported that the professional group most infected with pedophilia were not priests but bricklayers. The media also repeated the claim about minors being »sexualised« by the gay community. Bownik and Rogalski's exhibition consisted of a series of photos that extremely formalistically presented a male nude. Talking about a curatorial guided tour for families with children, a radio Poznań journalist reported that »young children with parents are looking at pictures of a naked man« and quoted an expert's opinion: »The psychologist Bogna Białecka, head of the Foundation for Health Education and Psychotherapy, is appalled by the event. »Convincing a small child that the view of a naked



Fig. 13: Paweł Bownik and Zbigniew Rogalski, *A Ten-Minute Break*, exhibition view

stranger is OK and natural is an element of grooming. By destroying its sense of intimacy, we make the child vulnerable to pedophiles' adds Białecka.«<sup>4</sup>

### 3 Does modern national art exist?

Conservative critics and media have always held the traditional view that the avant-garde language of twentieth-century art is immoral and degenerate. Such an opinion is shared by the majority of Polish society. Attacking artists who use media such as performance or installation, has become too easy to satisfy more ambitious columnists. However, the widespread belief that these technically suspicious forms are employed only by left-wing deviants – sick people whose only ambition is mockery, scandal, fraud and manipulation – has slightly changed in Poland. It has turned out that, paradoxically, modern means of expression can also be adopted to express conservative, religious, as well as nationalist and xenophobic views. As a manifestation of these tendencies two exhibitions can be mentioned: *Tymos – the Art of Anger* at Toruń's Art Centre in 2012 and

4 Krystyna Rożańska-Gorgolewska: »Małe dzieci z rodzicami oglądają zdjęcia nagiego mężczyzny«, at: Radio Poznań, 26.04.2019, <https://radiopoznan.fm/.../male-dzieci-z-rodzicami-ogladaja-zdjecia-nagiego-mezczyzny...> (last visit 18.10.2020).

*Rebellion Strategies* at Poznań's Arsenal Municipal Gallery in 2016. Anger, rebellion, as well as an aggressive and uncompromising attitude, are meant to be the hallmarks of this trend.

Its patron is Stanisław Szukalski, a forgotten crazy visionary who is now being rediscovered in Poland, and who, in the 1930s, created extraordinary and formally perfect utopian visions for Slavic state fascism, a system that never came into existence. In 2008, a critical and controversial analysis of Szukalski's work was made by another Polish artist, Piotr Uklański, who used foam to reconstruct one of the designs, titled *Stach's Eagle*, and showed it at New York's Gagossian Gallery. Today's patron of the conservative trend in Polish art is Zbigniew Warpechowski, an outstanding and once uncompromising performer who advocates nationalist and xenophobic views. His 2009 sculpture titled *What Else* depicts a toilet bowl and a board featuring ideas such as culture, dignity, freedom of speech, faith, patriotism, honor, and motherland, each waiting for its turn to be flushed down the toilet – according to the artist. Warpechowski's attitude has lost nothing of its radical rebelliousness; what has changed is that today the artist acts as a mentor and teacher who opposes the evil represented by liberal cosmopolitan elites. It seems, however, that there is no rational criticism here, there are only insults hurled blindly, full confidence in one's own knowledge, and lack of any attempts to understand the problems of the modern world.

Jacek Adamas is an alumnus of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and member of a group of Prof. Grzegorz Kowalski's former students who include the most recognisable Polish artists, such as Paweł Althamer, Katarzyna Kozyra and Artur Żmijewski. Adamas is a sculptor and local activist. In his best-known works, he approves of various conspiracy theories related to the Smolensk plane crash. His installation titled *Mourners* depicts shooting-target figures riddled with bullet holes. The name »Smolensk« underneath clearly suggests that the author identifies with the reports claiming that the crash victims were allegedly finished off with gunshots by agents of Russian special services. The work was displayed by the artist in front of Warsaw's Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art on the day the plane crashed near Smolensk and, after a few hours, removed from public view by gallery staff.

*TUSK 154*, the title of a mobile sculpture, is a combination of »Tu-154«, the airliner type, and »Donald Tusk«, the name of the-then Polish prime minister. For many years now, right-wing populists have been unsuccessfully trying to prove that the Polish prime minister took part in a plot to assassinate his political competitor and, together with Vladimir Putin, caused the plane to crash.

Adamas is perfectly aware of the huge potential of modern art's language to form a political message. However, his politically engaged works violate the ethical obligations of political art, one of which is to encourage us to think and ask questions. Rather than contributing to a critical debate, these works are part of a political witch-hunt, which has brutally, by means of outright lies, helped to provoke a political conflict which enabled populists to seize power.

As Jacques Rancière wrote, »art is politics not because of the messages or feelings it communicates about the world order. Nor is it politics because of the way it presents the social structure, conflicts and identities of social groups. Art is politics through the

very distance it keeps from its functions, through the type of time and space introduced, through the way it divides this time and populates this space.«<sup>5</sup>

Ignacy Czwartos used to be the author of subtle painting compositions whose style referred to Jerzy Nowosielski, the great nestor of Polish painting, and to the tradition of Russian avant-garde and Orthodox icons. However, the artist's close links with the community of football fans led to his artistic language coming to be used for different purposes. The series of paintings titled *Everyone Has His Own Heroes* is dedicated to post-war anti-communist partisans. The uncritical cult of those soldiers has become an instrument used by Polish right-wing populists to intensify the political dispute.

We could ask the question about the difference between the political art created by, say, Artur Żmijewski and the art of his university friend Jacek Adamas. Are their activities symmetrical, differing only by opposite directions of their thinking? Is this, as Piotr Piotrowski put it, art according to politics, or art in the service of politics? To conclude, I would like to quote Piotrowski's words written over ten years ago, words that sound as if they had been written today:

»Now that Poland is undergoing civilisational transformation, that the shape and value system of our society are being decided, that the options of open versus authoritarian society are clashing with each other, I strongly believe that we need art as much as we do oxygen, an art that will shake us out from the rut of conventional seeing and thinking.«<sup>6</sup>

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5 J. Ranciere, *Estetyka jako polityka*, Warszawa 2007, p. 24.

6 P. Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, Kraków 2007, p. 216.



Fig. 14: Zbigniew Warpechowski, *Co jeszcze?*, at the exhibition *Strategies of rebellion*, 2019

**Sarah Wilson**

I wish to present two Polish artists whose London shows made a huge impression on me in 2017, with continuing relevance for today. First, Marcin Dudek whose sculpture and video installation *Steps and Marches* was shown at the Edel Assanti gallery, secondly Ewa Axelrad whose *Shtamah* was shown at Copperfield. (‹Shtamah› means boys' solidarity implying group aggression).<sup>1</sup> Marcin is based in Brussels and Krakow; Ewa is a Polish artist based in London. Ewa's huge black papier mâché lions, life-size replicas of those in Trafalgar Square, dominated the roof of Hannah Barry's Bold Tendencies gallery, a multi-storey car park venue in Peckham, in the summer of 2017. When I saw them, I experienced a visceral sense of recognition: visceral reaction is important in my talk.<sup>2</sup> I discovered Marcin's show as an Edel Assanti gallery fan.

These two art exhibitions, created as installations and with remarkable and complementary poetics, work with political propaganda, media images and their mediation. The Brexit context and the rise of right-wing populism in both Britain and Poland is what makes these artists' works so relevant. In September 2019, the *Guardian* newspaper ran a headline »Polish ambassador urges Poles to ›seriously consider‹ leaving the UK«. There were 832,000 Poles living in Britain in 2018; 116,000 had already left, but Ambassador Arkady Rzegocki declared that only 27% of Poles had applied for »settled status« after Brexit.<sup>3</sup> Concurrently, in the autumn, the Lisson Gallery showed Ai Wei Wei's Lego wall piece, *Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election* (The Washington, DC, report of March 2019) at the Frieze Art Fair.<sup>4</sup>

The evil genius of the Brexit-linked connection in Britain is Alexander Nix, CEO of the organisation Cambridge Analytica.<sup>5</sup> An alumnus of Eton and Oxford, like David Cameron and Boris Johnson, he wears the poppy in November to commemorate the first world war, like any member of the British establishment. Beyond the systematic harvesting of millions of Facebook profiles (40% of Vote Leave's budget was linked to data-mining strategies) Nix is known for ›honey trap‹ bribes (Ukrainian girls) and more, hiding behind the deceptive company logo which looks both like a network and a brain.

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- 1 *For Steps and Marches*, (22 September – 4 November 2017) see <https://edelassanti.com/exhibitions/45/overview/> and <https://edelassanti.com/news/163/> and for *Shtamah* (20 September – 18 November) <http://www.copperfieldgallery.com/ewa-axelrad-shtamah.html> (08.03.2021) together with the artists' websites, <http://marcin-dudek.com/> and <http://www.ewa-axelrad.com/> (25 October 2020).
  - 2 Ewa Axelrad, *Let's go Yes, let's go (They do not move)*, Bold Tendencies, summer 2017.
  - 3 Sarah Marsh, *the Guardian*, 18 September 2019.
  - 4 <https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/arts/ai-weiwei-lego-london-lisson-gallery-a4250816.html> (25 October 2020).
  - 5 »The Cambridge Analytica data scandal came to light in March of 2018 and has since been dubbed the ›biggest political scandal of the century‹, as data harvested from over 87 million Facebook profiles was used to determine the outcome of both the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US presidential election.« Celen Ebru Paytoncular: »Cambridge Analytica Main Players: Where Are They Now?«, 19.12.2019, <https://www.women-in-technology.com/wintec-blog/cambridge-analytica-main-players>

Cambridge Analytica was exposed by Carole Cadwalladr, a *Guardian* newspaper journalist – my heroine, along with anti-Brexit businesswoman Gina Miller.<sup>6</sup> Together with established criminal fraud around Brexit, which the judiciary does not pursue, there is also the issue of the media's refusal to give adequate coverage to the ›whistleblowers‹ Chris Wiley and Shahmir Sanni, who exposed the workings inside Cambridge Analytica and the ›Leave‹ campaign's offices.<sup>7</sup> Our national anti-hero, Nigel Farage (leader of the now moribund UK Independence Party (UKIP), revels in his links to Steve Bannon and Donald Trump. In 2018, the figure who had no face, Dominic Cummings, the ›Leave‹ campaign's mastermind, was portrayed by Benedict Cumberbatch in the film *The Uncivil War*. In the current demonstrations, carnival masks present Cummings as the devil to Boris Johnson's ›dunce‹ in pointed cap – a master-slave dialectic like the relationship between King Lear and the fool. Who is the fool? (Cummings did not go to Eton and was at Exeter College, Oxford – there is a significant class difference between the two men).

I became interested in the ›Crowds and Power‹ issue straight after experiencing the Dudek and Axelrad shows, and have lectured on the subject in both Vienna and Moscow.<sup>8</sup> The evolution of thought around mass propaganda and control is so interesting with regard to art history, that I hope you will allow the rapid overview I present here.

Everyone knows the famous frontispiece by Abraham Bosse to Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, where the benign sovereign ›contains‹ the mass of citizen subjects brought into his body to create the ›body politic‹.<sup>9</sup> *Leviathan* was written in the bloody context of the English Civil War (1642-1651); a mirror for our times. Protestant ›Roundheads‹ under Oliver Cromwell, with their austerity-driven Puritan ways, were pitched against formerly Catholic or Anglican Royalist ›Cavaliers‹, the land-owning aristocrats.

A much later but relevant work by the Scot, Charles Mackay, investigated not the structure of legitimate government, like Hobbes, but the irrationality within political and popular behavior. *Extraordinary delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1841, treated alchemy, the Crusades, burning witches, the tulip craze in Holland and the South Sea bubble (a nationwide financial speculation that imploded). The move to study ›groupthink‹ begins here.

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6 Gina Miller, the Guyanese-British business woman took the British Government to court in a case contesting their power to take Britain out of Europe without approval from parliament and won. She suffered racist abuse.

7 Carole Cadwalladr, »The Cambridge Analytica Files. The Brexit whistleblower: ›Did Vote Leave use me? Was I naive?‹«, in: *The Guardian*, 24.03.2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/24/brexit-whistleblower-shahmir-sanni-interview-vote-leave-cambridge-analytica> (25 October 2020).

8 I have given lectures on this in Moscow and Vienna. Cp. »Crowds, Power and the Rape of the Masses«, Department of Art History, University of Vienna, 30/11/2017. »Culture and Emigration, Crowds and Power«, HSE Art and Design School, Moscow, inaugural keynote lecture, 10/4/2019.

9 See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies, A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton NJ, 1957.



After the invention of psychology, Gustave le Bon's *Psychology of the Crowd* (published in French 1895, in English 1896) saw many editions. In almost every case, writers specialising in mass behaviour have personally experienced the visceral horror of rampaging crowds: Lebon had witnessed not only the Franco-Prussian war, but the Communards setting fire to the Tuileries Palace in Paris. His book was taken up by the military who wished to form the perfect *esprit du corps* of the fighting body, and by the early discipline of criminology. At the turn of the twentieth century, Georges Sorel's *Reflections on violence*, 1908, inspired the Futurists. A revolutionary syndicalist, Sorel was interested in class struggles and revolution: Sorel was reedited in 1921 and 1937. The move from Futurist violence to later ambiguities is interesting here, and I beg another illuminating art-historical digression.

Modernism, with its militarised notion of the avant-garde, was often linked to violence and the contemplation of the crowd. The contrast is striking between Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Fourth Estate*, 1906 – the march towards the viewer of the proletariat claiming its rights (with recognisable portraits), and Carlo Carrà's *Funeral of the Anarchist Galli*, 1910-1911. It looks like a whirl of algorithms, psychic emotion transcending forms: far more than just futurist 'lines of force'. Galli was killed by the police in 1904; mounted police would not let mourners into the cemetery: horses, pallbearers, weapons are involved. In both Italy and France, artists and poets were influenced by Jules Romain's poetry and his theory of *unanimité*: the crowd acting as one soul, unanimously. Here, we enter the field of 'group psyche' theory, or collective consciousness.

In the later 1930s, the peaceful Popular Front processions, with banners celebrating Voltaire, Courbet, Paul Signac in 1936, turned to violent demonstrations around strikes, and another police victim's funeral in 1937. Walter Benjamin, a refugee in Paris, turned again to his earlier readings of Georges Sorel and his *For a critique of violence*, 1921. He spoke of the strikers' current quandary as to »when and under what conditions a legal action must convert itself into an illegal action and an illegal action into a violent act«. <sup>10</sup>

By this time the Soviet Comintern, the largest world propaganda machine in existence, was flourishing, directed by Willi Münzenberg, a Berliner, who moved with his international operations to Paris after the Reichstag fire in 1933. All new media were co-opted: photography, photomontage, film and reportage. Initially an antifascist, he turned against Stalinism from 1937-9, and was 'disappeared' in 1940. His book *Propaganda as a weapon*, 1937 (published in German in Paris), became a textbook for the Soviet dissident in Paris, Sergei Chakhotin. His *Rape of the Masses. The psychology of totalitarian political propaganda* (French 1939, English 1940, Russian 2016) brought his background as a biologist and student of Ivan Pavlov and the Soviet school of reflexology to bear on propaganda. *Le Viol des Foules par la Propagande Politique* (the French title) means 'mind violation' or 'mind rape'. The book was immediately pulped when the Nazis entered Paris in 1940.

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10 Compare Benjamin's *For a critique of violence* of 1921 with his letter to Fritz Lieb, 31 December 1937, see; Chryssoula Kambas, »Walter Benjamin, lecteur des *Réflexions sur la Violence*«, in: *Cahiers Georges Sorel*, 2, 1984, p. 85.



Fig. 15: Marcin Dudek, *Steps and Marches*, 2017

It is Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power*, 1962 (*Masse und Macht*, 1960) which gives my talk its title. Curiously anthropological and post-Freudian, it was initially motivated by his witnessing (like Sigmund Freud) the Nazis' triumphant takeover of Vienna. His first novel, *Die Blendung*, 1935 (English *Auto da Fé*, 1946), exposes mob action, group thinking and individual pathologies. To turn to our artists, however, it was William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, 1954, which was important for Ewa Axelrad's thinking. Translated into Polish as *Władca Much*, it was made into a UK film in 1963 and shown in Polish cinemas and on television: here English schoolboys interact together in a state of lawlessness which degenerates into tribal behavior and cruelty.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that what we now call ›the construction of masculinity‹ was addressed by Klaus Theweleit from East Germany with his *Männerphantasien*, 1977-1978 (*Male Fantasies*, 1987). It has had a huge impact on liberal studies – English literature during the First World War for example – and while ›toxic masculinity‹ is today's phrase (the dialectical other of the #MeToo movement), the British political establishment seems immune to these debates.

So back now to Martin Ducek who was born a poor boy in a high-rise block in still-Communist Poland, and whose excitement was to go out as a supporter of the Cracovia football team. Polish Cracovia fans dress in orange. Orange is the color of the team's

bomber jacket lining (turned inside-out for fighting); it signals opposition.<sup>11</sup> The orange installation in the Edel Assanti gallery asked the public to step through a steel turnstile sculpture as though entering a stadium in an orange haze. *Well washed*, 2017, hanging on the wall, is a cast of Marcin's brother's trousers, the day he was stabbed in the leg at a match: the gallery and the art scene become an experimental crucible as opposed to the event on the pitch or on the street. (Fig. 15)



Fig. 16: Marcin Dudek, *Total Event*, 2017

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11 »Today, in Eastern Europe, orange functions as a token of opposing those in power and the establishment. At the turn of the 1980s in Poland, it was also a symbol of Orange Alternative's anti-communist happenings and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – of the political revolution in Ukraine. Orange is also a color symbolising aggression – a form of a visible manifestation, contrasting with grey«. Przemysław Strożek, tr. Patryk Grabowski November 2017; English translation see: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/marcin-dudek> (25 October 2020).

The sculpture, *Total Event*, 2017, is a lead cast from a Soviet army helmet (worn by Polish riot police) inside which is cast of stadium terraces; useful repurposing – to beat up the fans. (Fig. 16) *The Mob was present*, 2017, a ›pleated-plane‹ sculpture on a rectangular stand freezes non-lethal police pellets on the slopes of a football pitch in miniature, as though about to rush down the terraces onto the ground. The simplicity of the metal stands, and the sensual texture and sharpness of the black shapes, riff on the modernist Polish postwar sculptural tradition. In poignant contrast is the display of a jesmonite cast, *Wara*. This is Dudek's own knitted balaclava — fans must be anonymous — stiffened anatomically into a faceless skull.

Dudek uses personal photos taken at the Poland vs Romania match in 1995. He also kept a one-year diary of archive footage and research. At Edel Assanti he showed videos in which black and white photographs of the crowds together with police surveillance footage appear pixelated; orange cubes appear and disappear over the screen, lending sparkle and animation to the entire installation. Fans, police, victims and perpetrators become indistinguishable.

Dudek's performance, called *Hooligan*, where he smashes up his Brussels gallery, Harlan Levey Projects, took place as part of the parallel exhibition. Here he relives the mixture of adrenaline and testosterone, the physical power, the ›muscle memory‹ that he experienced before he was an artist. The mental distancing required to perform in a gallery space surely threatens to collapse in the heat of the moment. One source of intellectual corroboration for Dudek is Raymond Mombousse's *Riots Revolts & Insurrections*, 1977, generated by the race riot of late 1960s America. In 1967 itself, Paul Jacob's *Prelude to Riot, a view of Urban America from the bottom* explicitly raised the ›underclass‹ issue. This chimes with both Dudek's and Ewa Axelrad's agendas, which investigate both the physical violence and psychic effects of the collapse of Communism on the least privileged members of society. Popular art is in so many ways the art of the football world — so much more than a sport in Britain and in Poland (Polish émigrés tune in to their own channels to watch). There is a spillover of hooliganism into behaviour of our right-wing UKIP and neo-fascist demonstrations — equally unpleasant.

To turn now to Ewa Axelrad, and *Shtamah*, the interest here is that a female artist of the same generation confronts the same issues around masculinity, crowds and politics, with equal formal power, equal sensuality but with delicacy and reflective tranquility. As we enter the Copperfield gallery, waves of flagpoles make a sine and cosine curve, while the video at the end of the room shows arms grasping each other in a circle – a male bonding scene, just like British rugby or football players. (Fig. 17) In the center stands a sensual wax torso, suggesting both armour and skin; in the video we see it pierced, inevitably recalling religious imagery — Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows. The placing of a finger over a hole in the video is so moving: Doubting Thomas's finger placed in Christ's wound? Axelrad brings intensely Catholic imagery and male vulnerability into her art, so evidently distinguished from the propaganda and religious intolerance which lies at its origins. Almost like a tray of toothpicks, an array of small implements was also crafted and displayed to suggest neo-fascist insignia in miniature. Far from speaking from the ›imperialist‹

position of the centre, in any self-righteous or nationalistic way, I wish to highlight to the shameful British neo-fascist groups with similar insignia.

These parallel shows of the work of Marcin Dudek and Ewa Axelrad, each formally innovative, and richly political, not only speak of Poland but are commentaries on the state of populism in the UK: British right-wing Brexiteers, British neo-fascists, similarly demonstrate with aggression, and harness hatred — (including women). Boris Johnson's government has put money aside for anticipated violence around October 31<sup>st</sup> — the date we were destined to leave Europe.

I end this article by juxtaposing Ewa Axelrad's *Gorilla*, the superbly lifelike inflation of a black puffer jacket with puckered ›arsehole‹, and a snap of Dominic Cunningham. The public always desires masterminds, and personalities in whom anxieties crystallise. Cunningham stands outside Tory Party Conference headquarters with its ›Get Brexit done‹ mantra: it coincided with the very week of the AICA conference. I intended to demonstrate outside the Houses of Parliament for the third time on 19 October, as I demonstrated on 23 March 2019, with artist Adrien Sina's poster: *Brutal Ruin of Economy, Xenophobic Intolerant Tediousness*. The tedium of three years of Brexit debates relates to the power of the ›Get Brexit done‹ mantra used by Johnson to consolidate his power. The hopelessness of Britain's divided left fills our hearts with fear: great danger beckons for all our European friends, the Europeans living in Britain, the British living in Europe — and the post-Cold War consensus of the whole body politic.



Fig. 17: Ewa Axelrad, *Shtamah*, 2017

We know what happened next.



*Moderator Catrin Lorch*

**Catrin Lorch**

I would like to start with a question to Marek Wasilewski about Jacek Adamas. What I found so interesting about this artist (whom I know by name but never knew that he had this proper artistic background) regarding the topic of how things ›tip‹ I found this figure very interesting because, obviously, he ›tipped‹ in a way. Can you describe what he was like that when he was at art school? Has he been someone who propagated right wing ideas? What happened to change him in that way?

**Marek Wasilewski**

Okay, so this is a difficult question because you have to go inside someone's mind. I can only say what I know about him. I know that he's a graduate of the Academy of Arts in Warsaw, from the famous class of Grzegorz Kowalski, and as far as I know by his biography he was always very politically engaged, also in the underground in the 1980s, printing the illegal Press for Solidarity. So, there was always this engagement, and the Solidarity Movement was very diversified, because on one side it was a worker's movement, it was the union's movement. On the other side it was very much connected with the Catholic church and conservative values. On yet another side you had leftist intellectuals like Jacek Kuroń or Adam Michnik. So, it was a kind of kaleidoscope where all parts of Polish society came together against the common enemy. I can only assume that part of this biography then made some kind of impact on his later choices when he decided to leave Warsaw to go to the countryside, where he started to be a local activist fighting local governments who were corrupted and doing things against the people. Then I could sense this kind of anger that was growing in him, which in the end, at the turning point, which is marked by the president Kaczyński's plane crash in 2010, the moment when people took sides – the ›point of no return‹ you could say – he flipped to the ›dark side‹ of nationalistic populism.

**Catrin Lorch**

So, the rhetorically counter-figure to this might be Marcin Dudek, whom you, Sarah, were talking about and who was someone battling in front of football arenas and now turning this into art. Can you tell us a bit more what made him choose a career as an artist, and is this linked to him coming to Great Britain, or did he come to Great Britain as an artist?

**Sarah Wilson**

He was discovered as an artist by the young gallerist Jeremy Epstein. He does not live in England, he lives in Brussels, but he trained (which is very important in terms of people quickly absorbing the right types of theory and also, to be more cynical, the right kind of language) for two years at Central St. Martins college of art in London from 2005 to 2007. But what interests me as a critic is that there is one kind of criticism you can do when you walk into the art gallery and you think the works plus the labels speak for themselves. However I am always interested in what actually produced the works of art, in terms of not just an artist's training but the emotional and intellectual nexus which spurred them. Marcin is so successful that, although I've also encountered a splendid work he did in Palermo last year, he never has enough time to talk to me in a deep way about that

transformation. I think, when we were having a little word together earlier, I said I'm aware that Arman also smashed up a gallery in New York as a work of art. But I think that then, Arman was re-performing an inner rage he'd had in Paris at the time of the Algerian war that was too complex and not transportable to New York. I think the proximity of the events, and also this idea of the physical action, and this very great violence permitted by the gallery when the artist himself is re-enacting, is very interesting. This puts into question the artist's self-formation, self-control, and the desire to get out of what Marcin Dudek must have seen as an impasse, a ›no-future‹ type life that he managed to get out of. It raises all sorts of questions for how we as critics or historians approach the artist where their biography, their subjectivity, and their emotional investment in what they're doing, their libidinal energy, affects things as well as simply the work of art in the gallery.

### **Catrin Lorch**

Well, still I found that opposing the two or three images – i.e. the way in which Dudek turned the football memorabilia, the clothes and the signs – so striking compared with Adamas, who somehow turned the language of this conceptual, partly figurative and very literate art, against it, and I found this was a very similar movement which created totally different art experiences in the end. I found that, with these two names that you were talking about, you somehow really framed what we were looking for in this session, to say how close and how different these art activities can be at a certain point. So, I found that really striking. Now I would like to learn a bit more about why you, Sarah, framed this work so intensively in the discussion about street protest and revolt? There was a lot of anger visible.

### **Sarah Wilson**

Yes. Well, I suppose if you think of the earliest work, that earliest Italian work, the artist Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, coming before all the Futurists whose names we know, was finding it imperative to stop painting nudes and salon pieces, and to give proletarians on the march the status of a history painting. So, he's doing this and as spectators of *Il Quarto Stato* (The Fourth Estate), 1901, you're actually in front, as though you are the establishment with the people coming at you. So, his imperative was to record what was on the street in the same way as the Futurists. I mean, Cubism is all to do with café life, even if you're reading newspapers about the Balkan war. This showed a way to get out of the confines of the inside onto the outside and make the street the subject.

But I think what is interesting with Dudek is that, instead of saying ›I want to be a performance artist‹; or ›I want to go on the street‹; or ›I want to be the Polish Petr Pavlensky‹, he actually wants to use the frame, which is a frame that invites contemplation as well. It's like the penchant for ›slow‹ in everything at the moment: slower contemplation, slower thought etc. He wants to use that gallery space to do something very powerful. Normally when you go into galleries you don't get the sense of being in an auratic space where everything is part of the same thought process, but that's what really struck me when I first saw his work.



Oddly enough, with Ewa Axelrad's Trafalgar Square lions up on top of the Peckham car park, what was strange was the transfer of auratic space and the messing-up of our feelings, including feelings of embarrassment at big, pompous British monuments from Trafalgar Square which is the traditional place of protest, and the transposing of that to a rooftop outside. So, there's an inside-outside element which I think is interesting, because just looking at the outside takes you away from the head. I think the gallery is a space where you can have a kind of enlarged head to think about things more contemplatively. I really love Ewa's work, I mean, she can do the monumental: we begin with the lions. She can do big, and she can do very, very small. And she can make criticisms about her position as a woman without the overused languages of ›feminism‹ in inverted commas.

**Catrin Lorch**

Have these two artists been displaying in Poland?

**Marek Wasilewski**

I don't know about Dudek but Ewa Axelrad definitely. She is a graduate of the University of Arts in Poznań where I teach and she exhibits her works in Poland

**Catrin Lorch**

I have one last question to Marek. You talked in a very interesting way about how justice and state in Poland now found new ways of censorship, and you talked about how they can, as long as you have two people who feel offended, can stir up some kind of media battle at least. But how does this affect the art institutions, because we are so much talking here about the media and the public and the arts. But can you just outline if that affects the institutions, and what kind of policy is behind this?

**Marek Wasilewski**

Yes, I think the whole picture is quite complicated. When you say censorship, I'm thinking about the times before 1989 when everything was very clear. There was an office of state censorship, and before any publication it was accepting or rejecting its content. So, you knew very well what you can do and what you cannot do, and if you want to publish or show something that is illegal then you have to go underground. Nowadays, the situation is more complex, because officially there is no censorship. But now you have to think twice before you engage in showing or discussing works that are critical towards religion for example, because people can feel offended. Also, there is growing pressure from the government, from the ministry of culture, on not showing certain things, and this is a pressure of money, they just refuse funding. In Poznan for example there is a very well-known Malta Theatre Festival. The Minister of Culture objected to the presence of well known director Oliver Frljic at the festival and withdrew the financial support that was previously granted to the festival. As a result the festival went to the court and the minister had to pay the money, but that was two years after, so it was already too late. So, we don't have clear censorship, but you can see that this field of freedom is getting smaller and smaller.

**Catrin Lorch**

I would now like to open the podium for questions.

**Klara Kemp-Welch**

My question is for Marek Wasilewski. I thought your analysis was very clear about the evolution of the strategy of populism in Poland, and you showed many examples of how very polarised everything has become. Obviously, this is something that is very much on our minds in England as well, the language of polarisation and the violence of that language which was something that was in the media last week, when Boris Johnson started using particular language to talk about a bill which had been passed through parliament.

So, I was struck by your use of the term ›the dark side‹ just now to talk about an artist having gone over to ›the dark side‹. I think that the analysis of these strategies is important, but I would be more interested to hear examples of artists and art works who have sought to build dialogue across these seemingly utterly polarised, impossible to reconcile groups. It made me think of Artur Żmijewski's very famous video work *Them*, in which he brought together representatives of different extreme groups in Polish society, very importantly, for a non-linguistic encounter where they were asked to use pictures and illustrations to show what they thought about the other group, and it led to violence. The examples Sarah gave were so powerful because both of them mobilised affect and touch and so on, rather than language. So, could you perhaps think of some examples of Polish contemporary works which have sought to foster dialogue?

**Marek Wasilewski**

Okay, this is a very interesting question. Perhaps it requires a different presentation, because obviously, the logic of this presentation was the analysis of the populist language. I think that the example of Artur Żmijewski is quite controversial because I think that the situation that we are facing right now in Poland is very binary. You can be on this side or you can be on the other side. If you're trying to build a bridge in the middle of the war then actually you're condemned by both sides. So, these voices, I think, are very weak right now. I am convinced that the art you're talking about has a very good future, but it's not very visible right now in Poland. As a quick example there is a young artist, Franciszek Orłowski for example, whose work is mostly about empathy, about reaching out to the other, about discovering the others in many different performances and visual works. He's doing exactly what you're talking about.

**Frida Sandström**

I'm from Stockholm. I have one question for each of you. First, Marek, I wanted to follow up on your exemplification and perhaps also look back on what the speakers talked about this morning in terms of singularities, and perhaps it's also important to think about examples that are not individual artworks but rather organisations in between fields as I think is one of the threads we've been following in this congress. I was thinking about the Warsaw Biennale that had its inaugural edition this summer, which explicitly, in

text and in practice, did present itself as a way to use the Biennale structure to mobilise, specifically in Poland, in relation to exactly what you were presenting. So, I'm curious if you could elaborate a little bit on that?

Then, for Sarah, I wanted to also ask you in relation to this artist that you brought up. In Kiev, two years ago, the artist David Chychkan made an exhibition that was explicitly critiquing the right-wing governance in his country, and this one was totally demolished by neo-Nazis that invaded the gallery and basically destroyed all his works, and also sprayed a lot of tags and wrote a lot of neo-Nazi symbols on the walls. This exhibition was taking place in the Visual Culture Research Center, that first was also hosted by the University of Kiev, the art school. But it was also due to political art being exhibited by the centre that it also had to move out from the university. When they had this thing happening in the gallery they decided to keep the exhibition exactly as it was. They continued to exhibit the works with all the violence that had entered the room. For me, there are big differences between the work that you presented and this event and that type of changed exhibition. I'm curious if you could comment a little bit on that.

### **Marek Wasilewski**

Apart from Biennale Warszawa you mentioned there are many initiatives all over the country, like for example »The Antifascist Year« which was a coalition of many art institutions across Poland. In the cities such as Wrocław, Gdańsk, Poznań there are many independent non government art initiatives, art schools and municipal galleries and each of them is resisting this kind of populism in culture in its own way.

I'm thinking also about gallery Labyrinth in Lublin which organised two very interesting exhibitions, one of them called *Democracies*, and right now they have an exhibition that is called *Three Plagues*. On the occasion of both exhibitions, they organised big discussion panels involving artists from all over Poland, coming especially to this discussion to talk about the language of reconciliation with the so-called ›other side‹. But also, it was a discussion about how our audience is limited only to those who think in the same way as we are thinking. I think these were very interesting discussions. Unfortunately, we are still, you know, without good answers to these questions but I hope this is a work in progress.

### **Sarah Wilson**

Thank you. I don't know the exhibition you're talking about in Kiev, it sounds very interesting, I'll look it up. But of course, all this is inscribed in an immensely long history of iconoclasm. Of course, there is a very interesting intersection between thinking about populism and, not just people burning down other people's flags or whatever but iconoclasm, and of course in the English civil war – if you think back to Hobbes, Cromwell's soldiers were ordered to put all their horses and stables and manure inside all the churches and then smash up all the Catholic saints on the front of the cathedral facades. So, there is a whole enormous tradition.

I'm fond of Sophie Calle's project, going back to Berlin, called *Die Entfernung*. So, when the two Germanys reunited all sorts of monuments were banished to the woods.

There were three categories, and there are the minutes in the back of the exhibition's catalogue, concerning whether things were to be displaced to a forest, smashed up and destroyed and the pieces thrown away, or smashed up and buried, or whatever. But that was an extremely bureaucratic process of people thinking what they liked, what they didn't like, and Calle's project was to record people's response to the absences.

So, one's not just simply talking about religion here but a long history of iconoclasm either done by individuals taking out their fury on something – which gets us back to this whole business of emotion and objects and desire to destruct – or state-ordered destruction. And of course, state orders can be, ›please smash this Madonna‹, or they can be ›please smash the city of Dresden‹. So, you know, we're kind of talking about scales and tipping here but there is the macro scale and there is the micro scale. It's interesting to think about iconoclasm and populism as being two sides of the same coin.

***Catrin Lorch***

Sadly enough we will have to end there with iconoclasm. Thank you very much for your contributions.

# Art Criticism in Eastern Europe

## Panel 7

MODERATION  
LIAM KELLY

MAJA FOWKES  
REUBEN FOWKES  
MAŁGORZATA STĘPNIK



**Democracy on the Defensive: East European Art Criticism in the Era of Illiberal Globalisation*****Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes***

In this paper Maja and Reuben addressed the topic of art criticism as a reaction to populist tendencies in (cultural) politics' by examining the response of critics both to the spread of populist ideology in the cultural sphere and to art projects dealing with the rise of political populism in Eastern Europe.

**Vox populi – politicians as art critics*****Małgorzata Stępnik***

The main aim of Małgorzata's paper was »to analyse and compare the ›critical‹ statements of Polish politicians, accompanying the events of the memorable March 1968 (among others, politicians responsible for the censorship of Mickiewicz's drama *Dziady*, directed by Kazimierz Dejmek) and also today's political discourse over art in Poland – widely present in both traditional and social media and highly polarized along party lines«.



Fig. 18: Burial of the Mücsarnok, Budapest, 10 August 2013



## *Maja und Reuben Fowkes*

»People with integrity became speechless. Almost overnight it was possible to utter the most outrageous nonsense and spread lies without anyone raising his or her voice in opposition. Any distinction between truth and falsehood, genuine values and counterfeit ones, seemed suddenly to have vanished. How was this possible? How could this have happened? What made this possible?«

These statements may remind us of the polarised political and cultural atmosphere of the post-truth era, characterised by the alternative facts that internationally accompanied the rise of populist and neo-nationalist movements in the last decade. But in fact they were written by Czech art critic Jindřich Chalupecký in 1948, when communist parties consolidated their control over Eastern Europe. Entitled *The Intellectual under Socialism*, the initially unpublished essay captured the abrupt transformation of the conditions of artistic life and critical debate brought by the suppression of democracy in the political arena and imposition of the doctrine of Socialist Realism on cultural producers through political control of artist associations, exhibition venues, education and criticism.<sup>1</sup> Chalupecký's observations on the existential decision whether or not to collaborate with the authorities, as well as the unexpected reversals of fortune and suspension of criticality under dictatorship, resonate widely with experiences of cultural life in undemocratic climates.

Although in the interconnected world of capitalist economies it would be impossible to recreate the conditions of the closed socialist system of Eastern Europe in the 1950s, this has not stopped right-wing politicians from intervening in the autonomous structures of the artworld to counter what they view as the pernicious influence of globalist ideology and promote a unitary vision of national art. It should also be noted that while populism is considered a widespread response to the inequalities of economic globalisation, it has a particular resonance in Central Europe, where it marks the return of monopolistic, centralising, traditionalist and censorial tendencies that were assumed to have been overcome in the democratic revolutions of 1989. In this essay, the encroachment of populism into the artistic sphere is approached through the writings of Central European art critics who describe the mechanics of interference in local art scenes, while at the same time articulating and amplifying the acts of artistic solidarity, counter-institutional ingenuity and mobilisations of the intellect that have arisen in active response.

While in 1989, by opening its land border with Austria to East German refugees, Hungary hastened the collapse of dictatorships and the eruption of multi-party democracy across Eastern Europe, today the country finds itself in the vanguard of the spread of neo-national populism. The modus operandi of the mechanisms of bureaucratic control of

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1 Jindřich Chalupecký, »The Intellectual Under Socialism«, in: Tomáš Pospiszl and Laura Hoptman, eds, *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, New York 2002, p. 29–36.

the Hungarian artworld by the forces of illiberal democracy were spelled out by art critic Edit András in a 2013 article for the online journal *Art Margins*, in a tone that eerily echoes Chaluppecký:

»Already the field of art is being centralised, and comrades who are loyal to the regime and whose ideas are in total compliance with the vision promoted by the government are being placed in chief cultural positions. The advantage of such a practice is that an official who is selected to lead an institution is close and loyal to the ruling party. There is then no further need for official censorship since this process automatically guarantees the proper ideological content.«<sup>2</sup>

The specific cases mentioned in András's piece included the fusion of the Hungarian National Gallery with the Museum of Fine Arts and the imposition of a new director of the Ludwig Museum in Budapest. Opposition to what was identified as a politically motivated attempt to seize control of the leading contemporary art institution in the country, coalesced around two weeks of protests and occupations of the entrance and staircase of the museum, with artists of all generations, commercial gallerists, curators from the non-profit sector and even art collectors joining the campaign. Although the protesters were unsuccessful in pressuring the government to reverse its decision, the ›Ludwig Stairs‹ occupation created new solidarities and galvanised the artworld to develop creative forms of resistance to the right-wing takeover in the cultural field.

The promotion of the populist agenda in Hungarian culture has however gone beyond changing the directors of art institutions. Another instrument designed to exert influence over artistic life is the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA), a newly formed organisation inscribed in the constitution and with a budget exceeding that of the ministry of culture, whose tentacles extend into artistic research and publishing. Imitating the structure of traditional academies, the MMA is divided into artistic branches, with privileged academicians in receipt of substantial monthly stipends. Amongst the 41 current members of the Fine Arts section there is not a single female artist, indicative of the spuriousness of their claim to »assist artists unfairly marginalised« in the history of Hungarian art.<sup>3</sup>

In her article, András also recounts the response of the artworld to the establishment of the MMA, including protests organised against the decision to arbitrarily transfer to it the ownership and control of another major space, the Budapest Kunsthalle or Múcsarnok. The focus of a performative action to mourn its loss to contemporary art was an obituary notice that read: »It is with profound grief that we regretfully inform you of the death of Múcsarnok, the Budapest Kunsthalle, which after a period of dignified suffering passed away at the age of 117. The cause of death was neglect and the irrespon-

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2 Edit András, »Hungary in Focus: Conservative Politics and Its Impact on the Arts«, in: *Art Margins* (17.09.2013), visit at: <https://artmargins.com/hungary-in-focus-forum/>.

3 See the Fine Arts branch page of the website of the Hungarian Academy of Arts, visit at: [https://www.mma.hu/web/en/section\\_of\\_fine\\_arts](https://www.mma.hu/web/en/section_of_fine_arts).

sible behaviour of the institution that goes by the name of the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA).«<sup>4</sup>

Although Hungary has been in the forefront of systematic attempts to impose a traditionalist, neo-nationalist paradigm on local art scenes through the control of arts appointments, funding, teaching and research, the model has also been adopted in other Central European countries. Characteristically a time lag of a few years can be observed between the coming to power of a populist movement and the decision to take on the internationalist bastions of the artworld. In Poland, three years after the Law and Justice Party won a parliamentary majority, art critic Adam Mazur was still able to maintain that: »[w]hen the populists took power in the autumn of 2015, contrary to expectations, it did not end with an earthquake. Not a single art gallery or museum director was removed from office, no director of an art academy was replaced, no control of arts funding was imposed.«<sup>5</sup>

Less than a year later, an article in the online magazine *Hyperallergic* drew attention to the mounting list of political interventions in the management of arts institutions, most recently the failure to renew the contract of director of the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art. As Berlin-based critic Dorian Batycka noted: »The move mimics tactics used by the ministry to silence other cultural workers and heads of institutions deemed outside the orbit of right-wing, ruling-party ideology.«<sup>6</sup>

The other similar cases mentioned in the article included government interference in the selection of the directors of the National Gallery in Warsaw, the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews and Bunkier Sztuki in Kraków. The fears of the contemporary artworld for the future direction of the CCA Ujazdowski Castle turned out to be well-founded, with the direct appointment of a controversial new director provoking widespread outrage amongst artists and curators in Poland.<sup>7</sup> The question remains whether the Polish artworld can learn from the experience of artists, critics and curators in Hungary since 2010 and mount a successful public campaign and effective defence of artistic independence against political interference.

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4 For the full text of the obituary, see: András, op. cit. (see: note 2).

5 Adam Mazur, »Polish Art in the Period of Populism«, in: *East Art Mags* (12 November 2018), visit at: <https://artportal.hu/magazin/polish-art-in-the-period-of-populism/>.

6 Dorian Batycka, »Poland's Ministry of Culture Again Accused of Trying to Control Progressive Institution«, in: *Hyperallergic* (24 September 2019), visit at: <https://hyperallergic.com/518207/polands-ministry-of-culture-again-accused-of-trying-to-control-progressive-institution/>.

7 On opposition to the appointment of Piotr Bernatowicz, see for example the international petition to »Revoke the director appointment at Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw«, launched on Change.Org. [https://www.change.org/p/minister-of-culture-and-national-heritage-of-the-republic-of-poland-blockdecision-of-appointing-a-director-of-ujazdowski-castle-centre-for-contemporary-art-0608626ac5c8-48f7-8549-173c7831e55a/sign?original\\_footer\\_petition\\_id=14313431&algorithm=promoted&source\\_location=petition\\_footer&grid\\_position=9&pt=AVBldGI0aW9uAE35HQEAAAAAXcnAjKJEBuc2ZjBjZWI4Ng%3D%3D](https://www.change.org/p/minister-of-culture-and-national-heritage-of-the-republic-of-poland-blockdecision-of-appointing-a-director-of-ujazdowski-castle-centre-for-contemporary-art-0608626ac5c8-48f7-8549-173c7831e55a/sign?original_footer_petition_id=14313431&algorithm=promoted&source_location=petition_footer&grid_position=9&pt=AVBldGI0aW9uAE35HQEAAAAAXcnAjKJEBuc2ZjBjZWI4Ng%3D%3D) (14.11.2020).

The question whether the legacy of the communist past has made the art scenes of Central Europe more prone to political interference underpins Czech art critic Vít Havránek's discussion of the causes of the institutional crisis in the National Gallery Prague: »On the cultural level, it would be meaningful only if the prime minister (and all politicians) stopped approaching culture manipulatively, as the owner of cultural capital, and if they begin to respect the division of power allowing cultural autonomy and independence, one of the historical achievements of Europe.«<sup>8</sup> This argument can also be extended by considering the modalities of social and economic development during the post-communist transition where competition between neo-liberal elites and the prevalence of corruption have destabilised the institutional structures of Eastern European art.

In Slovakia, Bratislava Kunsthalle has found itself at the mercy of larger political and financial considerations, with the government seeking to amalgamate it within a creative centre in order to urgently make use of European Union regional funding and eyeing its centrally located building as a development site. Uncertainties over its future are also compounded by a reduction in funding from the Ministry of Culture whose electoral priorities lie in the promotion of folk culture. Art critic Kata Benedek has identified the risk that indifference towards contemporary art could switch over into populist hostility: »Smer, in power since 2012, does not pursue the type of open Kulturkampf that is detectable in Hungary, yet the measures associated with Culture Minister Ľubica Laššáková evoke a populist political logic, which does not put forth a cultural policy but rather appeals to gestures in which she sees short-term political benefits.«<sup>9</sup>

The response of Central European art scenes to the threat posed by the post-democratic turn has not stopped at the defense of artistic freedom but has also entailed attempts to turn the tables on populism using the analytical power of contemporary art. By investigating populism as a subject of enquiry, including through the format of research exhibitions, artists and curators have sought to historicise, defuse and reframe its political ascendancy. Organised as part of the 2018 Warsaw Biennial, the exhibition *Skip the Line! Populism and Contemporary Promise* set out to contest populism as a linguistic rather than a political phenomenon. Co-curator Jakub Gawkowski explained his approach to learning the lingua franca of populism in order to redirect its energies in more promising directions, as follows:

»I believe that to recognise populism as a language is a step towards reacting to it. Coming from Central Europe, we often associate populism with Kaczyński or Orbán, right-wing autocrats, right? But if you take a broader picture, you can see that what unites the

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8 Vít Havránek, »Will Czech Republic ever be modern? Notes on the institutional crisis at the National Gallery in Prague«, in: *Blok* (21 June 2019), visit at: <https://blokmagazine.com/will-czech-republic-ever-be-modern/>.

9 Kata Benedek, »The Kunsthalle Paradigm: What is the Slovak Government's Aim with the Kunsthalle Bratislava?«, in: *East Art Mags* (29 September 2019), visit at: <https://artportal.hu/magazin/the-kunsthalle-paradigm-what-is-the-slovak-governments-aim-with-the-kunsthalle-bratislava/>.

populists is not being far-right, it's the way they talk and divide society. What I find really relevant, is whether we can think of »good« populism – not in the sense of dividing the society or harassing minorities but harnessing its emotional potential.«<sup>10</sup>

The capture of public institutions by traditionalist currents has also been a factor in the establishment of grassroots organisations to articulate and embody new forms of institutional critique. The Feminist Art Institution was set up as a loose network of like-minded institutions, which all signed up to a code of practice agreed upon at a meeting in tranzit.cz in Prague in 2017. Along with setting the goal of a 50% minimum representation of women in both annual programmes of exhibitions, festivals or conferences; and in managerial and creative positions, their shared code of practice includes proactive, anti-populist statements such as: »Feminist art institutions are steadfastly opposed to all manifestations of intolerance, e.g. racism, homophobia or sexism. They formulate strategies for dealing with such situations should they arise.«<sup>11</sup>

The Feminist Art Institution has also been involved in thinking through how art institutions should respond to ecological breakdown, such as by coordinating a joint statement signed by more than 80 cultural and artistic institutions in Prague to demand that the city council declare a climate emergency in February 2019.

Art critics have investigated the position of contemporary art at the interface between climate chaos and populist rhetoric, such as by exposing attempts to sanitise the financial gains of extractivism. Critic and theorist Václav Drozd drew attention to the sources of wealth of an influential Czech collector and philanthropist: »Petr Pudil's business has led to environmental devastation, leaving a huge carbon footprint, and to this day we all pay for it with every electricity bill. How will the North Bohemian lignite burnt in fossil fuel power plants become a private museum in the centre of Prague?«<sup>12</sup>

After being published on *Artyčok.tv* in the spring of 2019 the text was removed from the website under threat of a lawsuit but has now reappeared in a revised version that still precisely describes the genealogy of the business of the energy baron. Although there is as yet no consensus in the local art scene about the significance of the role of carbon wealth in the construction of the new Kunsthalle Prague, this case points to the importance of the existence of a free space for public discussion for the democratic functioning of the artworld.

The rise of populism and its attempt to interfere in artistic spheres has been met by the organising of protests and petitions, putting aside professional differences and

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10 Jakub Gawkowski interviewed by Flóra Gadó for *East Art Mags* (17 April 2019), visit at: <https://artportal.hu/magazin/if-populism-became-the-lingua-franca-of-our-time-then-there-is-no-choice-but-to-learn-it/>.

11 Cp. Tereza Stejskalová, »Feminist Art Institution. A Code of Practice«, [https://www.academia.edu/35492650/Feminist\\_Art\\_Institution\\_A\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice/](https://www.academia.edu/35492650/Feminist_Art_Institution_A_Code_of_Practice/) (14.11.2020).

12 Václav Drozd, »Privatisation artist Petr Pudil«, published in Czech in: *Artycok.tv*, visit at: <https://artycok.tv/42947/privatizacni-umelec-petr-pudil-upravene-vydani>.

coming together to express artistic solidarity, and by devising strategies to sidestep the control of institutions by representatives of neo-official art. However, the limits to the inventiveness and resilience of the artworld in the face of an unremitting political reality have also been pointed out. As Hungarian art critic Gergely Nagy put it in a 2018 text for *Spike Magazine*: »The eight years of right-wing nationalist and isolationist government has fundamentally changed the cultural environment. The critical wing of culture is now completely marginalised and the artists in this scene struggle. Many of them have left the country: the current Hungarian art community in Berlin is as big as it was in the 1920s [...] When you can't find public funding and publicity for your work and you boycott the state institutions out of disgust, then you will eventually be silenced. Soft censorship is working.«<sup>13</sup>

It may turn out that this statement was written at the low point of the post-democratic turn in Central Europe when the energetic resources of the art scene were depleted, leading many to conclude that in light of the neo-nationalist takeover of the cultural sphere, the only option was to leave. Although artists, curators and critics have found ingenious ways to work and survive in the hostile environments of historical totalitarianism and contemporary populism, such as by withdrawing from state controlled art circuits and forming their own adaptable platforms, it appears that a basic degree of functioning democracy is necessary for art and criticism to flourish. In recent months however, a chink has emerged in the armour of neo-nationalist domination with a series of electoral reverses suggesting that Europe may have passed peak populism. After all, just as neo-national populists have reinvented the mechanisms of artistic control developed by communist states, Central European art scenes are also replenished by drawing on the source of the rebellious unofficial culture of the socialist era to empower contemporary strategies of artistic resistance.

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13 Gergely Nagy, »Many of the artists have left the country«, in: *Spike Magazine* (12 September 2018), visit at: <https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/articles/many-artists-have-left-country>.

**Małgorzata Stępnik**

»Education to democracy is education to dignity,  
and that presupposes two things: a readiness to fight  
combined with freedom from hatred.«  
(Leszek Kołakowski)<sup>1</sup>

**»Happiness pills«**

James Elkins in one of his latest articles, entitled characteristically, *Art Criticism is Too Easy* – being a sequel to a pamphlet published as early as 2003<sup>2</sup> – repeats the thesis that: »it continues to avoid judgement in favor of description«.<sup>3</sup> Hence we may state that striving after neutrality is an essential part of the critic's current *habitus*. It seems completely different in the case of populist politicians, who are far from any guardedness or sophistication and who willingly assume the role of *tribuni plebis*, fighting with any manifestations of elitism, and finally – imposing their own »aesthetic programme«. How willing they are to distribute the »mind-set altering drugs«.<sup>4</sup>

I am alluding here to two literary works, which are important not only within Polish culture, being parabolic visions of a more universal character. The first one is *Insatiability* (*Nienasylenie*, 1932), a novel by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (pen name Witkacy), an outstanding artist, philosopher and a »trickster« of his times, who committed suicide upon hearing that the Soviet Army invaded Poland on 17 September 1939 (Fig. 19). In this prophetic novel, a Sino-Mongolian army takes over the rule of Poland and the »happiness pills« prepared by a Mongolian philosopher, Murti-Bing, allow the citizens to get rid of the feeling of existential anxiety, philosophical »insatiability« and (natural) objection to the new authoritarian rule. (Let us notice that the motif of these »happiness pills« can be firmly associated with the picture by the Wachowskis: *Matrix* of 1999, which was inspired by the ground-breaking Jean Baudrillard's oeuvre, *Simulacres et Simulation*). Likewise, the artists subject to this »therapy« – to use a pop cultural connotation again – go to »the dark side of the Force«. Whereas in art and literary criticism, »a certain breed« begins to flourish, that is, »simplifiers«, individuals who are »capable of simplyfying, at will, any complex problem...«<sup>5</sup>

The second of these literary works is Czesław Miłosz's *The Captive Mind* (*Zniewolony umysł*), a collection of essays written in 1951 which was first published by the

1 L. Kołakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial*, übers. v. W. Fries, S. Czerniawski und A. Kołakowska, Chicago and London, 1997, S. 260.

2 See: J. Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism?*, Chicago 2003.

3 J. Elkins, »Art Criticism is Too Easy«, in: *New Art Examiner*, Vol. 33 No. 1/2018, p. 10.

4 D. Pawelec, »Zniewolony umysł jako parabola (Introduction)«, in: Cz. Miłosz, *Zniewolony umysł*, KAW, Kraków 1990, p. 8.

5 S. I. Witkiewicz, *Insatiability*, transl. L. Iribarne, Evanston IL 1996, p. 108.

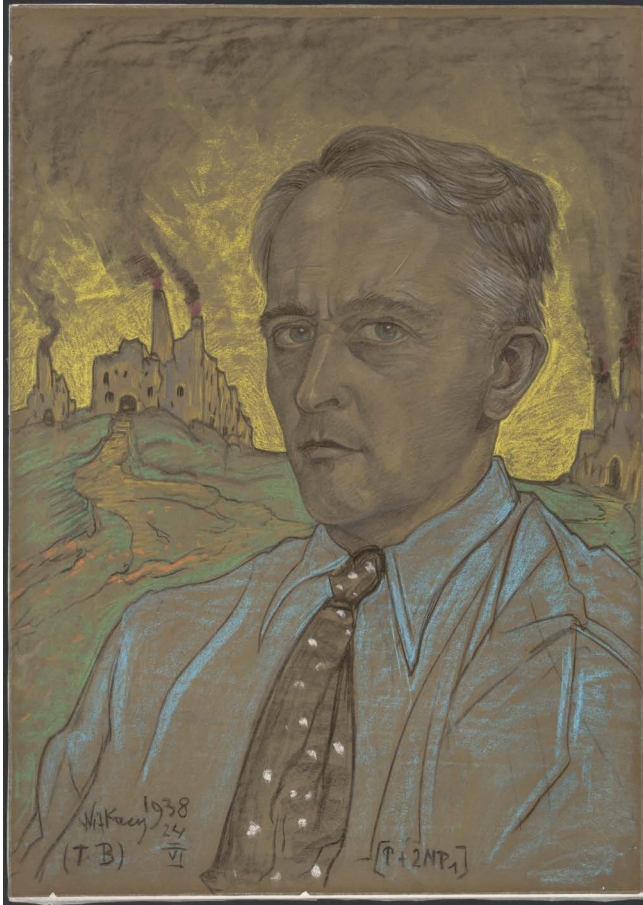


Fig. 19: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), *Autoportret*, 1938

Literary Institute in Paris in 1953. In this parabolic narrative the writer reflects on the state of mentality in people's democracies; a mentality subject to the overpowering influence of Leninism-Stalinism, which, as emphasised by the writer himself, has little in common with the original system put forward by Karl Marx. First and foremost, Miłosz analyses the attitude of his colleagues, once sophisticated men of letters and critics, but also of artists who became outstanding figures of the New Faith,<sup>6</sup> disseminating »the only right« doctrine of social realism.

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6 Cz. Miłosz, *op. cit.*, p. IX and following.



That perverse, progressive realism »depicting reality in its revolutionary development«<sup>7</sup> – by teaching »proper attitudes« – realised the »interest of the dictatorship«. <sup>8</sup> As Miłosz writes, in the field of literature it meant breaking off with »what has in every age been the writer's essential task – to look at the world from his own independent viewpoint«. <sup>9</sup> In this way, the »individual« changed into »serving the public«. Subtle high-brows and artists, guarding (self) censorship from then on, transformed into – to quote Stalin's words (which were later used by Andrei Zhdanov) – the »engineers of human souls«. <sup>10</sup>

Of course, it was possible to adopt some other strategies in this altered reality. One could, for example, withdraw from the public life (which brought the spectre of famine), or try to outsmart the raging censorship by creating allusive works directed at two various audiences, as ambiguous as a *versus cancrini* phrase, which, when read backwards gains the opposite sense. In my opinion, the most outstanding examples of such works within the field of the Polish painting are »Figures« (*Postacie*, 1950) by Wojciech Fangor, and »Two Young Married Women« (*Dwie młode mężatki*, 1949) by Andrzej Wróblewski. On the basis of the works produced by these two exquisite artists, it is possible to discern something which makes one think of both Manuel Castells's concept of »inverting the terms of oppressive discourse«, expounded in *The Power of Identity* (1997); as well as Slavoj Žižek's notion of »subversion-through-identification« described in »The Plague of Fantasies«, which was published the very same year.

Sometimes it suffices to turn to the classics, which only presumably appear »neutral«. The most significant case was the staging of »Forefathers' Eve« (*Dziady*) by a great romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz. I am referring to the stage adaptation directed by Kazimierz Dejmek, whose premiere in the The National Theatre in Warsaw (25 Nov. 1967) coincided with the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution outbreak. The last official staging of this play (30 Jan. 1968) – whose direct anti-Tsarist threads, as per the director's intention, were interpreted by the contemporary audience as anti-Soviet – caused a wave of student protests aimed mainly at censorship. Before the play was withdrawn from general release by the censors – even though, paradoxically, it was appreciated by the reviewers of the Russian »Pravda«<sup>11</sup> – Dejmek had attempted to explain his theatrical piece in a perverse way, with an attitude which could have satisfied social-realist gustoes. As he used to explain: »As a materialist I shifted the Christianity and mysticism of the author from the religious sphere to the realm of folk rituals,

7 Form Zhdanov speech, inserted in »Contributions to the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers«, 1934, (In:) *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, edited and transl. by J. E. Bowlit, New York 1976, p. 293.

8 Cz. Miłosz, op. cit., p. X.

9 Ibidem, p. IX.

10 A. Zhdanov, op. cit., p. 293.

11 See: Ł. Kamiński, *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve), undated, n. p. <https://polskiemiesiace.ipn.gov.pl/mon/all-events/march-1968/history/5240,Dziady-Forefathers-Eve.html> [visit: 08.03.2021]

emphasising the revolutionary and patriotic character of the work.«<sup>12</sup> The stage adaptation of *Forefathers' Eve* became, to a large extent, a hotbed of protests of the memorable 1968 Polish political crisis (referred to as ›March 1968‹ in Poland). Meanwhile, the counterculture events of Paris May 1968 would commence and ›bloom‹ in the entire West soon afterwards.

Every authoritarian system uses the propaganda of fear and relies on an extremely simplified, dichotomous vision of the world, and it does so regardless of the fact of whether it is extremely leftist or rightist. Serge Tchakotine, who after all was a witness of the birth of Nazism, wrote about the omnipotent propaganda of fear and persuasive language appealing to rudimentary human instincts.<sup>13</sup> The easiness with which the citizens surrender to the power of authoritarian monsters was also the subject of Erich Fromm's interest and his personal observations in his famous ›Escape from Freedom‹ (1941). Of course, these are only two from among innumerable texts on totalitarian mechanisms.

Although similar mechanisms are used – even if not on such a big scale – in contemporary *democracies* wherever *populists* manifesting what is called a ›besieged fortress syndrome‹ gain popularity, all populist discourses being at the service of a given power are, by their nature, simple in a populist and vulgar way. In each of those there are some functional key-words, as a Polish poet, Zbigniew Herbert, would put it: ›concepts [simple] like flails‹. These key words, legible slogans, partake in the process of social *conditioning* of the citizens, which we know from the gloomy dystopias by Aldous Huxley or George Orwell.

This conditioning has become particularly easy today, in the age of the significant hegemony of social media. An average user of the social media can easily falsely believe in their own power. However an easy access does not connote understanding. At this point, allow me to quote Miłosz, who says: ›Vulgarised knowledge characteristically gives birth to a feeling that everything is understandable and explained‹.<sup>14</sup> This may be the reason why the Dunning-Kruger effect can be observed so often.<sup>15</sup>

In our part of the world, anti-intellectualism is triumphing again. We could even talk about an *anti-intellectual turn*. As my friend, an outstanding English painter, Paul Collinson, says: ›We are living in the age of unreason‹. What is characteristic is the fact that this very phrase – the ›age of unreason‹ – has been recurring for many decades in the titles of treatises. It should suffice to refer to the work from the field of social psychology

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12 After: Ibidem.

13 Sergeï Tschachotin, *Le viol des foules par la propagande politique*, Paris 1939.

14 Cz. Miłosz, op. cit., p. 191.

15 The ›Dunning-Kruger effect‹ describes the overestimation of one's own self by less competent people out of an inability to judge one's own knowledge and ability with a certain degree of objectivity – which often leads to more self-confidence on the part of the person concerned than can be the case with self-reflectively judging and thereby perhaps even more competent people.

by Franz Alexander (1942), the economic study by Charles Handy (1989), or the book directed at »populist nationalism« penned by a British politician, George Osborne (2019).

Clearly, »concepts like flails« is also used in the political discourse regarding art. Here, I will return to the figure, signalled in the title, of a politician (allegedly) responsive to the vox populi – the voice of the people, and I will refer to the Polish, most topical context.

### The »new« language

Instead of quoting specific statements – with only one exception – I decided to indicate the key-words which have prevailed in the utterances of the ruling party over the last few years and which constituted a propaganda triad, viz: »nihilism«, »post-modernism«, »cosmopolitanism« – notions generally used at variance with their true meaning, while functioning as »bugbears«. These days, the word »nihilism« can be heard from the top rostrums in Poland and it tends to be compared to the worst totalitarisms in human history. (While, after all, the nihilistic attitude can result, as it was nicely put by Miłosz: »from an ethical passion, from disappointed love of the world and of humanity«<sup>16</sup>). Currently this word has caught on and can be heard in election speeches. Admittedly it is rarely encountered in comments referring to art, while it used to be commonly (over)used in the reviews and texts on cultural politics in the previous political system, viz: in the Polish People's Republic. »Nihilism«, linked with »cosmopolitanism« in one phrase, was supposed to form a negative antithesis of »healthy enthusiasm« of the builders of the new reality.

While artistic »postmodernism«, from the perspective of the contemporary *tribuni plebis*, is a synonym for what is not understandable (to them) – what is based on an experiment and transgression – even the local Law and Justice party activists (Lublin-based included), holding directorial posts in the cultural institutions, keep censoring the works of contemporary artists, labelling them as »postmodern« in their utterances, despite the fact that they are unfamiliar with the true meaning of this term. From their perspective, this slogan is an ultimate insult. Whereas, in a more general discourse referring to the substance of social issues – which are inherently ideological – the vision of the »corrupted«, »postmodern« – which is to say: western culture – is contrasted with the national tradition, just like the way philosophical »relativism« is contrasted with the ethical »values«. It is interesting that at times, the intellectuals, taking the posts at the other side of social barricades, assume a similar tone, claiming that e.g. »post-modernity is about a regime of doubt which has replaced the regime of truth«.<sup>17</sup> However, in my opinion, »a regime of doubt« is an oxymoronic expression. Anyone who doubts is never totalist indeed.

16 Cz. Miłosz, op. cit., p. 116. [underl. Cz. M.]

17 N. Witoszek-Fitzpatrick, [a voice in the discussion], in: *Captive Mind Revisited*, eds. K. Kopeć et al., Villa Decius Association/European Cultural Foundation, Cracow 2008, pages unnumbered.

Last but not least is, »cosmopolitanism«. In the Polish People's Republic the accusation of being a »cosmopolite« was formulated by the official columnists and censors against writers and artists idolising the »decadent West.«<sup>18</sup> Today this world is having its revival. Let me refer to only two, but very significant examples which support this thesis. The first is the protests of the right-wing politicians against the »cosmopolitan« character of the exhibition in the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk. The second one is a fierce critique, of course, again by right-wing politicians, of the literary works by Olga Tokarczuk, the 2018 Nobel Prize winner in Literature (the prize achieved in 2019), and earlier the laureate of the Man Booker Prize 2018 for her novel »Flights« (*Bieguni*) in Jennifer Croft's translation. Piotr Gliński, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, in an interview given at the beginning of August 2019, stated: »Yes, it is good that the Pole receives the prestigious award. It would be good [though], if she was a *reasonable* Polish writer, who understood Polish society and Polish community.«<sup>19</sup>

Beautiful, sublime and, on numerous occasions, experimental in their form, Tokarczuk's books – »constellation novels« as she calls them herself – do not fit into the registers of the right-wing gustoes. (Their »constellational« character, which is in essence Benjaminian, is an antithesis of stillness, an attitude of static affirmation.) For touching upon the threads of the multicultural (multiethnic) history of Poland (*The Books of Jacob* in particular), or for example ecologism (and vegetarianism) juxtaposed with the centuries-old hunting tradition (»Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead«), the writer puts herself in the role of »a psychotherapist of the past« (she is a psychologist by education). Tokarczuk can indeed be hailed, after Ruth Franklin, who dedicated the article in »The New Yorker« to her: »a challenger of orthodoxies.«<sup>20</sup> I think that the writer's cosmopolitanism – which I consider a positive value – bears some resemblance to Julia Kristeva's philosophy, with her tender compassion toward all that is strange, *abject*, and uncanny, (as well as with her belief in psychoanalytic ethics).

The power with authoritarian inclinations – and partially every power – cultivates social pedagogy by (re)producing obedient citizens, naming them carefully, as Pierre Bourdieu would have said – *habitus*, equipping them in a ready-made »schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action.«<sup>21</sup> »All pedagogic action« – as we read in the pages of *Reproduction* – »is, objectively *symbolic violence* insofar as it is the imposition

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18 Cz. Miłosz, op. cit., p. 46.

19 An interview given by P. Gliński to M. Olech and Ł. Mężyk, the journalists of 300Polityka.pl portal, published on 11.08.2019; <http://300polityka.pl/news/2019/08/11/kiedys-nie-bylo-w-polsce-demokracji-a-teraz-jest-zywa-demokracja-300polityka-u-piotra-glinskiego/> [visit: 12.09.2019].

20 R. Franklin, »Olga Tokarczuk's Novels Against Nationalism«, in: *The New Yorker* (August 5–12 Issue, 2019); <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/08/05/olga-tokarczucs-novels-against-nationalism> (07.09.2019).

21 P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, transl. Richard Nice, SAGE Publications Ltd., London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi 1990, p. 196.

of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power«. <sup>22</sup> This exquisite study, written in cooperation with Jean-Claude Passeron, deals, however, with the »symbolic violence« which is committed constantly, via *the language*, duplicating and preserving the hierarchy (*la distinction*) of the *underprivileged* classes. This »reproduction« is guarded by a »homo academicus«, a »pious minister of genius«, <sup>23</sup> creating »a respectful distance« with his »theatrical monologue«. <sup>24</sup> While it is completely the reverse, the social pedagogy cultivated by the populists acts against the complexity of the scholarly discourse, against the sublime of the literary phrase, just like any other manifestations of elitism. »Homo academicus« is in deep water today.

The populist power propagates, as I have said before, the language of literalism in which »a simple man« can easily move and, first and foremost, with which they can *identify*. In principle, it can be described with the same notions which have been contrasted by Abraham Moles in his »Théorie de l'information« with the concepts belonging to the sphere of aesthetics. So, on the one hand, we have an aesthetic (literary) »disorder«, an »unpredictable«, »original«, and »complex« work. On the other hand, there is political, discursive »order«, a language, which is »predictable«, »banal«, and as »simple« as possible. <sup>25</sup>

The programmatic pauperisation of the language is inscribed in the wider context of the contemporary anti-elite turn, or »anti-elite rage«, (additionally supported by »demographic fears«, in central and eastern parts of Europe in particular). <sup>26</sup> »Democratic elites are more meritocratic than ever« – as Ivan Krastev says – »but they are more hated than ever«. »Managing mistrust« – he adds – »is what democracies are about today«. <sup>27</sup> This paradox, as the Bulgarian political scientist points out, results from an equally paradoxical character of democracy per se.

While, as Tom Nichols indicates in a recently published, interesting study entitled characteristically, »The Death of Expertise« (2017), we live in an age of peculiar »worship of ignorance« – to paraphrase his words slightly. <sup>28</sup> A problem greater than lack of knowledge »is that we are *proud* of not knowing things«. <sup>29</sup> Even though the statements of the scholar have their origins in the observations of American society, they remain as universal as possible. As Nichols confesses: »I fear we are witnessing the death of the ideal of

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22 Ibidem, p. 5. [underl. M. S.]

23 Ibidem, p. 129.

24 Ibidem, p. 109.

25 A. Moles, »Information Theory and Perception«, transl. Joel E. Cohen, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and London 1968, p. 208.

26 I. Krastev, »The Age of Populism: Reflections on the Self-enmity of Democracy«, in: *European View*, Vol. 10, issue 1, p. 12.

27 Ibidem, p. 13.

28 T. Nichols, »The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why it Matters«, Oxford University Press USA, New York 2017, p. ix.

29 Ibidem, p. x. [underl. M. S.]

expertise itself, a Google-fueled, Wikipedia-based, blog-sodden collapse of any division between professionals and laypeople, students and teachers, knowers and wonderers (...).<sup>30</sup> (At this point, it is also worth making a note that »ignorance«, being a cradle of the greatest crimes in modern history, is one of the »lessons« in a widely-read book penned by Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, 2018).

Recently, I participated in a debate on possible methods of fighting against political populism organised by one of the local art galleries. One of the participants, a young man, stated that we should »strive at a more *global* communication« via social media. This statement is symptomatic for the times when communication (and its scope) is valued more than information (knowledge). Perhaps it is me who is a »dinosaur« in this way of thinking? »I am an art critic, a scold, a snob, a paid hack intent on punishing artists and spoiling the fun of the public«, »a dinosaur« – this is what a film critic, Anthony Oliver Scott, with a substantial dose of sarcastic humour, writes in *The New York Times*.<sup>31</sup> »On the Internet, everyone is a critic« – he continues – »an Amazon scholar, a cheerleader empowered by social media to Like and to Share.« In this regard it is hard not to agree with him. For it is the social media, so commonly used by populist politicians, that produces »*the thrilling, confusing effect* of making the conversation literal«. <sup>32</sup>

This »thrilling effect« becomes even stronger every time we realise the great presence of surveillance technologies in shaping our »individual« preferences, decisions and actions namely intelligent, digital machines creating a contemporary Panopticon. For, by taking part in mediating our notion of »self«, they produce a new kind of *die Unheimlichkeit*, about which Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli writes in his brilliant book, »The Digital Uncanny« (2019). »With data aggregators«, as the scholar notices, »we are no longer treated as *subjects* or addressees, but as sources of information collected, analysed, and sorted by algorithms«. <sup>33</sup>

So, maybe, against all odds, it is worth staying an analogue »dinosaur«? Fortunately – as Olga Tokarczuk said – »the world is made of words.« <sup>34</sup> *Still* made of words.

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30 Ibidem, p. 3.

31 A. O. Scott, »Everybody's a Critic. And That's How it Should Be«, in: *The New York Times*, published online 30.01.2016; <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/31/sunday-review/everybodys-a-critic-and-thats-how-it-should-be.html> [visitit: 12.09.2019].

32 Ibidem. [underl. M. S.]

33 K. Ravetto-Biagioli, *Digital Uncanny*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2019, p. 21.

34 A fragment of Olga Tokarczuk's Nobel Speech delivered at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. Translated into English by Jennifer Croft and Antonia Lloyd-Jones. Olga Tokarczuk – Nobel Lecture. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2019. Mon. 9 Dec 2019. <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2018/tokarczuk/104871-lecture-english/>> © The Nobel Foundation 2019

*Moderator Liam Kelly*

**Liam Kelly**

Good afternoon everyone. At the outset let me thank all three of you for your provocative and informative presentations. The first thing I would like to say is that I will make a few brief introductory comments and then I will open up discussion to the floor because the session time is short.

As you are all aware, in zones of conflict or in regimes of suppression or authoritarianism, questions of language invariably seem to come to the fore. Tom Paulin, who is an Irish literary critic, many years ago reminded us that the history of a language is often a story of possession and dispossession, territorial struggle and the establishment or the imposition of a culture.

In Maja and Reuben's presentation, they consider that the recognition of populism as a language is perhaps a step towards reacting to it. They also speculate a little bit that perhaps art critics themselves have been unwittingly drawn into reinforcing anti-globalist and conspiracy theory narratives about the post-communist transition – hence the effectiveness of the silence of words in that particular case.

In considering strategies deployed by artists under oppression Małgorzata in her paper makes reference to Manuel Castells' concept of ›inverting the terms of oppressive discourse‹ as expounded by him in his book »The Power of Identity« and the notion of ›subversion through identification‹ by Slavoj Žižek which is described by him in the book »The Plague of Fantasies«.

Such identified strategies of inversion or subversion reminded me of V.S. Naipaul who has written, particularly in »The Mimic Men«, about the way the colonised or former colonised seem to have an identification with the English coloniser, appearing to become more ›English than the English‹. However that apparent identification with Englishness has a mocking, subversive element to it in that there is a subtle interrogation of the language at work.

I am also reminded about the situation in Northern Ireland where I am from. In the UK, there are three devolved governments – one in Wales, one in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. The Northern Irish Assembly is suspended at the moment and has been for two and a half years. A substantial issue that has contributed to that suspension is that the nationalist population want to see a language act for the Irish language which was initially suppressed under the British colonialist project. But the Democratic Unionist Party, who cherish the link with Britain and their association with the Conservative Party in England, and who are heavily involved in Brexit, are denying the establishment of that language act. Why? Because they feel it will undermine their Britishness, which in the first place undermined the Irish language. So you can appreciate the ramifications of language. Let me then turn that into a question. Can clever words as used by art critics contribute somehow to the effectiveness and purposefulness of subversion in either of the two countries that you referred to – Poland and Hungary? It is an open question to all three of you or any one of you.

***Małgorzata Stepnik***

I hesitate to start because I will be pessimistic. I think that wise words are always left to people like us. But, our struggles, transgressions, subversions, and so on, are useless in the context of the power of stupidity. Sooner or later, every political power changes, indeed – every power comes to its ruination in time. One thing we have to do is to wait. Perhaps I'm too pessimistic in that respect. Of course, we may think that education is significant, but I'm not sure to what extent, taking into consideration the example of Martin Heidegger, just to name one instance. No, I don't think we can do anything about it.

***Reuben Fowkes***

Let me pick up on the issue of language and to respond also to what you said Liam about the curators and critics that we mentioned in our paper who are dealing with language, and especially the exhibition that we showed that took language as its basis rather than the structures of populism. I think there seems to be two possible ways of using language in that context. One, which is maybe going a bit further, which is trying to somehow appropriate or turn and make some of the ploys of populism useful and subversive in a way. As you said – to find a subversive, useful populist language. This does seem to be somewhat of a dangerous route to go down. The other is a way of trying to be more neutral and simply deploying the language of populism as a starting point, as a kind of structural starting point for an exhibition.

***Maja Fowkes***

I think that the question of language is very important. It is also important who is speaking. Like others who moved to London after many, many years living in Hungary, we decided not to speak ourselves. We considered that the best way was to speak through the voices from the region who are expressing and vocalising the struggles which are going on there. They all are colleagues, friends or former students. It is really important to give them a voice. What is good about it is that they do still have a voice. So they're not speechless.

***Liam Kelly***

So I guess the only thing we can do then with these populist politicians who masquerade as art critics is to refuse them membership of AICA. That's the very least we can do. Okay, I am now going to open up the discussion to the audience.

***Brane Kovic, AICA Slovenia***

My first remark would be that it is very easy, not to say cheap, to always evoke political interference into the cultural scene in the former communist or now post-communist countries, while on the other hand, the so-called free world is quite far from being free. The politics or power, if you want, which in the West means money, interferes in the cultural sphere. You have perfect analyses of this since the 1970s and in particular from Noam Chomsky. My question therefore is: 'Are the monopolies less dangerous than censorship or political interference?' By monopolies I also mean that some people are leading cultural institutions for decades, and they don't change. They have a very specific orientation or



political programmes. Indeed sometimes, they are not even on their own, but they become some kind of puppets on a string, manipulated by someone from outside. Thank you.

### ***Maja Fowkes***

Maybe I could respond first to your question. The first thought regarding ›Why do we always talk about politics?‹ Actually, we did not; when Reuben and I started to work together in the 1990's and early 2000s, we thought that ecology was the only problem left in the world after 1989. We thought then that everything else was sorted out and we could just focus on what was left to be sorted out in the world. Unfortunately, over this last decade, we have had to come back to political interference. What is different to the communist time is that we also subtly address this neoliberal leadership where there are questions related to institutional working, such as the role of private benefactors and privatisation.

There are some serious analyses in art works now, dealing with what went wrong with the transition from communism to post-communism and how did that perhaps lead to the populism we have now. So in that sense there is a need to address the connections. Indeed some art critics are doing precisely that – trying to see what went wrong and how did it come around to this situation again.

### ***Reuben Fowkes***

Maybe on the topic of language, just at the end of your question, you said that a director maybe is a puppet on a string. I mean, for me, that's a little bit of a populist trope of invoking that somebody is actually hiding their interest from behind someone else.

But let me say a little bit about this question of globalisation and neoliberal globalisation. How do we negotiate this problem? It seems, from the point of view of the economic effects of globalisation, that there are so many negative things that people can point to that happened from the 1990s onwards across the world. Maybe in this context we're talking about Eastern Europe and how not to swing back completely to the other side and reject all the possible benefits that could be derived from those processes in terms of transnational solidarities and all kinds of communication between cultures across the world. That is why we picked out a quotation from Igor Zabel at the end of our paper where he really highlights that, already in the 2000s, the fact that people shouldn't display a knee-jerk reaction against the bad things of neoliberal globalisation just to switch to some kind of very insular patriotic position.

Perhaps one other idea that could be used when thinking about that is to somehow pluralise this notion of globalisation. That is why in our original title we had this idea of illiberal globalisation. Therefore maybe there are different types of globalisation, neoliberal globalisation, illiberal globalisation. If you think of the moment around 1989, around those changes, this was a different kind of globalism as well. So maybe we can also introduce the word ›globalism‹ as a way of thinking about connections between countries on a global level which are not just based on economics and the domination of one particular system over all other systems.

**Małgorzata Stepnik**

In the last question from the floor, the divisions between the East and West were mentioned. I agree that today they actually seem artificial. Politics and art, art and criticism, politics and literature or philosophy – they are always intertwined. It's quite natural. I don't like Jacques Rancière's writings very much, but there is one line I really love. In the »Politics of Aesthetics«, he writes that a work of art that isn't ultimately intended to be politically *engagé* may paradoxically have the greatest political potential. I think that paradoxes, as Oscar Wilde wrote in his famous »Picture of Dorian Gray«, are what give us some essential information about truth.

**Liam Kelly**

Marek, did you want to come in?

**Marek Wasilewski, AICA Poland**

Thank you. I'd like just to refer to your question about »wise words« because it comes to mind that the populist revolution was engineered by words. So I think it's a matter of who owns the more convincing narration at the moment. So instead of being pessimistic and saying that, »well, there are no tools for stupidity and that we have to wait«, I think that instead of waiting, we have to come up with a more convincing, a better narration. We actually need wise words that would win over the words of populists. Thank you.

**Małgorzata Stepnik**

I totally agree with you, Marek. We prize wisdom, and that's why we are here. I think, that's obvious. What I really wanted to say is that – if you speak in a wise manner, if you use sophisticated narrative, if you genuinely want to communicate something – there'll always be a tension of being either an »insider« or an »outsider«. It is important and noble not to programme other people's minds, not to force them to believe what you believe, to discuss controversies and »differences«. But, when one turns into an insider of the artworld – be it an artist, a critic, or a literary writer – he or she may simply not be »heard«, not be understood by the social majority anymore. Such were the cases I referred to in my speech. But substantially, I agree: we need wise words.

**Liam Kelly**

Sarah do you have a comment?

**Sarah Wilson, AICA UK**

This is a little bit more of the same. I was very interested when you dared to say that you felt powerless in the context of the power of stupidity. In relation to this I just wanted to juxtapose two terms. One is to evoke for everybody Lenin's phrase »useful idiots« (at least a phrase ascribed to Lenin). One isn't simply talking about the masses who read *AIZ* magazine or whatever, but the writers and intellectuals that sustained the Comintern (Communist International Propaganda Operations). Its agenda was aimed at intellectuals who were »useful idiots«. And just to remind everyone that many »useful idiots«

in Britain in the 1950s were the intellectual elite who were, on the contrary, writing for anti-Communist CIA-run *Encounter* magazine.

I was very, very impressed last year when one of my Polish students, Dorota Michalska, wrote a fabulous thesis about three chronological chunks of Polish history in art from 1944 onwards which was based on her engagement with a kind of second generation of very young intellectuals who were just starting to have teaching posts. They were taught by the generation who wrote about capitalism coming to Poland and Coca-Cola signs on Warsaw's Palace of Culture. But she was using the equivalent of thinking in Polish about the state of ›those who were left behind‹.<sup>1</sup> Her work was extremely poignant, I can't remember the names of course of the young anthropologists and the young political theorists she mentioned, but there is a very interesting kind of non-dialouge, one could say, between the conception of ›idiots and ›useful idiots‹. And the actual pathos and tragedy of ›those (quasi-›idiots‹) who were left behind‹ as well as the inarticulateness of those who were driven to violence. So I just wanted to add those two terms to the discussion.

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1 Dorota Michalska, »On the edge of history: three generations of artists confront socio-economic trauma in Poland«, (Tadeusz Kantor, Gerard Kwiatkowski, Roman Stańczak), MA, Courtauld Institute, London, 2017. She refers to philosopher Andrzej Leder (b.1960), Marxist philosopher Michał Pospiszyl (1987), anthropologist Tomasz Rakwoski (b. 1967), theatre historian Dorota Sajewski (b. 1968), cultural theorist Jan Sowa (b. 1976) and historian Marcin Zaremba (b. 1966).



# **Political Censorship and its Effects on Artistic Production and Art Criticism**

## **Roundtable**

**MODERATION  
RAFAEL CARDOSO**

**HERNÁN D. CARO  
VIVIENNE CHOW  
DELAINE LE BAS  
ERDEN KOSOVA**



Fig. 20: Internet appeal by Osmankavala.org to free the journalist.

# ROUNDTABLE – POLITICAL CENSORSHIP AND ITS EFFECTS ON ARTISTIC PRODUCTION AND ART CRITICISM

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*Moderator Rafael Cardoso*

The following proceedings of the censorship panel are an abridged summary, not an exact transcript. To protect the personal safety of those involved, one of the presentations has been edited out, along with all subsequent references to it. This decision was taken in consultation with the persons whose speech is thereby curtailed. It is doubtless ironic that a panel discussing censorship, as well as the insidious nature of self-censorship, should feel obliged to censor itself. Thus, authoritarianism is not some distant rhetorical threat but a deadly, serious menace in the here and now. The editors regret the need to exercise this power and apologise to other participants for any discontent it may engender.

## **Rafael Cardoso**

Hello and good evening, I am Rafael Cardoso of AICA Germany and I want to thank Danièle Perrier for inviting us here this evening.

I will introduce the speakers one by one as they speak.

However, first, I would like to begin by reading a brief personal provocation, which does not necessarily reflect the views of the participants on this panel; the organisers of this congress; or AICA, but which I hope will heat-up the debate that we are here to have.

In these days of Twitter, 280 characters banded out by a half-wit can count for more, much more, than the twenty-eight volumes of Diderot's *Encyclopaedia*. Bearing this in mind, we must admit to ourselves that times have changed. Criticism isn't what it used to be, nor is censorship. Winston Smith's diligent labour for the 'Ministry of Truth' in George Orwell's *1984* is relevant today. There is little point in rewriting the past when any notion of a future is undermined day by day. Even if the past could be rewritten, who would bother reading it anyway? An average book can easily contain 100,000 words. How many tweets is that? In the time I take to finish this paragraph, I may already have lost your attention. If, that is, I ever had it. And if, that is, such a commodity as attention still exists.

In case you have been paying attention, the new authoritarianism is already here. Brazil, China, Hungary, the Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Venezuela. A brief list in alphabetical order of some of the most alarming examples. There are more, if you care to indulge me, and more on the way - if you prefer to split hairs over the meaning of terms like fascism, nationalism, populism, and democracy. It is not 1984; 1984 never happened. It is more like 1934, and we are hopelessly distracted while the Japanese invade Manchuria; the French far right fails to topple the Republic; while poet and playwright Erich Mühsam becomes the first political prisoner to die of torture in a German concentration camp, about forty minutes away from where we are now sitting. But however much it feels like it, it is not 1934 either.

The enemy we face today is more insidious because it makes itself so hard to pin down, like words that remain unwritten for fear they might be misread. Are Erdoğan, Orbán, and Putin fascists? Bolsonaro, Salvini, and Trump are elected leaders presiding over democratic states, abiding by the letter of the law. Can they be considered authoritarian? Is it censorship if no one actually bothers to ban the book, close the exhibition, or arrest the artist? Does it matter that we are even discussing the subject?

In the future, if there is one, everybody will be censored for fifteen seconds. Go ahead and tweet that. In the meantime, by all means, let's talk amongst ourselves. At least here we can be sure that our comments will not be deleted for violating terms and

conditions, or community standards. The revolution will not be tweeted, posted, or televised. The revolution will not be moderated. This panel, on the other hand, will; and it is my task to keep it within the allotted time. You have been duly provoked.

I want to introduce Erden Kosova, who is an art critic, currently contributing to the organisation ›Young Curators Academy‹, a side event of the forthcoming 4th Berliner Herbstsalon at the Maxim Gorky Theatre. Kosova is on the organisational board of the Medusa Foundation, Amsterdam, and on the editorial board of the Istanbul-based e-journal *redthread.org*.

### **Erden Kosova**

Before speaking, I want to have your permission to invite a friend of mine, Firat Arapoğlu, the head of AICA Turkey, to give a brief announcement.

### **Firat Arapoğlu**

Hi everybody. Thank you Erden for sharing your minutes with me. I'm president of AICA Turkey.

First of all, I would like to thank all the members of AICA Germany for inviting us to this perfect program. I requested permission to give a one-minute talk. I want to call your attention to an important case, the unjust imprisonment of Mr. Osman Kavala, who is a businessman and philanthropist and who has been behind bars for 700 days now. He has been accused by state prosecutors of trying to oppose the Turkish government by organising and financing the Gezi park protest in 2013. Two days ago, ahead of his birthday on 2 October, a social media campaign was launched under the hashtag DearOsmanKavala. The purpose was to remind people that the third hearing of the Gezi trial will be held on the 8th and 9th of October. Osman Kavala has remained in custody for almost two years under an indictment that is not based on any concrete evidence. Osman Kavala has touched the lives of countless people through his contributions to civil society and his personal kindness (please check the website for solidarity: [osmankavala.org](http://osmankavala.org)). He has always supported civic engagement, democratic forms of expression, and equality of access to arts and culture. So, I would like to call on all of you to show solidarity with him. Free Osman Kavala. Thank you.

### **Erden Kosova**

I guess I have ten or fifteen minutes. I'm used to speaking about the context of Turkey for a really long time, let's say hours. I don't know how to fit so much into this short period. So yesterday I was going through a previous text I wrote one year ago, which was a very bleak account of what has been going on in the country. It was so pessimistic that I wanted to come up with something with a more optimistic tone. But now, in general, Turkey is shifting quite rapidly. I would say that, within this one-year period, there is a kind of light at the end of the tunnel. You may know that there was a recent municipal election, and it was the first bitter defeat of the AKP regime. AKP stands for the Justice and Development Party. Justice is long gone, and development is also going away now, so they are really in trouble. What can art criticism do, in practice?



A lot of things have been done in Turkey, over a really long period, to keep up resilience. You see, fifty per cent of people voted for the guy; yes, he won again and again and again. But the other fifty per cent said no, no, no. A moment must come, I guess, when the majority will break down. I don't know what will come up to take its place, but this story, this nightmare, will move on to another episode, a kind of ending I hope.

I want to give a brief history of the AKP. They were a splinter group from the traditional Islamist Party, and they promulgated a softer social conservatism, a liberal economic program, and a promise to deliver structural reforms to dissolve the political tutelage of the Turkish army. Until recently, this allowed for a pluralistic democracy. Benefitting from the collapse of the political centre and widespread disillusionment after the Marmara earthquake in 1999; the economic crisis in 2001; and the austerity program that followed, they came to power with thirty-five per cent of the vote in 2002. The Western world bought into the idea of a softened Islamism compatible with neoliberalism, which could be made a model for Muslim societies, or Muslim-majority societies. And they poured liquidity into the Turkish economy, which created an illusion of economic success. Now, of course, it has been paid back. Just on that momentum, the contemporary art scene in Turkey started to thrive. Money from prominent bourgeois families and financial cooperatives accelerated institutionalisation, and the boom of galleries created an atmosphere of commercialisation. I have to emphasise the difference from the preceding situation, which followed from the experience of state socialism. I come from a completely different context, in which there wasn't a penny for art, let alone contemporary art. So, responsibility was handed over to the rich families. This expansion of the field was also utilised by the government, the AKP government, as a showcase for the EU candidature of Turkey, at that time – 2002 to 2003.

After a decade of structural changes, which pacified the military and juridical systems, the AKP decided to drop their soft-spoken tone. After their third electoral victory, they shifted into a new period of mastery. They cultivated a mythological hero, to give a single person control, and on the moral religious pursuit of social policies and foreign policy based on selective reconstruction of the 'glorious' Ottoman past. The leader of the party started to act like he knew everything, and he also engaged, in a less elaborate way, in art criticism. For example, he stated the newly built opera should be baroque; I don't know if he really understood the term. This kind of narcissistic self-obsession gave way to the suspension of the party system. I mean, he himself became the party. In the meantime, the peace process with the Kurdish movement was suspended.

The Arab Spring provided the AKP with an opportunity to expand its influence in the Middle East by making alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar and oppositional groups in some other countries. But after a while the leader became convinced that he was the next target of this Western plot after the Gezi uprising in 2013. This was a fracture within the party, led by a more intellectual religious sect, which led to infighting within the party and a military coup in 2016. The AKP became even more convinced that the West was against them, so they made a pact with the ultra-nationalists and anti-Western groups within the army. They kept casting themselves as the underdogs, so they had a pretext for pushing forward this kind of conservative and nationalist coalition.

Two long years of state of emergency, between July 2016 and July 2018, generated a stifling political atmosphere. Tens of thousands of public servants, including academics, were expelled from their jobs. A witch hunt was started against hundreds of academics who signed a petition that urged the state to resume the peace process. Probably the Berliners here are aware of the presence of these academics in exile in this very city. Prominent Kurdish politicians and proponents of peace were imprisoned. Journalists in the few remaining oppositional newspapers were jailed. A lot of people have left the country, as I mentioned. The critical voices who retreated to Twitter were targeted by newly established laws and pressured through legal trials for »Defamation of the President of the Republic«. As well as imprisonment, very extravagant fines had to be paid to this already rich guy. Some artists who were involved in peace demonstrations were also imprisoned – demonstrations that were somehow related to the Kurdish situation in the country. As I mentioned, Osman Kavala, who is kind of the director of Depo Istanbul exhibition space, and also the Truth Justice Memory Center, which keeps the record of past crimes against Anatolian cultures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is still imprisoned. We hope that he gets out this time.

The reliance of the contemporary art scene on institutions belonging to bourgeois families limited the oppositional positions. There was a wave of bombings during the state of emergency, coming from different or dubious sources. We never are sure who is really behind these bombings. These kinds of traumatic events cancelled all possibility of using the public space for art activism. The bourgeois families and the art institutions they run, like the Istanbul Biennial and Istanbul Modern, somehow managed to avoid direct conflict with the regime by softening or displacing the critical potential of the selection of curators and collectors, while at the same time avoiding acute cases of censorship. There are a lot of examples that can't be named here, but there was this one case of Aksanat, the art space, linked to another, more pragmatic and opportunistic family, the Sabancis. An international exhibition there was closed one week before the opening with the pretext that one of the works dealing with the guerrilla counter-terrorist crimes of the Turkish state could disturb national sensitivities.

During the break, we were chatting with my colleagues from Turkey, and there is a wave of cases in which there is a very open practice of self-censorship or – how should I put it – self-cancellation. Again, in 2016, a kind of biennial, organised by a provincial city, decided just a couple of weeks before the opening that it would be too risky to open the exhibition. So they decided to skip this edition, although a lot of the works had already been produced. The founding director of AICA Turkey protested this decision by making an analogy with the Weimar period, and the people from the AKP ranks attacked her. Another provincial biennial decided not to show a film that mentioned the experience of Greek ethnicity in Anatolia, based on the artist's own family story – she comes from the city of Malatya in the east of Turkey.

Theatre plays have been prohibited, LGBTQ festivals cancelled by the state, film directors put on trial. In the field of contemporary art, there have been interventions at exhibitions and physical attacks on galleries. There has been direct intervention in international activities too. In one case, an exhibition catalogue had to be republished

because of a complaint by the Turkish consulate that the initial version included the phrase »Armenian Genocide«. An arts group lost its financial support because one of the Turkish artists in the last *documenta* based her work on the life of a Kurdish guerrilla woman.

The leader of the AKP expressed disappointment recently about the fact that they failed to establish hegemony in the field of culture. They run fifty-nine per cent of the media, press, and television broadcasters; they pay a huge amount of money to journalists; they have all the state propaganda on the streets; and they say they lack cultural hegemony. I think that this is the point at which we can be resilient, by staying and not forcing things. In this atmosphere, political differences between the art establishment and critics of cultural capital – mostly Marxist positions – have been temporarily postponed in order to defend the mutual space of freedom of speech and expression. Recently, a similar coalition between totally different positions – Kemalists, socialists, Kurds, moderate nationalists and even critical Islamists – managed to push back the pressure of the conservative plus ultra-nationalist block in the last election. This momentum created a psychological turning point in speaking out more bravely, and pushed the process into a more normalised path. So, there's reason to be optimistic.

### **Rafael Cardoso**

Thank you Erden. I want to hand over now to Hernán D. Caro, who studied Philosophy and History in Bogotá and Berlin and has a PhD from the Humboldt University in Berlin. He works from Berlin as a freelance journalist for the cultural section of the *FAZ* and *Der Freitag*, and as a freelance correspondent for *Revista Arcadia* in Columbia.

### **Hernán D. Caro**

Today, I want to talk about the relationship between censorship and cultural journalism in Colombia – not specifically about censorship and *art* criticism. The most interesting things that happen in art criticism happen in larger or more general cultural media, and you can hardly separate the debate of art criticism regarding censorship from the debate of cultural journalism with regard to censorship. My case study is the *Revista Arcadia*, which Cardoso mentioned, and which we have just seen here. This is a large cultural magazine, one could say the one with the largest features section in Colombia, and one of the most prominent in Latin America. I work for this magazine as a freelance correspondent from Berlin, and it forms the background for my case study.

My thesis today is that, in the face of forms of censorship in Colombia specifically – and I think this is perhaps also true for other Latin American countries – cultural journalism has taken on a role that is perhaps not so typical in Europe: namely, in many cases, it has become a space where direct political discussion and criticism takes place. As far as censorship in Colombia is concerned, what is happening in many Latin American countries, such as Mexico, El Salvador, or Peru, probably happens there as well. Although there is violence or potential violence against journalists, whose profession can be life-threatening, there is, I would say at least, no open, direct, or official censorship as we know it in other countries – perhaps in Cuba, in Venezuela, or in Argentina and Chile during the dictatorships. Although, in my opinion, this official censorship does not take place, it can be said that this censorship is not even necessary in a country like

Colombia, because the biggest media – the biggest magazines, the biggest television stations – are already owned by very powerful families or financial groups, and so one could say that the question of censorship is solved by itself. In Colombia, it is very clear; for example, the biggest political magazine *Semana* (The Week, comparable to *Der Spiegel* – to a very important entrepreneur and banker, together with another entrepreneur, the son and grandson of an old, ex-president of Colombia. The current director-in-chief of *Semana* is, in turn, the nephew of the most recent ex-president of Colombia. Similar constellations can be seen in the biggest newspapers of the country: in *El Tiempo*, for example – the biggest newspaper of Colombia. And all important television stations belong either to very powerful families who have always played a very big role in politics, or to powerful individuals or powerful financial groups. And so you could say that these alliances usually ›do the job‹ of structuring a form of censorship.

But I have to say, and this very clearly, that, despite everything, the magazine *Semana* has nevertheless managed to be or to remain – or at least appears to be – more or less independent. Very important political scandals of the last few years have in fact been uncovered by *Semana* or *El Tiempo*, and yet, in a country like Colombia – and this is by all means true for other Latin American countries, not all of them but certainly for other countries in the region – you can always see a kind of governmental proximity in the media. This is always present.

In terms of censorship, or more specifically self-censorship, the most interesting case of the last years in Colombia took place within the *Revista Semana* at the beginning of 2019. There, a very popular and critical columnist was fired because, in his column, he criticised the magazine itself very strongly. The magazine had previously decided not to publish certain information that was unpleasant or dangerous for the government. *The New York Times* published this information, and it was learned that *Semana* in Colombia had always had the same information, but did not publish it.

As far as the topic of this congress is concerned, it is interesting to see to what extent cultural journalism in Colombia (for example in the cultural magazine *Arcadia*) – or more generally throughout Latin America – has taken on the role of discussing political issues and conflicts in the face of forms of self-censorship. The media has in a certain sense become ›places‹ where political discussion, political criticism, actually takes place – and sometimes not only cautiously but very openly. Following a lot of outrage at *Semana*, the columnist I mentioned was reinstated. He is now writing again in his normal working relationship. But the case has done a lot of damage to the magazine's reputation.

Now back to cultural journalism. I find it interesting how, in Colombia, cultural journalism becomes something that is not necessarily the case in other countries, at least not in Germany, as I know from my journalistic work here. In fact, here, there is indeed a discussion of politics in the features section, but this is not really the place where the larger political discussions take place.

As far as the magazine *Arcadia* is concerned, over the past few years, they have managed to represent and support very critical positions with regard to the government, and also to address very important political issues. In 2018, an entire issue was dedicated

to the presidential candidates, with very critical opinions. The editorial expressed open criticism, and the magazine continues to see itself as an oppositional force. Another full issue of the magazine dealt with the topic of religion and politics, and yet another included an editorial with the title *No More Murdering of Social Activists*. Such murders are commonplace in Colombia and this article appeared more or less two weeks after this columnist I mentioned was fired because he addressed this very problem. The magazine *Semana* decided against publishing exactly this information about the connection of the government with the murders, but *Arcadia* discussed it very openly.

The punchline of the story is that *Revista Arcadia* is owned by *Semana* – it is simply the cultural magazine of this powerful political magazine. What this means can, of course, be discussed for a very long time. I think at least two things are important here: firstly, that the media landscape in a country like Colombia is very complex; that political interests or alliances in the media do not necessarily, or not directly mean dependence or exclude independence or critical attitudes. Not all censorship is the same, and this is, of course, very problematic. You could probably talk about it for hours.

Secondly, I think that the insight you can gain from this is possibly a tragic one. Cultural journalism seems to be harmless, does not really seem to be the place from where decisions or statements have an impact. Perhaps culture is affected by it too; this is an open question. I also talked with a Venezuelan writer who wrote a very critical book against or about Venezuela. I asked her if the book will be published in Venezuela, and she said ›Yes, probably, but it doesn't matter‹ – so, it's not forbidden. But it's interesting to note how culture very quickly reaches certain boundaries, and criticism can actually take place openly; but in the end, *it doesn't matter*. Maybe that's a provocative statement – and yes, that's all.

### **Rafael Cardoso**

I want to introduce Delaine Le Bas. She studied at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London. She's a cross-disciplinary artist who worked with her late husband, the artist Damian Le Bas, on their installation *Safe European Home?* (2013). Her new installation and performance commissioned by Gorky Theatre in Berlin for the 4<sup>th</sup> Berliner *Herbstsalon DE-HEIMATIZE IT!* opened on 26 October 2019.

### **Delaine Le Bas**

Right, I'm going to keep this very short. My upcoming *Witch Hunt* installation is the third witch hunt, because it's a project that I've been doing since 2008/2009. Sadly, for my community [Roma], this is a continued history I'm afraid. I won't go into that because I could stand here for hours talking about it and the different histories and the different countries and the different problems. I would like to read something that I wrote for a performance in 2015 because, as a community and as a body of artists and academics, we have decided empowerment and empowering ourselves is the best way forward.



Fig. 21: Delaine Le Bas, *The Scream. A Woman With Nothing To Lose*, 2018

»My skin is mine,  
 my eyes are the colour they are meant to be,  
 not collected from dust-bound manuscripts.  
 Barefooted,  
 flayed,  
 skinned,  
 silenced into a stolen artefact.  
 Numbers,  
 measurements,  
 my skin is mine.  
 Words drip from my lips,  
 pose of darkness gathering clouds.  
 My tears have stopped.«

Delaine Le Bas, My skin is mine, 26.03.2015

Thank you.

### **Rafael Cardoso**

Thank you, Delaine, for that short but powerful intervention. We don't have much time. We only have until 7.30 pm, and I don't want to monopolise this podium and ask all the questions myself, so I want to open this up to the audience. First, I just wanted to comment on a thread that runs through what several people said here today, and that also came up in previous sessions. The way censorship has been diluted, so that we are not

necessarily dealing with censorship coming from a state, from one state power anymore, but from self-censorship, censorship through funding, through lack of funding, all kinds of dispersed forms of censorship. That is very much the case in Brazil where I am from. That's what's going on right now, less censorship coming from top to bottom and more coming from all sides and even from within. So, given that comment, I would like to open this up to questions from the audience.

**William Messer**

You probably have seen the protests in the street today, in Hong Kong, the first ones since the mask law, and everybody is wearing masks, including tourists, so they are not paying any attention to this banning. I just wanted to mention that. And I'd like AICA to play a much stronger role in standing in solidarity and fighting censorship. I hope we will do that in the future. I have two quotations that I keep in mind when I deal with censorship issues: One of them - I can't remember who said either one of them - is: ›self-censorship is the most insidious form of censorship‹. The other one is: ›assassination is the most extreme form of censorship‹. In the Hong Kong disturbances I think there was only one policeman using a gun with bullets in it, and he was not even wearing his helmet and other equipment. He was being Rambo or something. But the agreement with China was for fifty years right? So, it's known that this was going to come to an end, it was just a question of how soon, how quickly. But anyway, thank you. I'm very moved by hearing all of you speak about what's going on.

**Rafael Cardoso**

Thank you. More questions?

Well, I will take the opportunity to ask a question since no one else has one. Delaine, I want to ask you something about resistance because obviously your statement touched on that. Recently, after the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil, a very well-known indigenous leader and writer, Ailton Krenak, expressed an astounding sentiment. He said he felt sorry for the *white* people because the indigenous peoples have been dealing with this for 500 years. That immediately put a lot of this discussion into perspective, and I was wondering what you would make of that statement.

**Delaine Le Bas**

Well, it's a very similar situation in every country, and England is no different than anywhere else. This is really one of the problems, because I think people just don't recognise that this has been going on now for so long, and they'd been such an oppressed minority. Where do you start in trying to explain to people? Because it's a complex history from place to place. For example, there was slavery in Romania, which most people don't know about. And if you don't talk about it, it doesn't mean that it goes away. And it also doesn't change the majority perspective of people either. If we take that one thing in itself, to know that it hasn't been discussed; hasn't been talked about; it's not taught in schools; most people don't know about it at all anyway, and it's difficult. Also, top that off with most people - I have to say this, and I don't want to generalise here, but, even myself - people will come up to me and tell me that they sort of know more about me than I know

about myself. And that's really what that statement is when I read it, that's really what it's about, because we are a radically diverse community across the planet, we are multi-faith and, like I said, I could be here for probably days with various other people trying to explain the complexities of it, and it's difficult ... because you just feel like ... because no one, I don't know ... the picture came up of me screaming, because it's like a silent scream because no one listens, and a lot of the work I do has got garbled soundtracks in it, and when somebody asks, you can't really hear what you're saying. I say 'yeah', because no one listens anyway. And that's our history. So I assume, you know, it's a similar story really, sadly.

### **Rafael Cardoso**

So, can I extend that question to the rest of the panel. Are we talking about something new? Is this censorship we're seeing something new, different, or is it just the same old thing, and the focus has changed?

### **Erden Kosova**

Well in my case it's not new. The previous regime had quite strong militaristic leanings and, of course, socialists in the 1970s, 1980s... I mean, just to give you an example, in the 1980s, Kodeta had 600,000 people taken into custody. That's more crowded than most of the cities in Europe I would say. Of course, the previous state was not something feasible, but I would say the current situation somehow combines the worst of the past and the present, the conservatism, religious fanaticism, nationalism and racism. There is this strange combination of different strands and an intensified assault on the context of cultural activities.

### **Hernán D. Caro**

As I said, in the case of Colombia, we don't really experience big censorship. It is not really a new thing that big media belong to big families. It's as old as the history of the country or the continent, so I think what is maybe new – and I just speak for the case of Colombia – is that the media seem to be losing the role they had in past decades, as the possibility of showing things that are happening in the country. So, I think that's an extra drama, like the fact maybe, that in clear cases like Turkey, a government is really doing things directly against artists or journalists. That is not what we have, and maybe it's even more terrible, because it generates indifference and economic structures that create a situation like no one is listening. What I talked about may give the impression that I'm completely pessimistic about cultural journalism, or culture in general, but I still have the feeling that it's very important. Cultural media and art can really play a role in creating communities, which is very clearly happening in Colombia. Afro-Colombian communities, indigenous communities etc. find a place in the arts and sometimes in cultural journalism. I'm thinking about *Revista Arcadia*, and that may sound like a publicity announcement but I think this is the case also in Brazil. Cultural media open a door for some people to tell their stories where they can't really tell their story in another place. So, I think it still has a role, but the fact that censorship is something that is not so solid now – it's still very problematic. It would be easier maybe to fight against a censorship that's tangible and not censorship from within.



**Sebastian Baden**

My name is Sebastian, I'm from the German section of AICA, and I want to address especially Erden and Hernán, but also all of you, because when we talk about censorship what are your personal strategies for spreading your own message? We have some screenshots from publications on the internet, and obviously the internet is the only platform to spread messages if printed newspapers are undermined by self-censorship. So, maybe you can talk, from your toolbox, about how you are working personally to spread your message and what are your channels to reach those that you want to reach, and how you can get through to your audience.

**Erden Kosova**

Well of course a number of oppositional newspapers have been closed down or forced to change hands. So, let's say printed media became more difficult for political reasons. But, also economically, it is getting more and more difficult to publish something in print because of the freefall of the Turkish economy at the moment. Many things move onto the Internet. I'm on the board of an editorial e-journal, which was actually initiated by Osman Kavala, called *Red Thread*. I would say I personally never considered limiting myself, but I can tell a story, a kind of experience, which might give a glimpse of the situation. I wrote something, and the first paragraph was a sober description of what is being experienced. It was about an exhibition, but related to political events, so I wanted to start with one paragraph stating what's been experienced directly, without overt emotionalisation or whatever. The editor, who is a good friend of mine, quite progressive, politically close to me, said, Erden, can we take two or three sentences out of the first paragraph? And in that moment, of course you can say no. I didn't see any problem with what I'd written. It wasn't a lie or falsification. I was trying to get at the truth. I could have said no, but, at the same time, there is also some background information, that her husband was an academic who was the only one in a provincial university who signed a petition, and the fascists, the ultranationalists, came to his house and put a kind of death threat on the door, and then the next day he resigned and came back to Istanbul. Knowing this kind of information, knowing the sensibilities, their fear, you somehow say, OK I'm all right, you know, if you feel threatened by what I express, I would never want to put people in a more fragile position, so I agreed. But, of course, this retains a kind of bitter taste to me.

**Delaine Le Bas**

I suppose that what has happened is that we have met at different points, lots of us, and so we spread information amongst each other, but we also collaborate a lot with many other people, in many different countries. What's happened across Europe for example, we have almost created our own network, where we work together but also work in different ways, and also my own and my late husband's practice was to work anywhere. So, to go to places where people would say ›why are you going there?‹ for example, and also not necessarily being in a gallery space, to be able to talk to people on the street. I suppose I, we, have always wanted to speak to as many people as possible. I work cross-practice as well, because I feel that opens many doorways to people to access what I'm trying to talk about in my work, and also using the Internet in as many ways as possible.

It's really trying to do as much as you can that is self-organised in a way, I would suppose, because as a community it's still very difficult for us. A lot of my friends who work in other countries – I won't mention the countries, but you know them – very often their work is not represented, or it's always easier for someone else to be showing work that is about us, rather than by us. I'm not against collaborating with our people, people who aren't from our community, that's not what I'm saying, but I still think there is a majority oppression going on, oppression of a voice of the community really being allowed to come forward. Also, funding does not help a lot with that, because it often asks for particular things, and sometimes that is a form of censorship in itself. There is self-censorship sometimes as well, because people are frightened, and they are right to be frightened, because sometimes even their own families threaten them for example, and then one community might also threaten another community, so there is this going on in the background as well. The people who are this other stuff that is coming from the community, so there are a lot of different things like self-censorship, like political censorship ... so you just end up feeling that, as far as anyone is concerned, we shouldn't be speaking at all.

### **Hernán D. Caro**

Thank you for your question. I'm not even sure that I have a message, to be honest, or, at this moment I wouldn't know what my message would be. As a journalist, I still think that information has some power, although we are maybe flooded by an exaggerated quantity of information, which makes specific messages irrelevant, if you don't find them. But, I really think that information has power and, like I said, I have the feeling that cultural media, in some countries at least – I don't think it's the case in Germany, definitely not – are able to give a voice to some people who don't usually find a voice in other aspects of reality. I see that very clearly in Latin America; I see that very clearly in Colombia, and I think that's already a very important step towards a better reality. I also think that quality in journalism – that may sound quite conservative, which maybe I am – is very important, and I think you can really do things and change things through journalism, if you consider quality as the first, or one of the first things.

I just wanted to say one more thing about the message and the possibility of giving voices to people. I've been working for two years for a project funded by the Goethe Institut, which is called *Contemporary Art in Latin America* and which has a very important Afro-Latin American focus. This kind of magazine didn't really exist two or three years ago. I think it's more or less the only art magazine which is trying to look for Afro-Latin American voices in the arts, in contemporary art, especially. So, even if I don't have a message, I think it's possible through journalism to open doors for other people to send their message.

### **Rafael Cardoso**

I would like to echo what Hernán just said, in the sense that we live in a very strange paradox in terms of the art world, at least in countries like Brazil, and I think maybe Colombia too, where there are less and less spaces for art criticism, especially in the mainstream press. That's something AICA International could really give some attention to; to provide more, to encourage more spaces where people can discuss and think

about art and think about culture, because that is a form of censorship too. We're being squeezed out of the mainstream press, being pushed into alternative corners of the Internet, and our voices don't get heard anymore. The simplest way to get rid of your political enemies is to make them irrelevant, so I think this is perhaps a project that we collectively, as people engaged in AICA and engaged in art criticism, could think about, how to make these voices reverberate and be heard across the political divides in countries that are suffering from political oppression. And since there are more and more countries fitting that description, there is no shortage of fronts to work on.

I don't know if we have any more time, I would like to allow one last question.

### ***Yukiko Shikata***

My name is Yukiko and I am from AICA Japan, and I'm actually preparing an international symposium for AICA Japan next year, so that's why I'm here to learn about the current situation. I want to introduce the latest news from Japan, or around the Japanese situation. Maybe you have heard that there is one exhibition inside of the Triennial, titled *Unfreedom of Expression*. It was closed three days after the Triennial opened by the president of the Triennial, for safety reasons, because there were threats of possible terrorist attacks, not only to the exhibition but also to schools. There were discussions and movements by artists and cultural workers. The president set up a committee in August and many things happened. After two months of discussion in Japan, last week, on 26 September, the agency for cultural affairs of Japan announced it would withdraw support. From that day, demonstrations, petitions by artists, art people, and students started, and today, at the beginning of this session, I just received the information, the latest news. I want to share this information, so I want to make this available to you if you are interested.

### ***Rafael Cardoso***

Thank you very much for your participation, for being here. I want to extend personal thanks to Uta M. Reindl for asking me to be here as well, along with Danièle Perrier. Thank you very much for coming, and see you tomorrow.

*Translation: Jochen Stremmel/G rard A. Goodrow (Kosova presentation)*

MY SKIN IS MINE  
 MY EYES ARE THE COLOUR THEY ARE  
 MEANT TO BE  
 NOT COLLECTED FROM DUST BOUND  
 MANUSCRIPTS  
 BARE FOOTED  
 FLAYED  
 SKINNED  
 SILENCED INTO A STOLEN ARTEFACT  
 NUMBERS  
 MEASUREMENTS  
 MY SKIN IS MINE  
 WORDS DRIP FROM MY LIPS  
 POOLS OF DARKNESS  
 LATHERING CLOUDS  
 MY TEARS HAVE STOPPED  
 DELAINE LEBAS  
 26.03.15

Fig. 22: Delaine Le Bas, *My skin is mine*, manuscript, 26.03.2015.

# **Art, Criticism, and Institution**

## **Panel 8**

**MODERATION  
NORMAN L. KLEEBLATT**

**JULIA VOSS  
MISCHA KUBALL  
GREGOR H. LERSCH**



### Art and Activism

**Julia Voss**

The Tate Galleries' announcement in 2019 that they would no longer accept donations from the Sackler family was preceded by protests initiated by Nan Goldin, the American photo artist. Her example set a precedent. In the past six months, many other demands have been published in which artists have spoken out against cooperation with donors whose wealth comes, for example, from the manufacture and sale of weapons or from investing in them. The lecture gives an overview of these movements initiated by artists and discusses the possible consequences. How does activism relate to art criticism? Is it another phase of institutional critique or are we facing a new phenomenon?

### Populism vs Democracy and Social Media

**Mischa Kuball and Gregor H. Lersch**

In this conversation, Mischa Kuball and Gregor Lersch analyze the contemporary artistic and curatorial definitions of public space, democracy, and art. Recently, these three definitions have taken center stage in history and have undergone a substantial change from the interpretations and attributions they had in the 1970s. The current conversation will serve as a platform to discuss, based on the project series *public preposition* and the exhibition *res.o.nant* by Mischa Kuball, the aesthetic and curatorial implications of addressing these topics within an extended socio-cultural context. The conversation will focus on the relationship between historical sites and their context, using, as one example among others, the Jewish Museum in Berlin and Lersch's curatorial approach to issues that extend the role of the museum beyond traditional definitions and borders. Anticipation and interaction in the context of art performances and time-based interventions are the aesthetic tools that the artist employs in order to engage with democratic frameworks and new media. The works of art and projects spring from site-specific analyses of the locus in which they take place. Within their aesthetic structures, they incorporate social, political, or communal specificities and challenge the audience by being fleeting and temporary interventions that rely on the potential of an altered perception of seemingly familiar/suddenly unfamiliar urban and social contexts. These projects ask their viewers to reconsider the modalities of their engagement with democracy, populism, and new media.

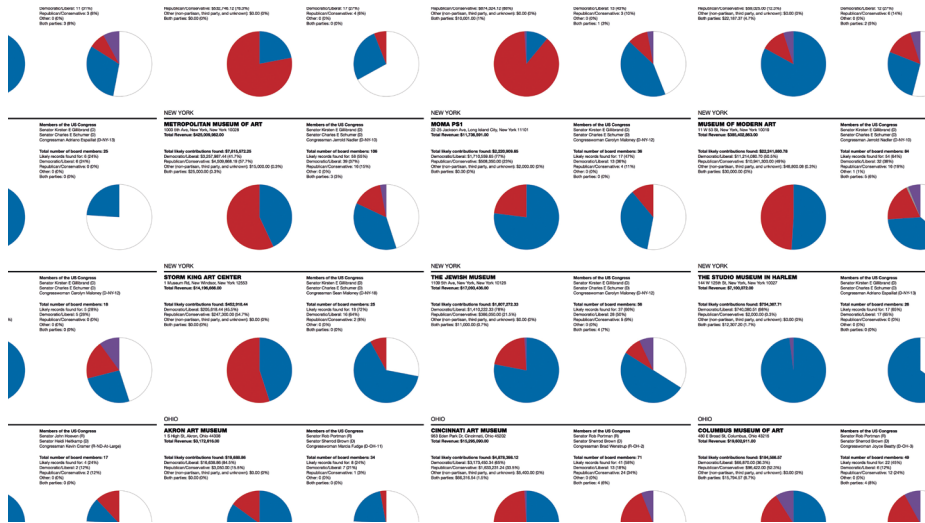


Fig. 23: Andrea Fraser, 2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics (Detail), 2018



**Julia Voss**

When one speaks of ›populism‹, what is often meant is the right-wing spectrum of political movements. This is considered – with good reason – to be an antagonist of the art world, including art criticism, as well as of freedom of the press and of opinion in general. The right-wing attacks on artistic freedom are repeatedly mentioned in this volume. In my contribution, however, I shall focus on the opposite phenomenon, which the artist Andrea Fraser has vividly pointed out in her book *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics*:

»What if populism and the art world were also allies? What if it turned out that art supports, helps, and ingratiate itself with the populists in an exceptional way, and glorifies them to boot?«

At first glance, this assessment does not sound very plausible. Fraser, however, has presented many arguments for this thesis, which can be summarised in a three-step approach and will be illustrated here by means of quotations from her publication:

1) The New Right, Fraser argues, are »conservatives who ran as populists – in order to rule as plutocrats«. <sup>1</sup>

2) The influence of capital on politics has become so far-reaching that sociologists, political scientists, and other observers of the system have concluded that the form of government can no longer be considered a ›democracy‹: »Instead, the United States has become a plutocracy – government by the wealthy«. <sup>2</sup>

3) This development is particularly evident in the art world: »Art organisations in the United States also have benefited from increasing concentrations of wealth. [...] The 128 arts organisations included in this study had combined total revenues of over \$ 4.2 billion in 2015. [...] Despite the common identification of many art museums as ›public‹ institutions, most operate with little or no democratic input, oversight, or recognition of government support. Instead, with well-publicised fundraising galas and donor recognition on nearly every wall, many art museums have become prominent showcases for highly concentrated private wealth, identifying that wealth with generosity, creativity, and cultural accomplishment.« <sup>3</sup>

In short, art museums have become places where the plutocratic conditions are glorified in a media-effective way, which, in the opinion of many analysts, provide the breeding ground for populism.

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1 Andrea Fraser, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2018, p. 31.

2 Ibid., p. 13.

3 Ibid.

With her extensive research, published in this book, Fraser provided for the first time figures and statistics which enabled her to trace this development on a broad basis. At the same time, she found herself in the company of other artists who were also concerned about the transformation of the art museum into a plutocratic instrument of power, and who used performative interventions to counter the situation. In the following, I will focus on these activists and the astonishing successes they have achieved in recent years. It will begin with a review that takes us back almost five decades, into the twentieth century, when the power structure still seemed straightforward.

When, in 1971, Hans Haacke received the news that his exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum had been cancelled and its curator fired, he had no idea that he would eventually become famous for it. Only many years later did the most unlikely of all situations occur. Haacke rose to become an artist that subsequent generations also revered for what he had not shown. His installation *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System as of May 1, 1971*, which dealt with the wheeling and dealing of a New York real estate speculator and led to the cancellation of his exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, turned into a kind of relic of activism with Haacke as its martyr.

It was to take nearly half a century however, before the tables were turned. It was only when the National Portrait Gallery in London invited Nan Goldin to present her work in a major retrospective in 2019 that the artist threatened to turn the museum down. If the institution accepted the million British pounds that the Sackler Trust had announced it would donate, Goldin said she would withdraw from the planned exhibition. The National Portrait Gallery then turned down the money, followed by the Tate Gallery, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Louvre. The Sackler family is accused of having earned several billion dollars with the Purdue Pharma company in the so-called Opioid Crisis, which has reached epidemic proportions in the United States.

And Nan Goldin was not the only artist in 2019 who was committed to examining the large belly of the museum world in more detail. In July, Warren Kanders, a member of the board of the Whitney Museum in New York, whose company Safariland produces tear gas that is used against migrants at the Mexican border, was forced to resign. Among the artists who, prior to this, had cancelled their participation in the Whitney Biennial in protest, were Michael Rakowitz, Nicole Eisenman, and Forensic Architecture.

And in October 2019, The Museum of Modern Art in New York received an open letter addressed to Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock Corporate Management and trustee of the museum. The letter urged Fink to cease investing in private prison businesses and was signed by, among others, Hito Steyerl and Andrea Fraser.

One last example, New York cultural workers, who came together under the group name ›Bad Barcode‹, recently succeeded in taking action against Amazon's plans to set up a headquarters in the borough of Queens. The protesters included people from all levels of society. In a recent interview, the artist Andreas Petrossiants, one of the organi-

sers, stressed the importance of all ›cultural workers‹ banding together – from the artist to the employee at the museum’s ticket counter.<sup>4</sup>

But where was art criticism in these activities? With the exception of the art magazine *Hyperallergic*, which appears online and provides extensive coverage of art activism, comparatively few art critics have thus far spoken out. Art history, the academic sister of art criticism, has also largely failed to address the conditions in which art is created and exhibited. The silence is all the more astonishing because no Renaissance scholar would think of writing about art production in fifteenth-century Italy without at the same time taking a look at the political situation, the clients, their intentions and goals. However, the closer art comes temporally, the less its context is included. Most contributions dealing with contemporary or even modern art, content themselves with a formal analysis of a painting, sculpture, installation or film, and use historical works for comparison. In my opinion, art criticism and art history thus fall short of the standards of their craft.<sup>5</sup>

Artist activism in 2020 can, however, also draw on an old tradition. Already, one hundred years ago, it was argued that »No amount of charity in spending such fortunes can compensate in any way for the misconduct in acquiring them«. Who said this? Theodore Roosevelt, the twenty-sixth President of the United States.<sup>6</sup>

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*

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4 See: »Andreas Petrossiants and Vanessa Thill in Conversation on the Cultural Work in Anti-Displacement Struggles«, in: *AAD*, 28 October 2019, URL: <https://aad.nyc/blog/2019/10/28/andreas-petrossiants-and-vanessa-thill-in-conversation-on-the-cultural-work-in-anti-displacement-struggle/> [last visit on 28 November 2020].

5 For more detailed information, see: Julia Voss and Philipp Deines, *Hinter weißen Wänden/Behind the White Cube*, Berlin 2015, p. 129.

6 Fraser 2016 (see note 1), p. 23.



Fig. 24: Mischa Kuball, *res.o.nant*, 2017

# POPULISM VS DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL MEDIA. A DISCUSSION WITH MISCHA KUBALL AND GREGOR H. LERSCH

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*Moderator Norman L. Kleeblatt*

## **Norman L. Kleeblatt**

Welcome; this session will revolve around Mischa Kuball's project with Gregor H. Lersch at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, *res.o.nant*, which asks the question: what is public art? Gregor is the head of exhibitions at the Jewish Museum Berlin and the curator of *res.o.nant*, and Mischa is an artist who has worked a long time in the public art realm and is also a professor of public art in Cologne. So I'd like to invite Mischa to start by discussing the project.

## **Mischa Kuball**

Thanks Norman for welcoming us here on the stage, and good morning to everyone. In the summer of 2017 I received an invitation to the Jewish Museum to meet curatorial director Léontine Meijer-van-Mensch, along with Gregor H. Lersch and Klaus Teuschler, to look at this space which has been dedicated the public as the so-called ›Education Centre‹. The museum had been thinking about new ways to use that space. The invitation arrived on Monday. By Tuesday, Gregor and I had a phone conversation and the project started the next day. So I arrived that Wednesday. That was two years ago and we just finished the project on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2017. Our idea was to look at the space and to consider that Daniel Libeskind's design already had a very strong emphasis on the question of how we can engage with the memory of the unspeakable and the unimaginable. This is a very difficult starting point. My first impulse was to leave the architecture as it was, or bring it back to its original power and force, while making it more accessible to audiences. So the interventions were subtle.

There are different forms of activism. What can museums do? This question led us to an idea to have two mind-maps, one inside the museum and the other connecting the museum with the city. The first, most radical thing, that you won't find in the paper so far, and even not really printed in the catalogue and the essays about the project, is the *open call*. Why is the open call interesting and, I would say, political? Because everything in the museum is controlled by the curator, by the institution and its preexisting standards. The open call invited musicians from around the world to contribute to *res.o.nant*. We reviewed and discussed every submission we received - 250 in total. So that was, I think, the most radical invisible aspect of that project. A wide variety of audio forms were proposed, electronic, acoustic, spoken word, acapella, to give just some examples. And we did this in a very specific moment when music and sound were not perceived in an innocent way anymore, especially in Berlin, but maybe we'll get to that point later on.

## **Gregor H. Lersch**

I would like to take up the theme of how museums can also have an effect in the public realm. For the Jewish Museum Berlin in particular, this poses a special challenge. I think most of you are familiar with the building and the urban situation of the Jewish Museum here in Berlin, with its large underground areas, the aesthetic presence of concrete and metal, the police surveillance. The consequence is that, at first glance, the museum does not appear inviting to the public at all and actually does not allow for any direct interaction with the public space. With *res.o.nant*, however, Mischa – as artist – and

I – as curator of the project – wanted to address a public at all costs and involve it in the concept. This was to be achieved first of all by involving dozens of musicians and artists, whom we contacted personally as well as through a public open call. The musicians contributed audio tracks, which were then integrated into the installation. We created as a kind of public in digital space, and brought them into the protected museum space.

With *res.o.nant*, a deliberately experimental format, we later left this safe space of the museum to intervene in the actual public space in Berlin. To this end, we orientated ourselves on the architectural design and the urban spatial concept of Daniel Libeskind, which is connected to specific places in Berlin's urban space by a grid of lines leading out of the museum. The ends of the lines lead to various 'lieux de memoire' in the urban landscape, which refer to events in German-Jewish history, such as the place where Rosa Luxemburg was murdered in 1919. For the intervention of *res.o.nant*, the artist chose



Fig. 25: Mischa Kuball, *res.o.nant*, with the poem by Paul Celan »Oranienstrasse 1«

the line that ended at *Oranienstrasse 1* in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Libeskind had included this location, which is located at the very busy corner of Oranienstrasse and Manteuffelstrasse, into the urban concept by referring to Paul Celan's poem *Oranienstrasse 1*, written in 1967. The disturbing and enigmatic poem refers to the death of Carl von Ossietzky, a German pacifist who died in 1938 when he was arrested by the Nazis. Today, at the address Oranienstrasse 1, there is a wasteland without buildings, surrounded by large billboards. Fascinated by this situation, we decided to rent the billboards and present the poem's text there in a highly visible way.

After the poem had been on display there for two days, something unexpected happened, because a printout with text had been added to the billboard. At first, it looked almost like vandalism, but the opposite was true; an anonymous person, most likely a neighbour, was probably fascinated by the text of the poem and had added an interpretation of it, which is available on the Internet. Printed out in poster format, this now complemented the text of the poem and gave passers-by more information and the stimulus to engage in discussion.

### **Norman Kleeblatt**

Mischa, you mentioned the Libeskind building, the heavy, imposing, concrete structure, however, Libeskind also played with invisibility, for example, the cubic empty spaces, the voids. And I think this is one of the things we have within the art world as Julia Voss said, the things that are not uttered, the things that are taken for granted. How do we bring them into the public sphere? How do we make them part of the popular consciousness? One example from the United States is our huge debate about monuments that honor the confederacy. This debate is not resolved but it is important that the conversation take place in the public realm. Now, the other thing is that *res.o.nant* happened during a time where there was a pressing conversation about what the Jewish Museum should be doing, and what another exhibition in the Jewish Museum was properly or improperly taking part in. How did *res.o.nant* - which tried to be somewhere between inside and outside - function within that discourse?

### **Gregor H. Lersch:**

In a certain sense, *res.o.nant* took place in the eye of the hurricane, since the project was shown at the same time as the controversially discussed exhibition *Welcome to Jerusalem*. The discussions led to extensive criticism of the Jewish Museum's programme and ultimately to the resignation of the director. Curatorial processes in a Jewish museum in Germany are always particularly delicate. And so, in the process of conceiving *res.o.nant*, we too had to carefully consider what could happen if we activated and invited a large group of unknown individuals - in our case, the potential responders to our open call. The highly topical issues of anti-Semitism and BDS were discussed, and we talked about this very openly between the institution, the curator, and the artist. In order not to fall into a kind of self-censorship, we finally decided to implement the open call without restrictions and to include all incoming audio tracks and musicians in the installation.

This form of openness also led to some of the pioneers of electronic music from Detroit participating in the project and performing live in the installation. Some of my

museum colleagues were initially very critical of this because at first glance electronic music might seem inappropriate in the context of Jewish Berlin – how can Techno and Holocaust remembrance go together? The musical performances, however, showed that artists such as Mike Banks and Monika Werkstatt were very sensitive and musically very stimulating, fitting in with *res.o.nant* and the emblematic »voids« of Daniel Libeskind.

In the end, *res.o.nant* did not become part of the fierce criticism of the museum's programming. This criticism focused very much on two things: the aforementioned exhibition on Jerusalem and the programme of the museum's academy. Nevertheless, the project with Mischa Kuball was implemented in a very conflictual atmosphere, and every step had to be carefully considered.

### **Mischa Kuball**

I would like to add a very personal moment. There are two things I remember from working with the artist Mike Banks. We were waiting for him, and he called and said: »Mischa, I cannot get into the building because there are so many police out there.« I never considered how it might be for a foreigner to come to the Jewish Museum, being invited, and then be immediately confronted with the police. The second memory is, after he was finished setting up his very impressive installation he called his mother in Detroit. She cried and she said, I'm so proud of you being a member of the Black Jewish community in Detroit performing in the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Before this we had not thought about these complex identities we were dealing with. It is not *black* and *white*, it is not even black, white and grey. It's so diverse. Every artist we invited considered the weight of the space and all were frightened of that particular part of German history. But maybe it's not only a moment of silence but the way we speak out and the way we introduce different voices.

Publications are another tool to engage the public outside of the institution. We invited eighteen writers from diverse backgrounds to contribute to our publication. This is another way to avoid a single channel reception. Regarding the question of BDS, there is a danger that people say, this is a BDS supporter so this person needs to be criticised or rejected. This is happening now with Walid Raad who was nominated to receive the *Aachen Kunstpreis*. He is an activist artist and we knew that. If you invite Hans Haacke to your museum you cannot be surprised if your institution is criticised. I really admire the decision Léontine Meijer-van-Mensch and Gregor Lersch made to invite artists without knowing in advance what the results would be. People accused the museum of not being a Jewish Museum, and even of being anti-Jewish. Benjamin Netanyahu, for example, has criticised the museum. To remain true to the commitment we made to the project, I think is brave. I think this is uniting artists, curators, museum directors, and critics to stand against these populist attempts.

### **Norman Kleeblatt**

I'd like to add another wrinkle to the issue, along with Julia's presentation on activism and the political and economic power channeled through museums, to say that at least we in the United States are under enormous pressure to diversify museums, to diversify programs, to diversify collections and diversify audiences. That runs in contra-



distinction to the standard support of museums. So it's two ends pulling each other in opposite directions. How can one even justify the diversification, given the absolute power structure of the museums and galleries as institutions?

**Julia Voss**

The question is, who is putting up the pressure? I think if we look at Germany we have a development where we have more and more private donors rather than public funding. Also, we have an explosion of institutions and in order to survive all of them need to cooperate with private donors, which is not necessarily bad but there is certainly a trend to make the inner workings of these institutions less transparent. A big issue here is also taxes. In German we say *unter Geheimhaltung* – it's not public. There are a lot of things we cannot even publicly inquire about because by law it's protected. So we don't always know where the money is coming from or how much there is. I think there are all kind of escape routes where you do a kind of formal diversification while museums are being privatised. What is really needed is one showcase of a democratic museum. I'm still waiting for the kind of director or group of activists or whoever who puts up that kind of model institution and says, listen, we can do it differently and we're going to show how we can do it differently.

**Gregor H. Lersch**

Yes, I can only agree with that. And if you are referring to the museum as an institution, it is fundamental to mention the discussions about the definition put forth by ICOM and the involvement of communities. This also leads to the question of what happens when a community demands an attitude from a museum that it – as a liberal orientated institution – does not want to share or even promote. This poses new questions regarding the concept of participation in the context of multiple populisms, which is omnipresent in the museum sector.

For example, the criticism with which we were confronted at the Jewish Museum was voiced by very different protagonists with very different political agendas and was transformed via social media into permanent pressure. This came from both politically conservative and left-wing circles, as well as from the Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives. All worked with tools that are also used by populist movements. Many people are not yet aware of this in the German context. The idea of populism – this is not just the German right-wing party AfD (Alternative for Germany), this is not an exclusively right-wing matter. It is something that happens everywhere. It is a tendency, it is an attitude, a kind of discourse. It is something that we can feel everywhere.

**Norman Kleebblatt**

In response to Julia's notion of the democratic institution, I think Marcia Tucker, when she founded the New Museum, tried to make it incredibly democratic. Everyone on staff, whether you were a porter, a secretary officer, a curator or a director, were paid the same amount of money. And I think it's ironic that now there is a real problem with a union at the New Museum, where workers are organising for higher pay. This is just one example.

**Henry Meyric Hughes**

It's not really a question but just an answer to Julia's particular demand for a new kind of museum. I want to draw your attention to a book by Piotr Piotrowski which was his last publication. It's called something like ›New Museum‹ and it imagines a new kind of museum that would engage directly with the public and fight this populist tendency. I recommend it.

**Julia Voss**

Thank you.

**Norman Kleeblatt**

There is another question out there.

**Jamie Keesling**

I appreciate that this panel has begun to delineate the contradiction bound up in the concept of populism. What do we mean when we talk about the success of activist art? This question is particularly pertinent right now considering the museum protests happening in New York. Most recently, the resignation of Warren Kanders from the Whitney Museum's board was widely claimed as a success by protesters. However, as critics, we would ask, what are the ultimate aims of these protests? In a time when museums and other art institutions are becoming more and more dependent on private philanthropy, the demand seems to be to replace board members whose millions have come from unethical means with either wealthy people who have accumulated their wealth through ethical means, or with non-wealthy people, which presents a contradiction. As critics, we might pose the question – and I wonder what your thoughts are about this – of what are the ultimate political aims of art activism, or how can critique clarify what those possibilities might look like when art activism gets it wrong or is insufficient?

**Julia Voss**

This is a very important question and I wish I had a ready answer to it. In the United States there is a big discussion on what's called philanthro-capitalism. Through tax incentives that were introduced in the 90s there was a big redistribution of public money to the private sector. This is also a big thing in Germany, though people are less aware of it. All of these wonderful institutions depend on the generosity of private donors. Meanwhile, the donors receive incentives for their donations. It was actually Bill Clinton who had the idea that these entrepreneurs who ran successful companies could be models for reforming the welfare state. This clearly failed, and this is why I'm also so thankful for the kind of activism we have in the United States, because it is so well-informed. It's not just some bold claim. If you read the open letters, if you read the books on philanthro-capitalism and so forth, it's a wave of activism now that is very well-informed.

**Norman Kleeblatt**

Let's take one more question.

**Liam Kelly**

How is the Jewish Museum funded? And is it distinctly different from the examples that Julia cited and their related problems?

**Mischa Kuball**

As a German federal museum it is mainly publicly supported by federal funds. There is a smaller yet important portion of private, mainly corporate money in the museum. But I have to say that we have a Sackler staircase. It is not formally named, but it is funded by Sackler. When the museum was opened, we had a German-Jewish-American director, so the museum has a very American system. We have a department for development, we have a lot of private money involved, even though we are a public institution.

**Norman Kleeblatt**

I thank you for your attention. Thank you, Julia, Mischa, and Gregor, and all of you.

*Translation: Jochen Stremmel/Gérard A. Goodrow (Lersch)*



Fig. 26: Mischa Kuball, *res.o.nant*, 2017

# **Art Criticism and Judgement**

## **Panel 9**

**MODERATION  
ELLEN WAGNER**

**THOMAS EDLINGER  
FLORIAN ARNOLD**



### What Do You Need? On the Relationship Between Empathy and Criticism

**Thomas Edlinger**

In his contribution *What Do You Need?*, Thomas Edlinger questions the concept of empathy with regard to its potential to promote mutual understanding in a society that can be described as either ›divided‹ or ›pluralistic‹. According to Edlinger, both the common idea of solidarity and that of empathy are, however, inconceivable without asymmetries between us and ›the others‹ within a society. While one generally demonstrates solidarity as an ›equal among equals‹, empathy often implicitly assumes a superiority of the person (often one means oneself) who can understand everything – or better: who believes him or herself capable of this.

Would it not instead be better to sharpen the awareness of what one cannot understand about the other on the one hand, and of what one does not want to understand about one's own position on the other? Taking Harun Farocki's short film *Nicht löschesbares Feuer* (The Inextinguishable Fire, 1969) as his point of departure, which aesthetically allows, not so much mere compassion, as – in line with Jacques Rancière – ›passions‹ to develop that are ›not adapted‹ to the situation described,<sup>1</sup> Edlinger attempts to open up ›common sense‹ to a form of dealing with one another which, as a temporary, mutable agreement on a basis of communication within a heterogeneous multitude, remains critical of its own criteria and limits.

### »Design and Punishment« – Criticism of Design in the Age of Web-Formatted Real Satire

**Florian Arnold**

While Edlinger is concerned with the idea of focusing less on one's own and the other's ›entitlement‹ and more on the differing and mutable needs within a society, Arnold practices a failure on himself as an ›aesthetic snob‹, which he allows himself to play out within the framework of a self-experiment; to – in a certain sense – use himself as an example.

On the basis of the ZDF mini-series *Design und Strafe* (Design and Punishment, 2019), which he co-conceived (torn to microscopic pieces even in design circles) and thus using the ›example of himself‹, the philosopher and design theorist analyses satire as the post-critical complacency of a media personality who fails because of the perfection of the acting out of real satire. Dealing side blows at the awe of ›author design‹, or kitsch fantasies from a furniture discounter, throughout the series Arnold lashes out at

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1 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* [1st ed. 2008], trans. Gregory Elliott, London/New York, 2009, p. 70.

design objects that fail to be future-orientated or emancipatory. But where does this criticism itself, which risks being issued purely out of habit, actually wish to lead?

Satire, as jocular admonition or as bitter mockery, distances itself from its subject. It can – as Arnold explains on the basis on Friedrich Schiller – make the ideal of human behaviour appear negative by showing how reality fails as a result of this. Today however, Arnold sees the distance as being tipped into a pleasurable involvement in the spectacle of a reality that is always ahead of it and which it can only emulate.



**Thomas Edlinger**

Today, we are those »who no longer know what the hierarchy for our ›we‹ is«, writes Tristan Garcia.<sup>1</sup> In the past, people still believed in affiliations from which they could not escape: blood, genes, gender, family, nation, religion. Today, the forms of the once natural identity are seen as mutable and contingent. The liquefaction of identities leads to the insight that there can no longer be a ›we‹ that can claim universal validity as a group identity. Every ›we‹ is particular and must always be founded anew.

In his novel *The Book of Strange New Things*, Michael Faber plays through the conflict between the smallest group of ›us‹ and the boundless universalism of religion. A happily married pastor is sent on a missionary tour to a foreign planet. The message of Christ is to extend to all creation, including extra-terrestrial life, while at home in dystopian darkened Britain, the lights slowly go out, and love at a distance threatens to wither. Which ›we‹ is now stronger? The fading, exclusive bond with a person, whose company you have lost? Or a loose ›we‹, that arises from an uninhibited fascination for the foreign, for the grateful, exoticised alien without Christian religion?

Society is a paradoxical construction, it knows no outside, despite the fact that it creates outsiders. Society does not yet exist – the communists say in 1917 – only a deformed system of rule known as class society. There is no society *at all*, says Margret Thatcher, only individuals and families. Society *no longer* exists, say many sociologists today. Let us take the monstrous concept of society as a makeshift way of understanding it as a cohesion that is as functional as it is mutable, and which today is threatened more than ever by the termination of the social contract. In many cases, society appears to be divided; it is eroding, say the pessimists. To put it more positively, it is plural, polyphonic, and full of contradictions.

Against this dichotomy, objections are formed which can take on contradictory forms. On the one hand, there is good old criticism; criticism that divides, and criticism of the division itself. Although more recent emancipatory, sociological models propose anti-hierarchical feedback between criticism and the criticised as a social practice of mutual and equal listening, criticism is usually an undertaking that places a privileged distance between itself and the object. This form of social criticism has existed for a very long time and has apparently not been able to reduce the division of society. Perhaps it has even, in the form of identity-political overload, promoted a victim-narcissistic form of hypercriticism which above all emphasises what separates and problematises what is common. It is also because of this effect of social criticism that the appeal to overcome distance, the appeal to empathy, has increased in recent years. Can empathy help to alleviate the deficits of criticism?

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1 Tristan Garcia, *Wir*, Berlin 2018, trans. Ulrich Kunzmann.

At the very latest, since one began talking about a *Willkommenskultur* (welcoming culture), one often hears: we must learn to empathise with the suffering and, more generally, with the perspectives of others. Ex-US President Barack Obama put his government programme at the service of empathy – at least rhetorically. In a speech in 2006, and that is to say before his election as US president in 2008, he considered the fight against an empathy deficit, which he lamented, to be more urgent than the mitigation of the fiscal deficit.

Perhaps it should and must be remembered at this point that the call for empathy circulating in Western countries today, generally refers to an emotional service, the provision of which presupposes a privileged social status. The reference to the importance of empathy as a ›social sweetener‹ is based on the inequality between those who give empathy and those who receive it.

Harun Farocki wrote in a text about empathy: »This word belonged to the counter-party. I had learned from Brecht not to gawk so romantically«. In his famous film *Nicht löschesbares Feuer* (The Inextinguishable Fire) about the complicity of a society based on the division of labour in the horrors of the Vietnam War, he asks about the meaning of drastic images. »If we show you a picture of napalm injuries, you will close your eyes«, the young Farocki says into the camera. Shortly afterwards, he stubs the burning cigarette out on his naked left forearm without batting an eyelid: »A cigarette burns at about 400 degrees.« The burn wound becomes visible. »Napalm burns at about 3,000 degrees.«

What happens to the viewer in the moment when Farocki attempts to rouse him or her to resistance? The empathy is transformed into an insight that leads to one becoming at odds with oneself. This promises more than the effective hit of good intentions – the consternation. Farocki's scene corresponds more to a body hit, which transmits an impression of reality via media technology.

Indeed, the added value of the extra-artistic, documented reality plays a decisive role in today's media art and culture. Media replaces the (often laborious and failing) work on empathy with the fiction of immediate experience. »Smack in the middle instead of just standing on the sidelines« is the advertising slogan of a private German television station. The difference between I and you become blurred in the media greed for proximity, identification, and authenticity. As a result, the subjective camera not only wobbles through gamified films and virtual reality animations, it is also booming in pornography and in the DIY journalism of smartphones and GoPro cameras.

New branches of research, such as affective computing and emotional decoding, assist in the exploitation of empathy. They attempt to make emotions that have not yet been decoded clearly readable and controllable. They are part of an algorithmic offensive that feeds empathy into a self-learning feedback system. Tomorrow's cybernetic buying recommendations may no longer say it out loud, but they do whisper it in other places: ›If that controls you, then perhaps this one also controls you.‹ Empathy becomes another word for the control society's access to individuals and groups in the perspective of private and state data mining.

Back to Farocki's avant-garde reference to empathy. Farocki's shock therapy was triggered by something that was once called solidarity-based criticism. In other words, a



Fig. 27: Harun Farocki, *Inextinguishable Fire*, 1969

criticism that thinks equality in an internationalist way and derives the necessity of action from this; an empathetic criticism that does not understand worldliness as a source of emotion but as an entanglement in relationships; which starts from the vulnerability of you and me and would perhaps today include the emotions of the dog on the one hand and the forest on the other.

Solidarity beyond interest groups is also coming back into fashion in the cultural sector. The 2019 Unsound Festival in Kraków, which has just opened, has taken this as its leitmotif.

Heinz Bude has recently argued for a renaissance of this resource of the social, which poses a crucial question that cannot be answered by the compensatory services of the state.

According to Bude, solidarity does not ask what is just, what is owed to one, and what has become a problem itself in its insistence on acquired privileges; solidarity, as Bude understands it, has something to do with Christian charity. It asks: ›What do you need?‹ And it does not expect a fair exchange for this. That sounds generous, but also somewhat unrealistic. For where is this solidarity (which one can only wish for but can hardly demand) supposed to get its political impetus? Who is inciting it, who is rewarding it, who is compensating for the unreasonable demands it makes? Is there, as studies on the non-rewarding helpfulness of small children suggest, an anthropological constant, a

social heat accumulator called solidarity, which is always in operation and only runs better or worse? Or is solidarity subject to the contingency of socio-psychological conditions, which, on the one hand, could homogenise a society against all internal upheavals (as in the post-war period up to the generation of reconstruction), or conversely, since the 1980s – in the course of the fetishisation of the personal choice of everything and everyone – could de-solidarise it to such an extent that the appeal to solidarity sounds like social kitsch? Or is solidarity increasingly turning from a world-opening social practice into an exclusive, national-conservative project that limits aid to the fiction of those close to me, to the people, to the community, to the street, to the family? If this is the case, the leftist figure of solidarity tilts to the right. It would strengthen the bonds of community against the social bond of society. Certainly, when the next flood disaster comes, everyone in the village, in the street, will be willing to show their support, but when the next wave of refugees comes, there will perhaps be much less people out there to see to the so-called *Willkommenskultur*. For what do we care about those we do not know and who have nothing to do with us?

Things were different in the liberation-loving Sixties. The solidarity of the left, fed by the criticism of capitalism, referred to the farthest reaches – to the civil rights movements in the USA, or to the Vietcong – and not only to women as the huge discriminated group in one's own home. But in the narrower class-struggle and economic sense, solidarity was an implication of the Marxist and also social-democratic criticism of the conditions of exploitation in the great leveller known as the factory. There, not only metals but also subjective conditions were melted down. At the time, the alloy was called the proletariat. After 1917, this would give rise to a ›new man‹. On the way there, communists had to adopt progressive self-understandings. This took place through a process that was both authoritarian and emancipatory at the same time, which, in line with Bini Adamczak, can be understood as universal masculinisation. All humans become brothers in the struggle against capital and for a world after, or in, constant revolution. But the communist brothers also consist of biological sisters and queer subject forms. The universally masculinised revolutionary body was both deficient and repressive. It missed the richness of already existing modes of existence and possibilities that lie beyond gender standardisation. Historically evolved femininities, Adamczak writes, were not available to the Russian Revolution. It was not until around 1968 that they came to be expressed (also in the momentum of a criticism of the deficits of the revolution of 1917) and prepared the ground for the expansion of identity-politically motivated claims to recognition that circulate today.

What is the proletariat today? What became of the working class? The good jobs and the bad jobs are too different today; precariously living female bicycle messengers and exploited people working under slave-like conditions in the Global South have too little in common with new self-employed people looking for a work-life balance. Not to forget the newly perceived and politically cultivated racial and cultural differences that turn former workers or middle-class women into ›white trash‹ or Muslims.

If the desire for solidarity wishes to be heard again today it must do justice to the roughly outlined pluralisation of social conditions and subject formations. This in turn presupposes, first that the criticism of false universalism is understood and accepted, and second, that this criticism does not become a trench war between the correct and most correct attitudes. This cannot be taken for granted – on the contrary.

For one could almost get the impression that it is precisely the progress of criticism of criticism that has led to a point where even the last certainties regarding the possibilities of critical behaviour, as Horkheimer once called it, are dissolving – a maelstrom that descends into a bottomless abyss. Walter Benjamin spoke of the dialectician who feels the wind of history in his sails. These sails were the terms that one only had to set right. Today, those who wish to get away set out with sails full of holes. Does this mean that it is better not to leave the harbour at all? Is criticism in fact a 'misery', or even being 'at one's wits' end'?

Normatively, criticism – strictly speaking – has a critical meaning only as a self-referential term. Criticism must be critical of itself, otherwise it is not criticism. It is, however, not clear which desired states criticism is actually aimed at; it is a matter of negotiation. Justice, equality, the prevention of exclusion and the recognition of all are often called normative perspectives. In principle, however, social criticism can of course also be aimed at ethnic identity or the re-establishment of the order of classes, although it may well share some leftist criticism of the experience of alienation in the modern era. Even the IS militia implicitly formulates a criticism of societies which, while horrified by their actions, are themselves largely indebted to the resentments of the holy warriors against the capitalist, corrupt, and cynical West. Where criticism is headed is therefore never clear from the outset.

Also, the more clearly such reactionary forms of criticism become apparent, the more the trust in the possibilities of a master narrative known as criticism tends to diminish. There is, however, no escape from being at the mercy of the tentacles of criticism, if only because criticism is a procedure that observes the results of an observation of the world, and at the same time becomes an object of observation itself. What matters much more is a better understanding of the tilting moments of criticism.

Post-critical forms of life, art, and thought have taken a stand against the deficits of criticism. Letting oneself drift, being decentred, turning night into day, for example – or isolating oneself, confirming oneself in bubbles and safe spaces. In art, the immersion boom provides a media-technical indication of criticism's loss of confidence. In addition, in the course of global art, generally binding criteria from the front and back, progressive and affirmative, are disappearing. There is not one ideal approach to criticism. As soon as criticism in art becomes recognisable and normatively calculable as a criticality procedure, it becomes threatened by devaluation – and vice versa.

The negation form of the next society, writes Dirk Baecker, is no longer the destruction or the *tabula rasa* of everything that has gone before – in a radical case, even negative utopia. Both procedures, destruction and utopia, once inherited the dwindling confidence in the improvability of the world through criticism, for criticism was the demo-

cratic promise of a functionally differentiated society. Anyone and everyone can criticise anything, because the world is a world of interpretations of texts and speeches that are potentially accessible to everyone. Resentment eludes the penalisation methods and control mechanisms of digitally upgraded criticism. It slips away and thrives. Resentment inherits the silence of the majority that is no longer silent. It cannot be critically re-educated or even controlled. It changes, just as an affectively charged network constantly creates new condensations without being dependent on one part alone.

Are there also productive, not *a priori*, politically contestable discourses that are associated with the uncanny power of resentment?

In a joint text with Alan O'Shea, the cultural studies pioneer Stuart Hall – in defence of the struggle for cultural hegemony once so impressively described by Antonio Gramsci – cites a few more examples of the ambivalence of common sense, which is usually flatly despised by critics. Common sense, in Great Britain for example, is angry about the barbarity of the Sharia, but at the same time shows understanding for the Old Testament vengeance logic of »an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth«. Similarly, it is also brought into play by people who are themselves dependent on state support vis à vis other underprivileged people, who they denounce as social parasites. Furthermore, common sense also wants the world to be fair, but does not find the unequal treatment of nationals and migrants in any way unjust. Heroically, it upholds the freedom of the individual, but at the same time complains about the fear-laden lack of freedom which results from the loss of social security as well as material impoverishment. Similarly, it is outraged at the greed of real estate speculators and the salaries of company directors but stoically elects those political parties that will most certainly never change anything about it. The criticism of ideology has always tried to tear off the mask of the necessarily false consciousness behind it and make the contradictions visible. Masks and veiled contradictions usually win at the ballot box.

Yet despite its latent conservatism, common sense is not a social law of nature but rather a historically variable construction. Its essence is nowhere to be found in reality, however diligently one may refer to it. Nor is it necessarily identical with the leaden corset of the majority society. There are almost euphoric references to it in leftist criticism – namely whenever, in the name of common sense, a minority concern or an emancipatory movement makes itself heard. Common sense then mutates into an expression of self-organised resistance against domination, which takes into account the heterogeneity of the struggles beyond the schematism of class struggles. In its variegation, writes Tim Stüttgen, referring to the film theorist Kara Keeling, the blaxploitation cinema of the 1970s represents the imaginary resource for a necessary Black common sense, a cinema that can be celebrated and with which the community can identify. Perhaps such forms of joyful occupation also represent a productive, historical point of friction for all those entitled positions that are categorised under the heading of Afro-pessimism.

A bold, open-ended, common-sense referentiality might be understood as an opening that could soften the frontline position of imagined proximity in the mode of empathy, and educated distance in the mode of criticism. A practice that could counter the alarmism of the constant deterioration of bad conditions with something that would

be neither elitist nor under-complex. A practice that would be close enough to touch, and far enough away not to get lost in the blindness of identification. Perhaps there would appear on the horizon something that could be called a new form of solidarity; a solidarity which looks at the damage and experiences of injustice worthy of criticism as a whole, and which can provide provisional answers to the always unresolved and inconclusive question: »What do you need?« Perhaps the *Fridays for Future* movement, for example, could initiate such common sense shifts, or can already be understood as their expression. In this case, the question of »What do you need?« would be extended to a damaged planet. The question would then aim at a solidarity that only knows participants.



Fig. 28: Harun Farocki, *Inextinguishable Fire*, 1969

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*





**Florian Arnold**

Some criticism formats are ultimately more serious than one would prefer, especially the critic himself. The satirist – in contrast to the ›classical‹ critic – hardly sees himself as being above his subjects, especially today, as he generally has to be involved in some way himself. Some facts can only be exposed by exposing oneself with them. Martin Sonneborn's critical outbursts during his term of office as an elected member of the European Parliament have, in the meantime, become infamous. Here, satire seems to have completely merged with its counterpart, and ironic mimicry has become cynical mimesis – a transition that was still recognisable on one of the most eloquent election campaign posters since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany, before – due to the election victory of the party *Die Partei* – the campaign came to a close and the posters disappeared. On the occasion of the German federal elections in 2013, for example, it was written in white letters on a red background: »*Inhalte überwinden!*« (Overcome Contents!); and what was affected by this turned out in retrospect to be not only a ›political‹ change of direction towards populism but also a ›satirical‹ one – but who could fault Sonneborn for keeping his election promise by simply feathering his own nest?

Nevertheless, a bitter aftertaste remains. Is it permissible to deal with political content in such a way that it becomes a mere formality of one's own advancement? Can one even speak of political satire in this context? Or have such satire politics already crossed a border beyond which satire and reality become indistinguishable? In the following, the aim will be to provide an answer to these questions, albeit an all too ambiguous and ultimately unsatisfactory one. But as one might expect, this has been part of the satirist's business ever since he sold himself as such.

## What was satire?

With regard to the history of the term, the origins of satire begin with cheating, or more precisely, an ›etymological cheating‹ which manifested itself in the approximative spelling of ›satyr‹. For a long time one believed that, in the Western context, satire was derived from the satyr plays of Attic theatre; and did these always drunken and lustful hybrid creatures as companions of Dionysus not already reveal something about the dual nature of satire, oscillating between salacious risibility, cryptic subtlety, and parodistically pointed polemics? No, the term »satire«, which is not only common in English, can be traced back to the Latin *satira*, *satira lanx* (›bowl filled with fruit‹) and thus offers a colourful mixture of all sorts of things rather than the desired double meaning. This is accompanied by the fact that it was not the Greeks but in this case the Romans, who can be attributed with the invention of satire. Or in the proud words of Quintilian: »*Satura quidem tota nostra est*«<sup>1</sup> (›At least satire is completely ours‹).

Without wanting to delve into the history of concepts to such an extent that the entire history of the genre is also discussed here, two classic forms of satire can be

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1 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, X, p. 1.

named alongside the founder figures. Whereas one form, the *Horatian*, is based more on a playfully ironic reminder of human vices – as expressed in an exemplary manner in Horace's *Sermones I, 1, 24*: »*Quamquam ridentem ridentem dicere verum quid vetat*« (»What forbids a laughing man from telling the truth?«) – the other, the *Juvenalian*, indulges in scourging, abysmal mockery of the world, culminating in Juvenal's verse from *Satires I, 30*: »*Difficile est saturam non scribere*« (»It is difficult not to write satire«). Although both forms are characterised by a certain distance to the flows of time, both also bear witness to a compassion that is at odds with their contemporaries, because it – »*O tempora, o mores!*« – wishes to claim equal standards for all. In the end, it is thus less about the individual shaping of one's own life, where it is exposed to ridicule, than about the claim to be able to take measure of an ideal of human life.

What exactly can be understood by this (also in the historical succession) is expressed exemplarily, in particular for the German-speaking world, in Friedrich Schiller's poetological reflections *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*. Here, although unnamed, an examination of the two classical forms of satire can be found, where Schiller writes: »The punishing satire obtains poetical freedom, whilst it passes over into the sublime; laughing satire receives poetical content, whilst it treats its theme with beauty.«<sup>2</sup>

Covered by the two basic aesthetic concepts of the eighteenth century, satire enters into an idealistic discourse by even expanding the front line in relation to reality. Drawn out of his reserve, the modern, sentimental satirist seems to be preparing an offensive which knocks the envisaged reality out of the field, as it were. The punitive aims straight through the rebuked criminal, at the sublimity of the ideal itself, as is characteristic of the concept of dignity (the intelligible character) of man in the tradition of Immanuel Kant. *Via negationis*, the actual ideal becomes visible and at the same time effective through the appalling circumstances only when satire »elevates« the reader out of the sensual lowlands and refuse into the abeyance of moral judgement, without itself falling into the compulsion character of moral preaching. Here, under the sign of a humorous sublimity, poetic and moral freedom tangent each other. In the other case of laughing satire, Schiller's concept of beauty comes into play, which he associates with the grace of the body. This time it is the awkward, ugly, clumsy foolishness that allows the sense of beauty to see itself distorted in its opposite, without taking pleasure exclusively in the vices of blasphemy. Both forms therefore, however contrary the aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful may be, agree on the point at which the ideal should triumph over the real.

This is all well and good, but what about this ideal of satire in contemporary reality? I now come to an example of ideal satire, which can no longer be understood as uplifting or euphemistic. It may sound grotesque, but I take myself as an example.

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2 Friedrich Schiller, »On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry«, in: *Friedrich Schiller Poet of Freedom*, vol. III, trans. Wolfgang Iillge and Ralf Schauerhammer (Washington, D.C. 1990), unpaginated.

### What is design and what is punishment?

It is probably not completely wrong to assume that the title »Design and Punishment« already plays a satirical game with the partly hypocritical euphemisms of design, and with an, at times self-righteous sublimity of punishment – although it was not intended in advance. The fact that satire today can no longer avoid using the chosen aims of its criticism to target itself at the same time, is part of the irony of a *zeitgeist* that persistently and skilfully fails to overcome *itself*. At first glance, it seems more like a humorous, low-budget format, situated between slapstick, criticism, and infotainment; but at second glance, »Design and Punishment« presents itself as a satirical format which, above all presents the mediatised habitus of the critic as a doppelganger of the real spectator himself. In contrast to the classical satirical forms and their characteristic relationship to the recipient, here there is a transition from an indignant and amused, ultimately distanced know-it-all attitude, to a complicity of sensual endorsement or reluctant surrogate shame, whereby both are forms of inner identification, of willing or unwilling participation in the spectacle.

A few characteristics shall be singled out, which allow us to gain a further perspective with regard to the question of the power and powerlessness of the satirical. The structure is as follows: in five short episodes, selected objects are subjected to a design critique in order to be subsequently brought in various ways to – in most cases – damning justice. Even the strict division, which is also reflected in the broadcasting time, only partially guarantees a balance between sentence and execution. It is primarily the voyeuristic curiosity, which is more than satisfied, where, for example, a piece of seating furniture is set on fire after being maltreated with a chainsaw and a gun. In contrast, the judgement itself is markedly capricious, exaggerated, and apodictic and thus reminds one more of tavern buffoonery than of the search for truth. What is more, the division of roles between an aesthetic snob, who talks until he's blue in the face, and his butler who, albeit with visible pleasure, gets his hands dirty, makes use of colonialist clichés which, in the exoticism of the Japanese, who vacillates between a lust for violence and self-denial, tip over completely into something akin to caricature.

On the whole, the initial impression could arise – if one accepts that the power of criticism is presented in an absurd drastic representation of its consequences – that the commonplace talk of »scathing criticism« were to be vividly illustrated here. This may of course arouse displeasure in those who wish to understand criticism as constructive intervention. But the whole thing becomes grotesque, not only for the »victims« but also for the »perpetrators«, from that point on where the arbitrariness of the enforcement backfires on the judge (and the attendant jury). As several episodes (for example the one on the Fiat Multipla) clearly reveal, it is ultimately not at all the critic's verdict that prompts the plump execution or, conversely, tempers »justice« with mercy, but rather a direction that is invisible to both protagonists and viewers, which operates and rules according to a prescribed script. In other words: the improvised criticism is not only transparently staged but is ultimately a pale strategy of legitimisation for a self-righteous and autocratic spectacle, which is laid out in advance like a show trial (only this time on public television) without any higher purpose (about which all ideologists at least still lied to themselves).

So what is all this about?

### The criticism of criticism of criticism...

What the public criticism of this format has in common is a certain astonishment, a kind of shaking of the head in the face of an orgy of destruction and waste (not least of taxpayers' money, as is repeatedly emphasised), which only rarely gets around to calling a spade a spade and calling what is actually problematic about the format by its name, namely as a satire on the brink of *hate speech*. Instead, there is an ironically distanced tone on the part of the critics, which seems to be in a kind of competition with the format, as if it were a matter of going one better (which the format admittedly invites) and thereby continuing to make reality of what one at the same time rebukes for moral or other reasons.

Only one thing seems clear, as a Facebook post on the fringes of the debate puts it in a nutshell: »Satire must unfortunately [why of all things »unfortunately«? FA] also face the question as to whether the contribution is suitable for motivating viewers to have a positive mental reaction. If this fails, then we are dealing at best with slapstick«. But maybe this is precisely the crux of the matter; that is to say, maybe, exactly here, one still does not sense enough cynicism, that perceptive faculty and manner of dealing that is indispensable for every satirist when it comes to finding the punch lines, although igniting these may require something else.

There is nothing directly positive about satire; at most *via negationis*, as we have already established with Schiller, a position can be taken beyond the circumstances described, if it is not to lead to lame-punchline excitement for what is good, true and beautiful. This is particularly valid for the true person of the satirist of today, as can be read beautifully in Kurt Tucholsky's credulous assertion: »Satire is a thoroughly positive thing. Nowhere do those lacking character betray themselves quicker than here, nowhere does he show himself swifter, that tomfool without a conscience, one who attacks this today and that tomorrow«. <sup>3</sup> Should one pat oneself on the shoulder? Or is it just that, here, with Tucholsky, that which was already a moral thorn in our side with regard to his predecessor returns – moral cockiness in the midst of conjured up or self-imagined libertinisms?

On the other hand, the positive, in the sense of the edifying, has been put up for discussion since the late eighteenth century. Instead, it is a romantic irony that hovers over an abyss of negativity, of not-this-and-not-that, and this irony is existential rather than moral. One could also say that beauty and grandeur are replaced by a mixture of the two; satire is, in one, satire of these basic categories themselves, in that irony loses itself in its own infinity, in the incessant reflection of its self-reflection and self-criticism, ultimately in its own groundlessness, which not only makes it increasingly questionable, but which made it questionable in the first place. In other words, satire becomes the grotesque – the spoiled brother of slapstick.

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3 Ignaz Wrobel [Kurt Tucholsky], »Was darf Satire?«, in: *Berliner Tageblatt*, 27 January 1919; english translation available online at: <http://kurttucholsky.blogspot.com/2006/02/was-darf-die-satire.html> [last visit on 26 November 2020].

What seems to me to strike the right note, more than Tucholsky's self-righteousness directed at the religious public, is Friedrich Nietzsche's admission that he himself no longer knew whether he was dynamite or a *Hanswurst* (clown):

»I am not a man, I am dynamite. And with it all there is nought of the founder of a religion in me. [...] I require no ›believers‹; it is my opinion that I am too full of malice to believe even in myself; I never address myself to masses. I am horribly frightened that one day I shall be pronounced ›holy.‹ [...] I refuse to be a saint; I would rather be a clown. Maybe I am a clown. And I am notwithstanding, or rather not notwithstanding, the mouthpiece of truth; for nothing more blown-out with falsehood has ever existed, than a saint.«<sup>4</sup>

Nietzsche's confession – already marked by features of ›madness‹ – one again takes the ›*Hanswurstiaden*‹ (farces) seriously, which have been part of the canon of the genre since Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*. These are ultimately farces of criticism, which only ignite where the critic blows himself up with them. It is slapstick with clichés, a delusional competence for everything and everyone, while at the same time making a pretext of ignorance, a (self-)caricature as coquetry with the irony of history, finally and on the whole one's own petty bourgeois careerism as a boarder of the *Zeitgeist*, which hardly allows the satirist to look in the mirror without shame and alienation. The only ›consolation‹ here is the insight that he is not the only one, and yet he sees himself fighting a losing battle as the last moralist, who, in view of his own success with the others, will eventually lay down his arms.

»What may satire do? Everything.«<sup>5</sup> But what, finally, is it *capable* of doing? – Nothing! – For there is only one *Hanswurstiade*, which is at the same time and indeed real dynamite: reality itself.

### What is real satire?

The simplest answer should come as no surprise: Trump. In this person, everything comes together that can be imagined in terms of grotesque behaviour in the highest offices. Here, the jester seems to have been made king, and the whole thing is topped by the jester's cap in that this jester has always considered his cap to be a crown (when, in fact, it is only a toupee). Yes, perhaps even more; is Donald the saint who shows satire the way to self-redemption, even its redeemer in person? One could at least think so, if one observes the incredulous doubts, challenges, and accusations that accumulate daily in the countless testimonies of his critics, the still hesitant discipleship of a doubting Thomas, who does not want to admit it, but finally comes to understand that reality has already become a fool's kingdom on earth. Criticism of this real satire has fizzled out (what more can be critically investigated with regard to this revelation?) and at the same time has

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4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Volume Seventeen: Ecce Homo*, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (New York 1911), p. 131.

5 The closing lines of Tucholsky's *Was darf Satire?*.

been resurrected as a fascinated and astonished – and herein miracle-believing – prayer of every single word that passes over the lips of this proclaimer of self-deprecating pride; this divine son of rich simplicity. Why criticise Donald's real satirical majesty, instead of simply emulating him and doing the same? And it is done.

When one subsequently recognises this satirical conversion, the relationship between the kingdom of heaven and earthly life of satire presented itself with Tucholsky and Schiller as follows: »The satirist is an offended idealist: he wants the world to be good, it is bad, and now he runs up against the bad«,<sup>6</sup> – »In satire the real as imperfection is opposed to the ideal, considered as the highest reality«. <sup>7</sup> The good news for satire and, at the same time, its deliverance from all the evil of resentment, blasphemy, and temptation is, in contrast, in real satire, the ideal as luxury is opposed to the real as the lowest ideal.

In order to assert the dignity of both the critic and the reader, reality is no longer allowed to fail due to the ideal, but conversely, the ideal fails because of reality and with it the critic or satirist as an ideal role model of mature opinion making. He sees himself, as well as his luxury of pharisaic-intellectualistic petty criticism, exposed to the sin of pride and finds refuge where he no longer wishes to cling to the superstition that the heavenly kingdom of satire is still ahead of us, paradoxically but logically only in the poverty of the spirit...

... And there he stands in front of the audience, as a patriarchal orator in the carnival of opinion, as just another jester among many who take themselves too seriously. Self-parodic opinion-forming and judgement processes range from casting shows of all kinds to the latest tribunals in the Levant. Be it in the gossip groups of the social media, or in the pathos of indignation on paper, the *Hanswurste* practice their critical antics everywhere, all of them finally united in the zealotry of a new faith, the unswerving belief in themselves and their own *confirmation bias*.

Who would want to be left out? Is the satirist doing something else? Can he want to do something else? – In the words of Martin Sonneborn: »What we do is easier. We work destructively. It's fun, it's amusing, and it has to be done«. <sup>8</sup> Perhaps this is still the only viable policy of satire, a *politique du pire*, which does not once again satirically and critically pull the *cacocratie* »through the cocoa« (as the Germans say) and thus make it sweeter, but which ensures in the easiest way that one ultimately gets sick of both it and reality. Because you may or may not laugh, but the real satirical point is that politics today needs one thing more than anything else: politicians. (Ignition)

Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow

6 Tucholsky 1919 (see note 3).

7 Friedrich Schiller, »Satirical Poetry«, in: idem., *Aesthetical and Philosophical Essays* (Redditch, Worcestershire, 2013), pp. 393–401, here p. 393.

8 Martin Sonneborn, in the interview conducted by Cornelius Pollmer: »Das Vergnügen quietscht«, in: *Süddeutschen Zeitung*, 5 October 2013 [translated].

*Moderator Ellen Wagner*

***Ellen Wagner***

From different social and media-critical perspectives, Thomas Edlinger and Florian Arnold approached the question of how too much proximity or, conversely, too much distance to the objects, as well as to one's own actions and context, can have an effect on criticism. Coming from the fields of social and design criticism respectively, both lecturers invited the audience to participate in a reflection ›between the disciplines‹, which also allowed new views on the genre of art criticism.

Art criticism has long since found itself in ›survival mode‹. In a digitally saturated media landscape of divided audiences and an ›overkill‹ of critical products (Florian Arnold), it is becoming increasingly difficult for critics to reach their addressees – or even anyone, for that matter; to ›muddle through‹ with the next text, until the deadline, until a reader's reaction takes up all the energy that is so urgently needed to reflect on the situation and function of art criticism as such. Is art criticism increasingly becoming ›writing about art‹? And if so, how can it assert itself without wearing itself out in a grimly proclaimed battle for the ›survival of the fittest‹?

Moreover, in a world where ideological positions flow into one another, and knowledge and discourses increasingly spread ›virally‹ in affectively charged atmospheres, art per se, with its ambiguities, offers a contentious, discussion-laden field – fortunately, it should be added. But hardened and inscrutable attitudes of hyper or post-criticism, of intransigence and offensive indifference, obscure how much involvement and how much distance from the issue is at stake among those involved – that is to say, how to enter into a discussion.

In art criticism, the dilemma of the protagonists' entanglement in the system is a sore point. How much side-line activity can criticism tolerate? What happens to its postulated autonomy if the precariousness of writing, which is poorly paid or at times only paid in the currency of ›visibility‹, makes it subordinate to other ›bread and butter jobs‹, which in turn require greater involvement in the events and their institutions?

But also: how much criticism is possible in order not to surreptitiously cut into the meat of one's own cause and peer group, as Sabeth Buchmann remarked in the panel discussion, by means of a differentiated – in individual aspects also problematising – examination of certain artistic works, such as feminist approaches?

The post-critical restraint with unambiguous judgments and classifications can appear as an (un)conscious protective mechanism for artists and critics, in order not to narrow their own scope of action in an environment in which each has always been interwoven with the other. Similarly, the overshooting of a distanced irony, which seems to fit in almost everywhere in the media, can leave a back door open for the ›not meant to be taken seriously‹. The attempt to always address several markets, such as discourses and networks, often leads to attitudes being differentiated rather than questioned by other participants in the discourse, and, in the worst case, to being silenced rather than being taken further (Sabeth Buchmann).

Whether only the courage to express oneself clearly can help one out of this situation is hard to say, in view of the vagueness, which, especially in the aesthetic field, is also indispensable as a productive factor. The attempt to fictionalise one's own role as a critic, to experiment with points of view, and to allow oneself to change one's mind while writing,

might offer another opportunity. As an ›exercise in empathy‹, of an artistically attempted criticism, against an art that always feels called upon to be ›critical‹, this attempt could at least lead to unexpected proximities and distances that open up different paths for art and criticism than those of a mutual featuring.

### **Frida Sandström**

You talked a lot about how to write or how we can use the platforms on and for which we work. I would like to add a quote from the *Comité invisible*, a group of writers and thinkers in France who, in 2017 published a book titled *Maintenant* (Now). There, they write that the exchange value of language has approached zero – and yet we continue to write. We do this because there is another way of using language. One can talk about life, or, from the perspective of life, one can talk about conflicts; or from the midst of conflicts themselves, and I think that this material conception, or even criticism of where we write from, is essential, also in this space, with regard to all the contributors who are here. From my perspective, this is much more crucial than evaluating or meta-criticising what has already been written.

### **Sabeth Buchmann**

If you look at the history of criticism, there is precisely this field of tension between empathy and criticism. Look at someone like Denis Diderot, who to a certain extent always fictionalised his own role as a critic in order to include this very field of tension in his work, meaning that you have to show total solidarity with something in order to be able to criticise it at all. For me, however, the question also arises for your [Thomas Edlinger] proposal to reformulate solidarity-based criticism, whether, where identity politics interfere with it, forms might not also emerge that ›kill‹ precisely this tension, where solidarity again undermines the possibility of criticism in the sense that you cannot, for example, argue against a member of your own peer group. If I were to criticise the work of a feminist artist, for example, I would always have to face the criticism that I am thereby also criticising feminism or the representation of women in art – and right now, cases like this are steadily increasing in the social media.

### **Thomas Edlinger**

It's good that you say that. It is indeed something that, in my view, has increased greatly, and where a tipping point of the desirable effects of criticism lurks – which can lead precisely to the fact that an originally emancipatively understood multiplication of forms of representation and of participation, can lead to something, originally conceived together, becoming silent rather than just differentiated. I have no answer now as to how one can get out of this dynamic, because in fact this would also mean in part that one would remain silent in an unjustified place and allow something to be valid, which one should not actually allow to be so. At the same time, however, I believe that, in these objections – and this would be my point of criticism of this boom in objections – forms of power that have thus far been little reflected are lurking from the side where one initially assumes that powerlessness is hidden. Cultural appropriation would also be a good example of where this tilting figure – between making that which was hitherto invisible visible, and



that which was previously unheard audible – can be observed. It is not so clear, however, who is opening and closing doors, and with what form of authorisation.

### **Thomas Sterna**

As far as the aspect of emotionalisation is concerned, I find that very positive emotions are often expressed in connection with reports about art. There are even book titles such as *The Love of Painting* [by Isabelle Graw], among others. As someone who wishes to analyse this, one is quickly treated like a cold critic. I think this is a problematic aspect, especially when the provincial critiques in particular lose all value due to their descriptive empathy, and everything becomes indistinguishable.

### **Thomas Edlinger**

In art criticism, I think you have to insist that you are right, even against the audience. It goes without saying that the audience cannot be the criterion. But what I was talking about is social criticism rather than a great current in which forms of criticism that appear in artistic work, in hybrid forms between activism and art for example, play a role in an inverse relationship to politics – criticism as a great counter-order.

If the example of ›criticality‹ can be cited as the leading currency of a politically interested or oriented art, then that is also interesting aesthetically. What would it mean for a conception of aesthetics if criticality became a decisive yardstick? Not in the large collections, in the large forms of representation, but in other areas which I am also more involved in, it does indeed play a major role. You then have to be careful not to overestimate that this is such an important field, but I think, discursively it is. There, I would consider your objection to be justified.

### **Jonas Balzer**

My question – addressed to Florian Arnold – is whether, in your opinion, the criticism you yourself have experienced for the *Design und Strafe* mini-series would fall within this emotionalisation of criticism described by Thomas Edlinger. Because the criticism was actually a criticism *ad personam* or even more a criticism of the form of criticism and not related to the object itself.

### **Florian Arnold**

The problem is to be able or willing to distinguish between these in the first place. In the mediality of social media the idea is always to personalise, and in a certain sense to turn people into things, and vice versa. And that, I think, is an expression of the situation we find ourselves in, which makes it difficult for critics to navigate, to really have an address-specific effect and not simply shout what one thinks into the digital Hades of oblivion. The question is that of the effect of criticism. And then there is perhaps a manoeuvre or a strategy, to find a way through a differentiated relationship between distance and empathy that actually works.

But I would always emphasise that the essential point is the reception in this whole, and the rampant indifference, which is generated by the overkill of even critical products. I think this is a question to which one cannot give a critical answer. Perhaps it

really is a question of raising awareness, of debate, and also of deciding for it, and whether certain media are simply incapable of conveying criticism. Perhaps criticism, in the sense of Vilém Flusser, is simply a dimension of textuality, and perhaps we are living in a post-critical age, when we have long since entered an age that speaks a completely different language than that of criticism. This is where I see the problem. But perhaps it is also a philosophical meta-perspective, which no one has interest in, and which, above all, does not advance the business that lies behind it. But that is the only thing that interests me about the whole thing.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*

# **Film as Art Criticism**

# **Artistic Film Contribution**

**MODERATION  
SABINE MARIA SCHMIDT**

**STEFAN RÖMER**



Fig. 29: Stefan Römer, *ReCoder of Life*, Still, 2018

**Moderator Sabine M. Schmidt**

**Sabine Maria Schmidt**

I am very pleased to introduce Stefan Römer as a member of AICA. In 2000, he received one of the very few awards for art critics that exist in Germany, the ADKV-Art Cologne Prize for Art Criticism.

Stefan Römer works with several media as both an artist and theorist. His art history dissertation was published in 2001 under the title »Künstlerische Strategien des Fake – Kritik von Original und Fälschung (Artistic Strategies of the Fake – Critique of Original and Forgery)«, an important topic which he has since been pursuing continuously. He worked as an assistant at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne, as Professor for New Media at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, and since then as a visiting professor at numerous academies. In addition to his visual and musical work, his cinematic work is also important. In 2006, he launched the feature-length film *Conceptual Paradise* and is currently working on the experimental film cycle *ReCoder*, from which we will now see *ReCoder of Life*.<sup>1</sup> After the film, he will explain his concept of criticism.

**Sabine Maria Schmidt**

The film was premiered in May at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, and we are pleased that we are able to show it here at the conference in the appropriate format. There is a very decisive point in the film when the leading actress Reco asks the question: »What is critique?«

**Stefan Römer**

Reco then speaks visibly, but you cannot hear what she says. There is a pronounced silence; a gong resounds. This acoustic reduction accentuates the image. With this, I provide a hypothetical response in the film. The faded-in texts read: »critique means« – »recoding reality«.

I would like to make the following comments on the context of the film: The term »populist game« appears in the film. A background for reflection in my film was the theme of »populism«, which appears in the title of this conference and which was also the subject of the conference panel with Oliver Marchart and Ana Teixeira Pinto.

The special form of my film is occasionally described as *challenging*, since there are many different text levels. There are, however, also many strong images that form different layers with the texts. But the audience talks mostly about the texts. The reason why I have been working with such text structures, not only in this film but also in performances (in some cases since the mid-1980s), is that, in contrast to populism, I am concerned with maximising complexity – in other words, not with a simplification of content but rather with an increase of complexity. For I do not want to comply with the cultural dictate that it is always about viewer ratings or click counts that can be achieved with simple content. Beyond that, it is also completely doubtful whether simplification is truly in the interest of the audience. But populism claims that it is.

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1 See: Stefan Römer, *ReCoder of Life*, on: *vimeo*, URL: <https://vimeo.com/336762237> [last visit on 17 November 2020].

I am interested, first and foremost, in a cinematic scenario rather than in a precise transmission of information. For this purpose, the text layers, in addition to the images and sounds, are very important to me. Characteristic for my use of text in film is a quote from the filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha from 1990: »Concepts are no less practical than images or sound«.

I would like to connect this quotation with the film theory of Gilles Deleuze, namely that the work of theory is to be taken just as seriously as the work of the image or the film. Both must be produced or created and are the result of communicative work as practice. This together is the key to my films.

On the question of why I stopped writing art criticism, I would like to say that I simply could no longer afford to spend the time for art criticism as and alongside my own artistic work. The first reason was that the pay was too low; the second reason was that serious criticism was met with a withdrawal of information from the art institutions, which made certain artistic discussions and the work of art criticism more difficult.

### **Sabine Maria Schmidt**

But you understand – rightly so – that your film work is also a form of criticism, and you also introduce a method with the film. Could you explain this a little, in particular the central idea of being able to re-code reality – which implies a previous coding through images, doesn't it?



Fig. 30 a: Stefan Römer, *ReCoder of Life*, Still, 2018

### **Stefan Römer**

Everything is coded as soon as it is denoted and negotiated by language. The title *ReCoder* is initially used in a historicising way. The reference is the film *Decoder* (1984) – which can be considered an underground film because it is so unknown; with its leading actresses Christiane F., who was known through the book »Zoo Station: The Story of Christiane F.«, and F. M. Einheit, who was the drummer of the band *Einstürzende Neubauten* at the time. The film aims to decode subliminal sound information that is played in hamburger joints as ambient sound. According to the theory formulated by William S. Burroughs in his book »The Electronic Revolution«, the information of the dominant system of government is decoded and processed by the collage-montage technique of the cut-up. The subsequent playing of the sound collage at the place where it was originally recorded is intended to lead to revolts there. Burroughs himself even makes a cameo appearance in my film.

In addition, I use the term »recoder« to refer to a theoretical paradigm shift. From today's point of view, all the above-mentioned components have changed. Above all, digitisation has changed the relationship between the individual and the code of information. To give a brief indication of this: today I speak more of recoding, because the autonomy for an act of decoding is no longer given unconditionally and without context. In the new media »ambient«, we are constantly expected to decode and recode, from which there is hardly any possibility of withdrawal.



Fig. 30 b: Stefan Römer, *ReCoder of Life*, Still, 2018

**Sabine Maria Schmidt**

I would like to come back to the images that I already found very coded and conceptually thought through. After all, there is no *dérive* through an Asian metropolis but rather, despite all the apparent randomness, there are still very decidedly interwoven reference systems.

**Stefan Römer**

I am interested in very precise film settings and layering in the montage of shots, whereby the pans and zooms refer to historical working methods of film. But I am even more interested in the emancipated audience being able to interpret the material I offer as they wish. In doing so, I also try to allow for coincidences. The texts in the film therefore do not have to be read and understood letter by letter. It is rather an offer, like a poem or a novel – or like the documentary photography of a street scene. This is the difference between art and the news, the latter of which should be completely understandable.

My fear is that a great deal is currently being subordinated to economisation, for example by statistically determining and specifying the modes of reception and the duration of reception. One need only think of the pre-announced reading time for digital newspaper articles. It seems to me that there is far too little resistance to this economisation of the whole of life.

**Sabine Maria Schmidt**

I can only agree with that. You had one more topic you wanted to raise here at the conference, which we discussed last night following the restrictive censorship examples explained by colleagues.

**Stefan Römer**

My question to the conference participants is: whether this conference would not like to produce a final *communiqué* in support of the situations in Turkey and Hong Kong that were raised yesterday?

**Sabine Maria Schmidt**

We would in any case like to respond to the appeal for Osman Kavala, raised by our AICA colleagues from Turkey. There is also the Committee for Censorship of AICA International, which reacts very specifically to individual cases. We heard yesterday how complex the situations are and that it is necessary to consider exactly what can be done where without putting colleagues at additional risk. But that should not stop us from undertaking such a *communiqué*.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*



# **AICA Incentive Award for Young Art Critics**

**2019**

**WENTING TAO**



**How the Curatorial Stereotyping of Chinese Art Essentialises the Work of Zheng Guogu\***

***Wenting Tao***

The winner of the 7th AICA Incentive Award for Young Art Critics 2019 is Wenting Tao born 1996 in Hefei, China. The jury praises Wenting Tao's winning submission, *How the Curatorial Stereotyping of Chinese Art Essentializes the Work of Zheng Guogu's*, for its deep critical analysis exposing the bias of reading non-western points of view in exhibition making.



Fig. 31: Zheng Guogu, *Visionary Transformation of the Tranquility of Heart*, 2016

## *Wenting Tao*

Buddhism has become not only a religion, but neoliberalism's spiritual panacea. Its currency has risen across the globe. Its practice has become regionless, as hard to define as it is easy to subscribe to. And its contemplative teaching is not only perfectly compatible with capitalist pursuits but indeed acts as mental opium for the mad dance of late capitalism. For the neoliberal individuals unable to actually distance themselves from rapid technological accelerations and capitalistic endeavors, its tenet of impermanence offers moral comfort while its slogan of renunciation provides psychological distance. Eastern spirituality has quickly become a favorite institutional rhetoric because it has the innocence of the other, the authority of the transcendental, and the flexibility of moonshine. And that is why when an esteemed art institution like MoMA PS1 invokes vapid Buddhist tropes to unify the career of a Chinese artist whose trajectory is inseparable from the politics and economics of contemporary Chinese society, it's a sign that something has gone very predictably wrong. Zheng Guogu's two current solo shows in New York: *Visionary Transformation* at MoMA PS1 and *Photoworks 1993–2016 Even a click of the shutter is unnecessary* at Eli Klein Gallery, offer a chance to compare different curatorial treatments of his work.

At the age of 49, Zheng Guogu has achieved a wide-ranging and diverse body of work. Emerging out of the coastal city of Yangjiang in the early moments of Deng's economic reform, he was an enthralled observer of the blooming consumerism and influx of global culture. The current show at *Eli Klein Gallery* presents the first overview of his photography work from the 1990s. *My Teacher* (1993), a photo in which Zheng is shown laughing with a homeless man, whom he observed for six months, can be deemed the young artist's manifesto. In an interview, Zheng explained that he was attracted to his teacher's heedless joy and »special immune system.« Referring here to the man's vagrant diet, »immune« can also describe his exemption from societal rules. Zheng is interested in exemption: escaping a system (legal, economic, or cultural) through operating within it. This subtle, strategic form of dissent was to become an underlying thread throughout his career. In *Honeymoon* (1995), Zheng borrowed a friend's wedding certificate to spend a »honeymoon trip« at a hotel in Guangzhou with a girl named Luo La. The resulting snapshots of the trip emanate a genuine sense of romance and intimacy. *Computer Controlled by Pig's Brain* (2007) targets the overheated art market, proving that being open and deliberate about making »bad« paintings from randomly generated phrases is not enough to deter the usual process of aesthetic and speculative commodification.

Inspired by the video game *Age of Empires*, in 2005 Zheng set out to build a colossal private garden in his native city Yangjiang. The construction process depends equally on architectural ingenuity and schmoozing local legislators to bend planning regulations. According to the wall text of his painting show *Visionary Transformation* at PS1, Zheng's elaborate real estate undertakings »evoked the Buddhist belief in the impermanence of the physical realm«. Moreover, his »pursuit of such transcendence« is crystallised in 12 paintings that »heighten« the »enlightenment« of Buddhist *thangkas* through the

»transformative power of digitisation.« *Thangkas* are traditional Tibetan Buddhist Scroll paintings used to focus on meditation.



Fig. 32: Zheng Guogu, *Honeymoon No. 7*, 1996

We learn that for each piece, Zheng digitally overlaid multiple *thangkas* and then painted them in oil with various application techniques. In most of them, such as *Visionary Transformation of the Purification* (2011–13), a concentric configuration of deities disintegrates into an all-over marbling of discordant colors. Despite the holographic effects of overlaying, the paintings are overwhelmingly flat. The marks range from damp and wobbly (resembling inkjet image transfer) to brittle and abrupt. In *Ultra Violet Visionary Transformation No.2* (2014–15), the mannered curvatures of the syringe-applied paint strands sit awkwardly with the slapdash texture of their enclosed surfaces. Religious contemplation is at least plausibly derided in these paintings, although overly quoted as a nominal theme and source of imageries.

The problem is not that this is a weaker body of work by an otherwise significant and inventive artist. It lies in MoMA's wholesale acceptance of these paintings as fitting seamlessly into Zheng's artistic oeuvre, neatly folded into the shorthand of spirituality — which, thus, becomes a trope that bypasses critical evaluation — the need to consider how these paintings function as art, as if visual strength is not historically a primary site for

spiritual or political message. Such mindless mythologising of Chinese artists is in no way rare. In fact, artists like Xu Zhen have made works that deliberately satirise the awkward essentialising of Chinese art into stereotypical Eastern cultural values.



Fig. 33: Zheng Guogu, *Visionary Transformation of the Purification*, 2011–2013

Therefore, if we are to critically assess Zheng's heterogenous oeuvre, it is necessary to secularise, so to speak, his conceptual focus to specific ends. The show at *Eli Klein* offers the potential for one such reading. A consistent thread that runs through the works on view is a kind of qualified, amorphous, negotiable freedom enjoyed by the individual in post-Cultural Revolution China, a period marked by the constant rise of new

infrastructure, systems, and orders. Thus, this freedom is in constant negotiation with an essentially authoritarian power structure whose actual rules in practice are often in flux and sometimes indeterminable. From the vagabond living outside of societal norms in *My Teacher* (1993), to the imposter couple realising their romantic dreams in *Honeymoon* (1995), to the artist navigating local regulations to build Liao Garden (originally named Age of Empires), the freedom is mapped out by systems and rules that the individual bypasses to romance some deeper value.

Zheng measures society's power topology through its negative spaces, where the rules are not, where games can become reality, even just for the sake of the game itself. Consumerism is both the condition and confine of his work. The boisterous gang in *The Vagarious Life of Yangjiang Youth* (1996) strikes poses of violence and rebellion, but their individuality approximates that of '90s youths everywhere because of the leveling influence of global mass media. Zheng's »bad« paintings can only mock the commerce of art by being implicated in it. The »precise, fairytale-like existence« of the dolls floating in the urban skyscape in *Tokyo Sky Story* (1998) is symbolic of a sense of suspension between an all-determining economic infrastructure and the ethereal realm of personal imagination. In this light, the paintings at MoMA are logical extensions of his older works, as they evince the desire to push the limits and manipulate the principles of a framework, to see how far one can go.

This is just one possible reading of Zheng's work which, stitched to the artist's complex and variant life, often takes unpredictable turns depending on the immediate circumstances and the set of possibilities on hand. His mode of operation is instinctual and pragmatist, opposite to the mythical, inward-turning beam of spirituality in MoMA's narrative. One thing *Visionary Transformation* tells us is that the currency of incomprehensibility is still robust. The juxtaposition of the two concurrent shows, therefore, is a call to substitute a more rigorous and nuanced critical focus for ready-made stereotypical tropes in understanding contemporary Chinese art.

*This article first appeared on Hyperallergic.*





Fig. 34: Zheng Guogu, *Ultra Violet Visionary Transformation No.2*, 2014–2015



Fig. 35: Zheng Guogu, *The Vagarious Life of Yangjiang Youth No. 16*, 1996

# Art Criticism and Discrimination

## Panel 10

MODERATION  
ELKE BUHR

ISABELLE GRAW  
SABETH BUCHMANN  
ANTJE STAHL  
JULIA PELTA FELDMAN



### **Crises of Criticism/Negative Capabilities**

***Sabeth Buchmann und Isabelle Graw***

In their contribution, Sabeth Buchmann and Isabelle Graw explore reasons for the unpopularity of art criticism in historical and current perspectives and redefined criticism as a medium of reflection on social discrimination. While Graw uses the works of the painter Jack Whitten to describe a dynamic between association and dissociation (in Whitten's concrete case, between a claimed belonging to a modernity that is at the same time denied to the Black artist) as it should also characterise a self-reflexive art criticism; Buchmann explores the feminist thinking of Annemarie Sauzeau-Boetti. This seeks to make a »double space of incongruence« – the negation of one's own female subject character – fruitful as a starting point for dealing with exclusions under the conditions of patriarchal culture.

Art criticism makes demarcations, exclusions, and evaluations, which undoubtedly contributes to institutionalised forms of discrimination. At the same time, however, it also has the possibility – especially in its social-theoretical varieties – to attack social discrimination. The critics delved into this double character of critique – discriminating and reflecting discrimination.

### **Artistic Freedom as Privilege**

***Julia Pelta Feldman und Antje Stahl***

The questioning of the Western value of artistic freedom by activists who appeal to artists' morality and respect for the painful feelings of others is, understandably, met with outrage and fear by liberal art critics. The contribution by Julia Pelta Feldman and Antje Stahl explores the reactions of art critics to recent cases of so-called »left-wing censorship« and identifies the prejudices that underlie them.

How can it be too much to ask museums to address sexism, racism, and other forms of injustice in their own collections? Is it really »unreasonable« for (*white*) artists, as well as *white* critics, to reflect on their own freedom as a privilege that has long been denied to minority artists? With these questions, the contribution called for a change of perspective that does not understand the discussions about »artistic freedom« in the sense of a demanded restriction of this very freedom, but rather as a plea for a long overdue *expansion* of the right to express oneself and to be heard; for those who in history and the present – also in the world of art that sees itself as pluralistic – were and still are confronted with everyday realities that make the participation of members of minorities in the discourse enormously difficult or instrumentalised.



Fig. 36: Jack Whitten, *Black Monolith X (The Birth of Muhammad Ali)*, 2016



**Isabelle Graw**

Recently, I re-read the text ›Kritik der Kunstkritik‹ (Critique of Art Criticism), which was jointly written by Sabeth Buchmann and myself.<sup>1</sup> Looking back, I wondered how the theses formulated there could be implemented in the practice of art criticism.

I was in the process of writing a text about Jack Whitten's *Memorial Paintings*, and I realised that the implementation of our core idea was no easy task, that art criticism inevitably discriminates, but at the same time is able to reflect social discrimination. It was quite a challenge to discuss Whitten's work in other art-critical and thus also *discriminatory* categories, and at the same time to place his practice in a context of social discrimination. Thus, our other central demand to reflect on art criticism's ›system-immanent creation of value‹, that is to say its generation of value and meaning in art-critical writing itself, inevitably fell somewhat by the wayside.

I also recoiled from ›self-situating‹; that is to say from a self-positioning of criticism as we had advocated this in our text, not least of all because of my concern that this might seem a little coquettish. For such a self-situating might have led me to say ›I‹ where I actually wanted to make a binding normative argument about Whitten's practice.

Our methodological ideal of a criticism that acknowledges the *provisional* nature of its art-critical judgment also seemed to me to be difficult to achieve in my writing. Using adverbs such as ›possibly‹ or ›presumably‹, I sought to signal the possible *contestability* of my theses.<sup>2</sup> But at the same time, I wanted to make binding statements about Whitten's practice.

That criticism, as we suggested, should also ideally reveal its assessment models, was also easier said than done. I approached paintings by Whitten such as *Black Monolith X (Birth of Muhammad Ali)* from 2016 (fig. 1) with a clearly formulated hypothesis (which stated that the manifold procedures by which Whitten suggests the ›animation‹ of his paintings are directly related to their presentation as ›gifts‹ for other artists or jazz musicians, whereby, from an anthropological point of view, they also necessarily circulate as ›animated gifts‹ within a system of exchange). But although I clearly set out my interpretative framework in this text, there is no real disclosure of my criteria.

The fact that methodological and content-related guidelines cannot simply be ›implemented‹ does not, in my view, in any way mean that they are superfluous or even futile. On the contrary, in my experience the practice of criticism is characterised precisely by such methodological difficulties and permanent self-revision. Criticism then, also seems to me to be crisis-like in its essence, as was already evident in Reinhart Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis* (1959/1988). However, for me, its current potential lies not only in its capacity for crisis-like self-revision; it must also simultaneously make decided (and well argued) judgments that may even hurt.

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1 Sabeth Buchmann and Isabelle Graw, 'Kritik der Kunstkritik', in: *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 113, 2019, pp. 33–51.  
 2 See: Isabelle Graw, 'Beseelte Gaben im Tauschsystem. Überlegungen zur Malerei von Jack Whitten anlässlich der Ausstellung ›Jack Whitten. Jack's Jacks‹ im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin', in: *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 116, 2019, pp. 116–25.

The current potential of criticism can however, only be meaningfully determined by considering its current ›systemic dilution‹, which we also discussed in our text. Not only in a neoliberal economy orientated on the values of the market does criticism have a difficult position, even where it is in extreme demand, such as in the sphere of *documentas*, *Manifestas* and biennials, norm-critical art can lead to a neutralisation of criticism.

The social media have also contributed to its systemic dilution, which should be added to our findings, for according to Maik Fielitz and Holger Marcks it is in the nature of social media that they dilute criticism. Rumours and manipulation often take the place of secure specialist knowledge because here, criticism – for example on Facebook – has been replaced by an evaluation culture based on ›Likes‹.<sup>3</sup> To the same extent that social media have helped long unheard voices to become a public forum (see: #MeToo), they are also the ideal transmission instrument for fear-inducing right-wing propaganda.

What can an art-critical text on the painter Jack Whitten achieve under these circumstances which are not exactly conducive to criticism? In my view, Whitten's practice is characterised by the very double movement that we have ascertained for criticism, oscillating between association and dissociation. For in Whitten's work as well, a variety of aesthetic procedures are used to claim membership in a modernism that also demonstrates that, as a Black abstract painter, it does not include him as a matter of course – association and dissociation in one. One example: with the help of conspicuously crooked and askew grids, as in *Totem VI Annunciation (For John Coltrane)* from 2000 (fig. 2), Whitten has taken the modernist myth of the grid as a guarantor of flatness *ad absurdum*. Here, both the clusters of primarily grey fields of colour, and the grid forms they comprise, appear extremely crooked and askew. As in jazz, to which many of Whitten's titles refer, the artist has used a strict formal requirement, the grid, to simultaneously liberate himself from this. Grids that appear organic, that make curves, or whose outer form has been rounded off, are omnipresent in his work.

If, in these works, Whitten takes the liberty of producing crooked and askew grids, I think this signals two things: that the tradition of the grid is not naturally available to him, *and* that the modernist claim of the grid to overcome the figure-ground relation is not sufficient. Whitten's grids do not give the impression of two-dimensionality, but rather, on the contrary, suggest a three-dimensional, corporeal form of animation. With his paintings, Whitten makes a matter-of-course claim to belonging to a modernism traditionally understood as Western, while at the same time signalling that they are not included as a matter of course within a Eurocentric and racist painting tradition.

By analogy to our model of criticism as a ›medium of social discrimination‹, Whitten's work is also an art-immanent reflection of social discrimination, in which the artist, analogous to the critic in our model, locates himself both within and outside a system of values. However, unlike a criticism that is associated with and dissociates itself

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3 Maik Fielitz and Holger Marcks, 'Digital Fascism: Challenges for the Open Society in Times of Social Media', in: *Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies Working Paper Series* (Berkeley 2019).



from the circumstances, Whitten's dissociation is to be understood as a socially forced one that goes back to his position as an artist who operated for a long time 'from the margins'.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*

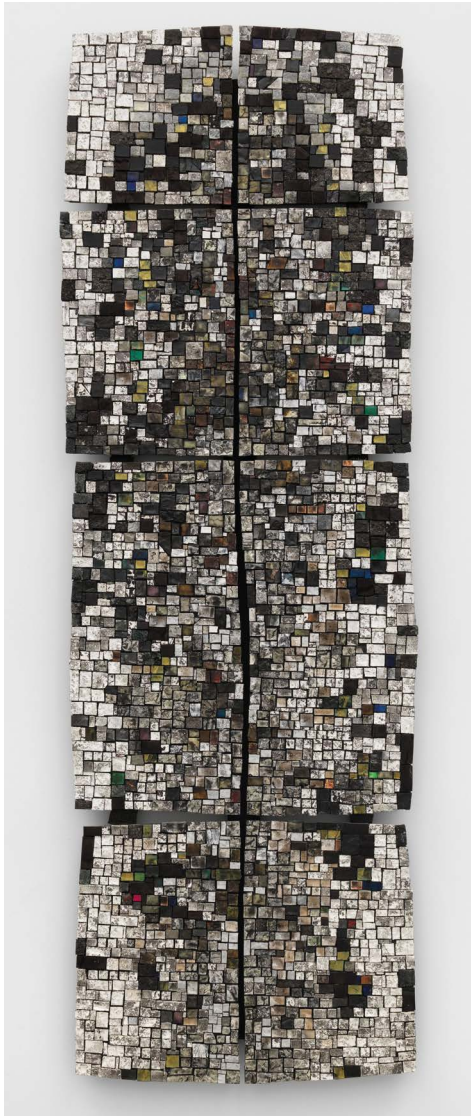


Fig. 37: Jack Whitten, *Totem 2000 VI Annunciation*  
(For John Coltrane), 2000



### **Sabeth Buchmann**

The contribution by Isabelle Graw and myself is based on our joint essay on previous contributions to the journal *Texte zur Kunst* regarding correspondences between art criticism and identity politics.<sup>1</sup> In this, we proceed from the thesis that criticism participates in a fundamental way in the sociological logic of exclusion. For, according to our argument, criticism necessarily makes distinctions and thus also demarcations; that is to say, in methodological terms, it practices an intrinsic form of discrimination. Derived from the Greek *krinein* (›to differentiate‹), criticism represents a medium of judgement and value formation in which institutionalised mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion reproduce themselves in ever new ways. As a rule, the object of art criticism is that which is successful from an economic, institutional, and/or media point of view.

However, one's own share of social discrimination need not necessarily be the reason for the self-abolition of criticism, as some theoreticians, including Denise da Silva and Kerstin Stakemeier, demand.<sup>2</sup> Although we take such a radical standpoint very seriously, we still strongly support art criticism as a necessary medium of public education in the sense proposed by Hannah Arendt. In our view, however, it should be understood all the more as an exemplary medium of reflection of aesthetically and politically institutionalised discrimination. Our question, therefore, is: who has personally carried out such a reflection of social discrimination within the field of art criticism and in what way?

In light of the #MeToo movement and ›cancel culture‹, which the organisers of the conference have addressed, I would like to briefly discuss a – in my opinion – relevant example from the early phase of feminist art criticism. Insofar as anti-discriminatory ethics are regarded as an expression of populist political correctness, and as such ostensibly threaten to restrict artistic autonomy. My hypothesis is that the attempt to combine feminist cultural criticism and gender-reflexive art criticism – as will be discussed in the following – offers possible answers to this issue.

I refer here to the text titled ›Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art‹ by the Italian-French art critic Annemarie Sauzeau-Boetti, which is both a representative and specific example of the debates on the concept of female aesthetics in the 1970s. I came across the text thanks to the curator Ilse Lafer, who had placed it in a central display case in her exhibition *Doing Deculturalisation* at the Museion Bolzano (April – November 2019), alongside Carla Lonzi's famous polemic ›Sputiamo su Hegel‹ (Let's Spit on Hegel, 1970).<sup>3</sup> In the January/February 1976 issue of the art magazine *Studio International*, which was dedicated to the theme of ›Italian Art Now‹, Sauzeau-Boetti states – in

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1 Sabeth Buchmann and Isabelle Graw, »Kritik der Kunstkritik«, in: *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 113, 2019, pp. 33–52.

2 See: Denise Feirrer da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis 2007); Kerstin Stakemeier, »Kritik, genauer Kunstkritik«, in: Ilka Becker et al. (eds.), *Fields of Codes* (Cologne 2018), pp. 24–35.

3 The exhibition title is borrowed from a quotation from Carla Lonzi's radically anti-culturalist essay, »Let's Spit on Hegel« [1970], trans. Veronica Newman, available online at: <http://femrad.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html> [last visit on 20 November 2020].

reference to works by artists such as Carla Accardi, Iole de Freitas, Marisa Merz, and Ketty La Rocca – that she does not believe in »feminist art« because »[...] art is a mysterious filtering process which requires the labyrinths of a single mind, the privacy of alchemy, the possibility of exception and unorthodoxy rather than rule.«<sup>4</sup>

Although this would seem to be based on a classic, romantically individualistic concept of the artist, the author also argues for the necessity of the self-perception of women, and women artists in particular, as a social group. This group must oppose the concept of culture as an »sexual absolute«, which is also widespread among women since it presupposes male humanism as a generally valid standard of value in art. Sauzeau-Boetti counters this with the often hidden, but at the same time collectively experienced »incongruence«. What is meant by this is a relationship of women to the world that differs from male experience. Cultural incongruence is thus localised in a consciousness torn between sexually different forms of existence and their assimilation into male culture. By addressing the connection between the marginalisation of women and their fixation on nature – on the one hand – and male-defined cultural history – on the other – which is crucial for feminist discourse, Sauzeau-Boetti recognises the exploration of the female body through culturally undervalued – because non-avant-garde – materials, figures, colours and rhythms, gestures etc. as a recurring feature of women's art. The crux of her argumentation is the resulting derivation of a »negative capability as practice in women's art« from the ambivalence that the reference back to hitherto un-symbolised areas of life within the male-defined value canon of avant-garde culture signifies; »negative« because the female practices Sauzeau-Boetti described as an expression of an »alien culture« meant a programmatic betrayal of the simultaneously appropriated avant-garde aesthetics.

In my opinion, the »double space of incongruence« derived from Sauzeau-Boetti represents a highly topical precondition for anti-discriminatory art criticism. She thus has no illusions that any intervention, no matter how militant, in the constitutive canon of exclusion, means betrayal of the »basic disunity, »negativity« and OTHERNESS of women's experience.«<sup>5</sup> In a binary sense, which from today's point of view can certainly be problematised, the critic turns what she calls the »double space of incongruence« against any positively conceived alternative of artistic expression, and instead demands a »subject in the negative who wants to displace the horizon; no, to *alter* it.«<sup>6</sup>

The negation of the necessarily appropriated subject status calls for female self-identification at the moment of its revocation. This is not a plea for an unbroken affirmation of identity politics, but rather for a negative one. As such, the »double space of incongruence« is directed against those restrictions and degradations with which the structurally male art establishment has long considered the symbolisation of

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4 Annemarie Sauzeau-Boetti, »Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art«, in: *Studio International. Journal of Modern Art*, January/February 1976 [*Italian Art Now*], pp. 24–9.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

6 *Ibid.*

femininely coded areas of experience and life. The way in which the essay ›Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art‹ combines art criticism with anti-discriminatory identity politics, is therefore literally ambiguous. In considering how to deal with social exclusion in the sense of »basic disunity, ›negativity‹ and OTHERNESS«, Sauzeau-Boetti's so-called »double space of incongruence« proves to be a proposal for simultaneous integration and disintegration.

The legitimacy and relevance of feminist art criticism under the conditions of patriarchal culture, questioned by representatives of the radical women's movement, is countered by Sauzeau-Boetti's text with a concept of criticism that is reflexive of both subject and institution. In my opinion, this is first and foremost in order not to let women's art slide into indiscriminateness. According to her argumentation, the construction of female aesthetics makes a difference in terms of a relationship to the world that is perceived as different from the values and criteria of male humanism. I therefore also interpret the »double space of incongruence« as a way of dealing with one's own, impossible to eliminate, dichotomy between art criticism as a constitutively standardised practice of differentiation and the necessity of negating existing criteria of differentiation in favour of normatively excluded symbolic languages – avant garde meets ›alien culture!‹<sup>7</sup>

In the light of this historical example of feminist art criticism, I would first of all oppose the cheap concern about the deprivation of artistic freedom through anti-discriminatory rules and regulations, with the restrictions traditionally imposed on art by female and queer producers. Having been ›rediscovered‹ by contemporary curators aware of their historical responsibility, the undoubtedly necessary integration of art marked as being identity-related is in line with the »values of the market« (Wendy Brown), which Sauzeau-Boetti also had in mind.

But long before marginalised – because repressed and/or forgotten – art practices became both a market resource and a target for voices affirming and criticising identity politics, a woman art critic who was aware of the pitfalls of *affirmative action* created a figure that was neither congruent with pro nor anti positions. In this sense ›Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art‹ makes an *ex-negativo* determination of art criticism as a structurally excluding practice of differentiation, in order to formulate criteria on this basis for thinking of practices marked as feminine and queer, not as the categorically ›other‹, but as an incongruity inherent in art and thus all the more productive for art criticism.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*

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7 Ibid.



Fig. 38: Ilse Lafer (ed.), *Deculturalize*, 2020

**Moderator Elke Buhr**

**Elke Buhr**

Welcome to this panel discussion. We want to move further with regard to the criticism of art criticism. Boris Groys once said: »A critic is no longer a person who stands on a mountain, looks down on the plain, and can tell those below what to do; in contrast, a critic stands firmly down below on the meadow and points only to something that might be interesting – and at the same time points to himself«. In other words, art criticism also points to itself. Art criticism should reflect on itself, and that is exactly what we can expect in a few minutes. And this was the point of the contribution by Isabelle Graw and Sabeth Buchmann – two of the most renowned art critics in the German speaking world, both of whom also teach at universities and have dealt with a great deal both in theory and practice.

I found that extremely interesting. In the end, what was theorised in one lecture was put into practice by Jack Whitten, only with a different theme; not with the excluded femininity, but with the excluded African American. In his art, he analyses this difference; in other words, he simultaneously deals with the strategies and then interprets them differently, appropriates and negates them. What I would like to know now is: in the end, you say you have a distorted image of the 1970s; what has changed since then, how far have we come?

**Isabelle Graw**

I believe that what Sabeth addressed with her example of an identity politics characterised by negativity, can also be found today in various psychoanalytic approaches. For example, in Samo Tomšič's new book *The Labor of Enjoyment*, where he also strengthens a form of psychoanalytically conceived identity – one that is not characterised by affirmations but rather by a notion of identity as unstable and permeated by alienation, traversed by negativity – and suggests that one should start from such a concept of identity if one wants to think of identity politics. I believe that there are many attempts at the moment to get away from the distorted image of essentialist identity politics. Be it that you look again in history; weren't there more complicated designs even then? Or that one should take another look at psychoanalytical ideas of identity, where one can also find what one is looking for.

**Sabeth Buchmann**

I myself was surprised when I came across this text. I think there are few texts within art criticism that touch so succinctly and fundamentally on the foundations of philosophical systems theories; on the one hand (as perhaps taken for granted in the context of the '68 or post-1988 struggles; that one dealt with Hegel and Kant; positioned the whole thing within the framework of international class struggles, and had no problem at all with what is formulated today as a problem, that identity politics and class struggle would be on two different sheets). Suddenly, in this early form of difference-based feminism, which we have always considered a bit derogatory, a figure appears who takes all this into account, so that one has to ask oneself: don't we have to go back to square one? Don't we have to look again at what we left by the wayside, which is also theoretically

already pre-formulated on the side of art criticism, precisely in the context of the struggles and debates that are taking place today around this term? It was a lesson for myself.

***Elke Buhr***

There are actually two separate questions here: Can one make art within the patriarchal system? And can one write criticism within the patriarchal system? Or are these indeed the same question?

***Isabelle Graw***

I think criticism and art are intrinsically linked. I don't think that the one can be thought meaningfully without the other. Of course, I'm not saying that every critic makes art. On a categorical level, of course, they are different production systems. But I think that the conditions within which we move, the constraints we face, the questions of strategy – and these are ultimately strategic questions that we are discussing here when we talk about Whitten and an association that implies dissociation – on this level of strategy, there are of course similarities.

***Elke Buhr***

You mentioned that the critic must reflect her point of view when she criticises. How does the critic reflect her own position with regard to race, class, and gender when she writes?

***Isabelle Graw***

That was precisely my problem.

***Elke Buhr***

Exactly. But what is the solution?

***Isabelle Graw***

I could not go into this in greater detail. In our joint text, we already called for a kind of self-situating of criticism, also in view of the fact that one can no longer assume that one is above things but that one's own judgement is made situationally, under certain conditions, within a particular situation. There have been attempts in this direction since the 1990s, when female critics and theoreticians almost reflexively defined their position at the beginning of their texts, according to the motto: ›I am a *white*, privileged woman; and, with this, the problem of situating oneself was clarified. I find that a bit difficult, because there is something mechanical about it, and, in the end, it doesn't really say that much. I think how you do it and whether and in what form you might have to say ›I‹ in certain places, is a matter for negotiation and probably only to decide from text to text according to the situation. There is no recipe. I just wanted to point out the difficulty.

***Sabeth Buchmann***

As far as this question is concerned, I would also like to come back to the counter-reaction, the demand for a radical self-situation. If you look at the debates that have



determined the art discourse in recent years – whether it's Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, new materialism, or speculative realism – these were theoretical movements that argued that there must be an end to this self-inspection of the self-critical subject, which only tends to re-legitimise itself, and has propagated instead a return to things, to facts, to materials. I believe that this pendulum movement must be kept in mind, because, from this side, there is also the threat of a demand for the abolition of criticism. The pressure is coming, on the one hand from a side that is critical of colonialism, sexism, and discrimination; but also from another side. And, as Isabelle has suggested, the social media are taking the whole thing one step further. That was the question we asked ourselves.

**Isabelle Graw**

*Criticism under duress.*

**Sabeth Buchmann**

Exactly.

**Elke Buhr**

I don't know if you can break it down like that. But why do we need criticism? What is so important about rescuing it now? A provocative question.

**Sabeth Buchmann**

I would like to answer that, with reference to Hannah Arendt – who wrote a text about *judgment* – and for her, judgment is essentially an activity that makes art – or whatever phenomenon of criticism it may be – a public matter. Without criticism there is no public. This is the political statement that one can make about this with reference to Hannah Arendt.

**Isabelle Graw**

Criticism means, literally: differentiation, delimitation; and without differentiation, meaning – and thus value judgements – there is no art. Art is genuinely dependent on criticism, for if there are no art-critical discussions about artistic works it is not at all clear what could be at stake in these. If no one says anything about it – and ideally says something competently – then you can spare yourself the whole thing. Thus, even in the art industry itself, criticism has a very important role, which I would defend despite the partly justified desire to abolish it. The attempt of our text was, after all, to first distinguish between criticism of criticism that we consider meaningful, and criticism of criticism that we find problematic, in order to then arrive at another concept of criticism where we say: yes, there is this problem that criticism discriminates, but criticism also has the opportunity to reflect on social discrimination, and we do not want to squander this competence. But of course, we also want to keep an eye on the discriminatory potential, which is certainly problematic.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*



### **Antje Stahl**

Roughly ten years ago, about the time when I started writing texts about art, the task of art critics still seemed to be to protect art from the encroachment of the market. The financial crisis had certainly left its mark. But the willingness of hedge fund managers, oligarchs and companies to invest still seemed so great that they were primarily concerned about the differences between art and marketing. Even at biennials, these differences threatened to become blurred. In any case, I rarely heard of state interventions or political protagonists that resulted in broad moral and socio-political debates in our latitudes, that is, in metropolises such as Paris, New York City, or Berlin; and court cases in which an artist such as Jonathan Meese was on trial because he had raised his hand in a Nazi salute at the University of Kassel in the summer of 2012; or great indignation at the artistic exploitation of people in precarious living situations, which Santiago Sierra regularly exhibits in museums and at biennials; were the exceptions. But this has changed.

#### **1 Pressure from the right**

›Pressure from the right‹ has increased, to quote an article that appeared in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) only a few weeks ago.<sup>1</sup> Together with the German public television broadcaster ARD, the SZ produced a chronicle that soberly documents the »murder and bomb threats, criminal charges, disruptive actions, and demonstrations« that have been directed against art projects by a Syrian artist, a left-wing punk band, and the Zentrum für politische Schönheit (Centre for Political Beauty) since December 2016. Among the sources of these are supporters of the extreme right-wing Identitarian movement, anonymous ›haters‹, as well as members of the right-wing populist political party AfD (Alternative for Germany). The latter have been trying for some time now to cut or completely eliminate funding for the arts in parliaments, city councils, and cultural committees. In public speeches in state parliaments they have been polemicising against the »understanding of democracy« of artistic directors, against »ethos theatricality«, and the »inane welcome propaganda« of the »united left« at theatres, operas, and museums.

In a Bundestag debate on the promotion of culture in rural areas, Götz Frömming, member of the AfD, declared in early 2019:

›Your primary concern is not the preservation of the existing rural village culture that has evolved over centuries, but rather the satisfaction of the interests of a very specific clientele, which now strives to export culture from urban areas to the countryside. We in the AfD parliamentary group refuse to re-educate people in rural areas under the pretext of promoting culture.«<sup>2</sup> Martin Erwin Renner, AfD member of parliament, added: »Over the years, a conformist, politically correct cultural *juste milieu* would develop as a result.«<sup>3</sup>

1 Peter Laudenbach and John Goetz, »Druck von rechts«, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 August 2019, URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/afd-kulturpolitik-rechtsextremismus-gewalt-1.4578106> [last visit on 17 November 2020].

2 Quoted in: *ibid.* [translated].

3 Quoted in: *ibid.* [translated].

Perhaps we do not have to go as far as Philipp Ruch, the founder of the Zentrum für politische Schönheit, in his latest book *Schluss mit der Geduld* (Enough Patience) and write of the ostensible *coup d'état* committed by a »right-wing civil war apparatus«. <sup>4</sup> However, art critics and columnists should be up in arms in view of such statements by politicians; after all, they sell fundamental encroachments on artistic freedom as though they were measures to protect the homeland, and play down the demand for a German *Leitkultur* (guiding culture) which has always sought to exclude everything foreign, queer, migrant, feminist, gay, lesbian, Black, Arab, Turkish, disabled and so on, from cultural life, by force. Art critics and columnists must raise awareness about the fact that, in this way, the cultural-political programme of the National Socialists is being translated into the present. After all, a so-called ›culture from urban areas‹ was defamed once before – in 1933 – and artists of Jewish origin or of liberal or communist ›sentiments‹ were harassed until they were forced to leave the country, deported, and murdered.

## 2 Left-wing protest

That would at least be my request, no, my demand with regard to my colleagues. So far, too few have paid attention to these disturbing cultural developments. The so-called leading media have indeed reported on several of the »murder and bomb threats, criminal charges, disruptive actions, and demonstrations«. I do not wish to deny this. Time and again, comparisons have been drawn with the »purges« of the National Socialists. Information was given about »deathblows« and »poison cabinets« for art, and German-language feature sections warned quite explicitly against »formulations such as degenerate art«. <sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, these analogies rarely referred to AfD politicians, right-wing extremists, or Identitarians. In numerous editorials, there was no discussion of those who wish to impose ›*Leitkulturen*‹, instead, art critics and columnists targeted their political opponents – African American artists; a handful of Native Americans or their descendants and representatives; or even a *Allgemeiner Studierendenausschuss* (student union). For two and a half years now, the media have counted them among the right-wing, militant, even terrorist mob.

Consider the artist Hannah Black, for example, born in Manchester in 1981. In March 2017 she addressed an open letter to the curators of the Whitney Biennial demanding that the painting *Open Casket* by the artist Dana Schutz be removed from the exhibition or even destroyed. The work in question is an artistic and abstracted appropriation of a photograph depicting the body of the African American youth Emmett Till, who had been murdered in Mississippi in 1955 at the age of fourteen by two *white men*. In the open letter, Hannah Black and numerous other activists and artists, among others, explained:

4 Philipp Ruch, *Schluss mit der Geduld*, (Munich 2019).

5 Cf., for example, Jürgen Kaube, »Ist das Kunst oder kann das weg?«, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 February 2018, URL: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst/waterhouse-wenn-die-dummheit-der-manchester-art-gallery-schule-macht-15428302.html>; Thomas Ribi, »Kunst kommt nicht von korrekt«, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 6 February 2018, URL: <https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/kunst-kommt-nicht-von-korrekt-ld.1354230> [both sites last visited on 17 November 2020].

»The painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people because it is not acceptable for a *white* person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalised for a long time«. <sup>6</sup>

The activists who, a few weeks later demonstrated against an installation by the artist Sam Durant in front of a wire mesh fence at the sculpture park of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, were also discredited by the media. The museum had purchased Durant's *Scaffold* for the park; a large wooden construction that resembled a scaffold and was intended to commemorate, among other things, thirty-eight members of the Dakota people who were murdered in 1862 on a gallows like this in Mankato, an hour and a half's drive from the Walker Art Center. On protest posters, their descendants and representatives had written statements such as »execution is not art« and »not your history«. This provoked art critics all over the world and especially in German-speaking countries to such an extent that they resorted to extremely sharp rhetorical guns.

### 3 ›Iconoclasts‹ and ›Virtuous Terrorists‹

There were the ›iconoclasts‹, a term that reminds one of the reformers Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, in whose name churches, monasteries and abbeys were cleared of sculptures, paintings, stained glass windows, and organs in the sixteenth century. Recently, it was actually only the Taliban who were placed in this tradition of iconoclasm – the religiously motivated destruction of images – after they demolished the Buddha statues of Bamiyan in Afghanistan in 2001. Elsewhere, Hannah Black, the descendants of Native Americans, and other activists were described as »guardians of public morals«, »virtuous dancers«, and even »virtuous terrorists«. <sup>7</sup> They were also repeatedly said to long for »politically correct art«. <sup>8</sup>

›Was this polemics?‹ I asked myself, or were protagonists deliberately defamed here, all of whom question *Leitkulturen* in their own way? How can art critics and columnists – and not members of the AfD – compare a few artists and activists who stand up for the rights of Black people, women, or Native Americans with cardboard signs and open letters to the Nazi regime?

Admittedly, the ›Nazi cudgel‹, as one could say colloquially, was only the tip of the editorial iceberg, but to this day, expressions such as ›politically correct art‹ still make any attempt, however liberal, to find an egalitarian form of expression, and even of society, appear like the political programme of communist hardliners. The acronym ›PC‹ is, of

6 Hannah Black's open letter was published online at, among others: <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/the-painting-must-go-hannah-black-pens-open-letter-to-the-whitney-about-controversial-biennial-work-7992/> [last visit on 17 November 2020].

7 Cf., for example: Hanno Rauterberg, »Tanz der Tugendwächter«, in: *Die Zeit*, 26 July 2017, URL: <https://www.zeit.de/2017/31/kunst-museen-reform> [last visit on 17 November 2020].

8 Cf., for example: Peter Huth, »Stoppt die neuen Tugendterroristen«, in: *Die Welt*, 27 January 2018, URL: <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article172922630/Sprachpolizei-Stoppt-die-neuen-Tugendterroristen.html> [last visit on 17 November 2020].

course, no longer a battle cry for the new right. According to the political scientist Mark Lilla, »PC« was even responsible for their rise, for Donald Trump's election victory – and even for the success of the AfD.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4 Shoo, shoo: Back to the ›realm of aesthetics‹

Why did hardly anyone want to deal with the survival/realities of life of the alleged new ›iconoclasts? If you take a closer look at Hannah Black's open letter, for example, you are constantly confronted with the blind spots of the art business, indeed the culture industry as a whole. She writes that the suffering of the Black population was being used as raw material from which *white people* and the media profit most of all – from Black communities living in poverty not far from the Whitney Museum in New York; from Black children who are denied a childhood. And no one with any liberal common sense would contradict the fact that the exploitation and discrimination of African Americans through slavery continues in its own way, not least of all in the cultural industry of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Nevertheless, it was precisely the liberal critics who – how should one put it? – left this injustice by the wayside.

They prefer instead to insist on discussing the characteristics and qualities of a work of art, answering formal questions regarding the application of paint and brushstrokes, and even returning as quickly as possible to the »realm of aesthetics«. One could almost get the impression that art critics were scared stiff to enter into cultural-political discussions and argue about all those extra-pictorial facts that make a work of art possible in the first place – the exhibition, production and living conditions; the artists, collectors, sponsors, curators, gallerists, museums, power relations, capital flows, etc.<sup>10</sup> In any case, the refusal to take activists in the art world seriously can hardly be explained rationally – or am I mistaken?

In her open letter, the author Hannah Black had also claimed that there was a world of experience to which the »non-Black« had no access. That they could never understand more concretely or internalise why Emmett Till's mother had declared his mutilated body a memorial; and that they would have to accept that such a painting as Dana Schutz's *Open Casket* is hurtful: »that the painting has caused unnecessary hurt«.<sup>11</sup>

And it seems that it was the contradiction expressed here, in these unforgettable lines, that the critics (who, incidentally, in this country are almost all *white* and male without exception) could not tolerate. Hannah Black questions their intellectual capacity.

9 See: Mark Lilla, »The End of Identity Liberalism«, in: *The New York Times*, 18 November 2016, URL: <https://marklilla.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NYT-identity-liberalism.pdf> (05.11.2020).

10 I wrote in greater detail about the history of formalism in art criticism in: »Wem gehört die Kunstfreiheit?«, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19 February 2018, URL: <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/wem-gehört-die-kunstfreiheit-ld.1356377> [last visit on 17 November 2020].

11 Hannah Black, 2017 (see note 6).

A statement such as ›You can't understand this‹ puts reason and imagination in its place. Vain minds that deny the dialectics of the Enlightenment cannot bear this.

At the periphery of the new sculpture park of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, where Sam Durant's *Scaffold* was erected, the representatives of the Dakota tribe of the Sioux demanded only more respect for their history and pointed out that only recently a memorial service was held for a young teenager from their tribe who had hanged himself with a rope.

But instead of addressing the rising suicide rate among Native Americans and the particular geographical and historical conditions of this work of art, in this public space – in other words, taking into account the so-called »context« – critics actually made fun of the »sensitivities« of these people. They accused the »affect community« of demanding »comforting approval«, and even went so far as to conjure up a »crisis of liberalism«. <sup>12</sup>

## 5 No crisis of liberalism

The problems of such reporting and criticism should now be clear and obvious. Not only epistemological insights and debates about hermeneutical circles, and even Platonic wisdom, are ignored in this way – »I know that I know nothing« should, in my opinion at least, be part of the basic mental equipment of every critic. The achievements of liberalism are also destroyed in this way. Liberalism once had values other than the assertion and defence of its own views and interests. The political scientist Judith N. Shklar, for example, called for first listening to the victims. For her, this is the only way to understand the real effects of politics and law, values and norms, to perceive the injustices and humiliations experienced in everyday life. <sup>13</sup>

It is time for the contemporary art critic to remember these basic skills, namely to listen and to empathise. Only then will the majority society get the chance to deal with their crimes and be able to prevent them in the future. The ›not understanding‹ that Hannah Black writes about may in fact be a privilege that separates the powerful from the powerless.

*Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow*

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12 Cf., for example: Hanno Rauterberg, »Wie frei ist die Kunst? Der neue Kulturkampf und die Krise des Liberalismus«, Berlin 2018.

13 Cf., for example: Jan-Werner Müller, *Furcht und Freiheit – Für einen anderen Liberalismus*, Berlin 2019.



Fig. 39: Emmett Till's mother Mamie Bradley speaks to the press after her son's kidnapping and murder.



**Julia Pelta Feldman**

It's nothing new that, in protecting and displaying the best of our cultural heritage, museums also inevitably display – and protect – some of the worst of it: *white* supremacy, colonialism, sexism. Among liberals as well as leftists, this has been acknowledged for some time now. What is new is that the chronically repressed have begun to demand that we not merely acknowledge such problems but actually do something about them.

**Censorship and autonomy**

Many critics are crying out that art is under attack. They call activists' demands »censorship.« In the majority of such cases however, the calls for censorship arise not from intolerance, hate, or prudishness but from protestors who seek to address long and undeniable legacies of sexism, racism, and other forms of injustice in art, whether historical or contemporary, and in a contemporary art world that has so far done very little to correct them.

When critics mobilise the word »censorship« to describe activists' demands, the implication is that these activists actually have the power to suppress works of art. They don't of course. By definition, activists are outside the power structures that control what happens in museums. We should be wary of true censorship – which, as recent events in »illiberal democracies« make clear, remains a true threat. But we must also be wary of using the term »censorship« to describe calls for justice – especially those that come, not from authority, but from the victims of it.

Still, it is often argued, art must be autonomous, must be free. »Wasn't artistic freedom one of the greatest accomplishments of modern western societies? Hasn't artistic freedom achieved constitutional status, because it is widely accepted that relevant works are only created when artists are not made to adhere to aesthetic or moral conventions?«<sup>1</sup> This question was recently asked by Wolfgang Ulrich in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. But in crying censorship when activists object to specific works, Ulrich and other critics confuse an artist's *freedom* to create whatever he wants with his *right* to an audience. In his own studio, an artist is indeed free to paint the most hateful subjects all day long. He is also free to try to sell these works to art museums. However, just because he paints them does not mean that museums must buy them. What is called »censorship« could then be better reframed as the demand to know why this work – this particular work, and not any one of hundreds of thousands of others – deserves the privilege of an audience. (It may be possible to argue that artists bear no moral responsibility. Museums, on the other hand, certainly do.)

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1 Wolfgang Ullrich, »Auf dunkler Scholle«, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 16, 2019. Original: »War die Freiheit der Kunst nicht eine der größten Errungenschaften der modernen westlichen Gesellschaften? Erlangte die Kunstfreiheit nicht sogar Verfassungsrang, weil man weithin anerkannte, dass relevante Werke nur entstehen, wenn Künstler sich nicht an ästhetische oder moralische Konventionen halten müssen?« [Translation by the author]

### Artistic freedom: ideal and reality

I have previously argued that artistic freedom is essentially a myth – that it is only abstractly and formally a right that belongs to all.<sup>2</sup> Concretely, and in reality, it is a privilege of the few. Some critics dismissed this argument out of hand, artistic freedom certainly does exist, they say, it is even protected in the constitution. Yet while the German constitution also states that men and women have equal rights, it would be ridiculous to argue that sexism therefore simply does not take place in Germany, since the law forbids it – »for that which must not, can not be.«<sup>3</sup>

Arguments about the universal validity of artistic freedom fail to take into account the difference between *rules* and *norms* – between the *ideal* and the *reality*. Artistic freedom is a wonderful idea, one worth defending, yet many are unable to access it. Failing to distinguish between ideal and reality is therefore an intellectual fallacy. To defend the current *reality* of artistic freedom is to defend a situation in which privilege is a necessary prerequisite for it.

In his recent book, *Wie frei ist die Kunst? – How free is art?* – Rauterberg acknowledges that »artistic freedom was never a complete freedom«. In practical terms, he says, it is limited by the need to protect children or privacy rights – in essence, by other norms – and by individuals' financial capacities.<sup>4</sup> There the discussion ends. In defining freedom's limitations this way Rauterberg fails to include the cultural or political circumstances that not only influence but in many cases decide what we are able to say and do, much more so than the letter of the law can.

I am hardly the first to point this out. There was no law forbidding women from writing poetry in 1929 when Virginia Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own*. In this famous meditation on women's struggle to lead an artist's life, Woolf imagines that William Shakespeare had been brother to a sister. Had she been born with the same natural talent, her talent, unlike his, would never have been given an opportunity to develop. She would have lacked the education given to her brother, the encouragement, the opportunity to believe in herself, the role models – and above all, she would have lacked the time and space to develop as a writer. Woolf imagines an undistinguished end for this poet who never was: »She died young – alas, she never wrote a word.«<sup>5</sup> This little story is tragic, and it is entirely irrelevant whether Shakespeare truly had such a sister; the story is true. In reality, it has played out thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of times, it's just that no one noticed. Such a tragedy, such a screaming silence, can be understood as an overwhelming act of societal censorship.

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- 2 Julia Pelta Feldman, »The Myth of Artistic Freedom«, In: *Zeit Online*, January 2, 2018. <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2017-12/debate-censorship-artistic-freedom-sexism-metropolitan-museum-balthus/komplettansicht>
  - 3 Christian Morganstern, *The Impossible Fact, The Gallows Songs*, translated by Max Knight (Berkeley: University of California, 1963), p. 35.
  - 4 Hanno Rauterberg, *Wie frei ist die Kunst?*, Berlin 2019, p. 11. Original: »Nie war die Freiheit der Kunst eine totale Freiheit.« Translation my own.
  - 5 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, London 1989, p. 124.

But Woolf is not in fact concerned with Shakespeare's time. She continues: »Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the cross-roads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here to-night, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed.«<sup>6</sup>

It was hardly the law that prevented women from writing, it was the very circumstances of their lives, the unfortunate accident of having been born women. Woolf understood very well that »artistic freedom« is only accessible to those who have the opportunity to exercise it. If we value freedom in the arts, we need not worry about those who are criticised. Rather, we should worry about those who never got the chance to speak in the first place.

### Universalism and culture

Another common concern of liberal critics is that one can only listen to minority voices at the expense of society at large. Rauterberg speaks of »special interests« or »individual interests« that fight against »that which is universal in the culture.«<sup>7</sup> The problem is that this »universal« does not exist. It is a partly illustrious, partly appalling fiction that has always excluded the people to whom Rauterberg brusquely ascribes »special interests.« If the universal in culture were really so universal there would no longer be any so-called individual interests – they would then be completely and equally integrated into this culture. The very existence of identity politics is a reminder that we cannot simply make a claim to any culture's universality. Once again, the idea of such a universalism, inherited directly from the Enlightenment, is a valuable ideal and a worthy goal, but as it stands today the culture is only universal to those who themselves are considered universal, i.e. *white* men. This means that, by defending »the universal,« one actually privileges the »special interests« of the *white*, heterosexual, Christian man of a certain social class.

»*White* man« – that has a bad ring to it. I know a lot of *white* men are tired of being constantly referred to as *white* men these days. It sounds dismissive, overgeneralising. They want to be seen as individuals, whose thoughts and ideas are able to transcend their gender and skin color. They want others to see them as people, not as stereotypes. Perhaps that gives them an idea of what the rest of us are dealing with. In fact, this is precisely why we speak of »*white* men«, because »Black women« are also spoken of; because everyone has an »identity,« whether they, she, or he wants it or not. A truly pluralistic society must understand that its universalism can only be pluralism, that it consists of many different elements. Our goal must be to hear and recognise them all, not to homogenise them. The universal – and this is the very core of liberalism – cannot be expressed as *content*, as a fixed idea; rather, it must concern the *conditions* under which people can develop and grow.

Rauterberg, Ullrich, and other liberal critics seem to think that those demanding change oppose the idea of a shared, universal culture that includes everyone. I do not

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6 Ibid.

7 Rauterberg, *Wie frei ist die Kunst?*, pp. 17-18.

object to this idea. On the contrary, I want it profoundly. What I object to is the confusion of ideal and reality – the illusion that this ideal has ever truly existed.

### **The dialectic of artistic freedom**

If we wish to come closer to this goal we must give up the belief that we have already achieved it. This is admittedly easier said than done. It is upsetting to feel that we might be losing something – freedom to express ourselves, or a shared sense of identity – but this is wrong, that freedom was never universal, it was the privilege of a few; this shared identity was always a fiction, used to smother those who didn't share it. The feeling of loss is real, but its object is an illusion.

To acknowledge that artistic freedom is a fiction is to open a yawning hole in a belief system that has given us many of the best and noblest ideas of western culture: scientific inquiry, democracy, self-determination, freedom of expression. But we cannot forget that the same system of beliefs has also given us – and no exaggeration is necessary here – the basest terrors this planet has ever seen: colonialism, slavery, race science, genocide. This is what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer called the dialectic of Enlightenment. We can't simply snip out the bad parts and leave the good parts as they always were, because their outlines remain, and continue to shape and influence even those things we all love and wish to support.

I neither oppose nor regret the noble ideals of the Enlightenment and the progress that has been made in pursuit of them, but it is not simply that we aren't there yet, not simply that progress is slow. Rather, as Adorno and Horkheimer insisted, this very progress contains the seeds of its own destruction, and could well be obliterated if it fails to acknowledge that its failures are not mere exceptions but building blocks of the freedom and equality some of us have achieved. That is why it is crucial to realise the difference between our ideals and our reality. Because we do not further artistic freedom when we ignore its failures.

But I cannot express this better than Adorno and Horkheimer themselves. They wrote in 1944:

»The aporia which faced us in our work thus proved to be the first matter we had to investigate: the self-destruction of enlightenment. We have no doubt—and herein lies our *petitio principii*—that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking. We believe we have perceived with equal clarity, however, that the very concept of that thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms, the institutions of society with which it is intertwined, already contains the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today. If enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate.«<sup>8</sup>

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8 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford 2002, p. XVI.

**Moderator Elke Buhr**

**Elke Buhr**

We have now distinguished between rights and privileges, as well as between censorship and criticism, which was necessary. What I would like to talk about again is the sore point of empathy and the question as to who is allowed to say what. I think what irritates art critics so much about the debate launched by Hannah Black is that it implies that you are not allowed to say anything about it because you do not share the biographical or other characteristics of particular groups. But then you don't really need empathy anymore. What is the role of the critic then? Is it to keep your mouth shut? Or what's left?

**Antje Stahl**

I believe that it is first of all not about forbidding someone to speak, but rather to claim the right to speak for oneself. In *The New York Times* there was a counter-proposal to this self-examination of criticism with which one constantly tries to question oneself; an identity policy proposal that simply says: ›We need more Black critics‹ so that there are alternative perspectives on one and the same object. I believe that this is just the beginning. The fact that someone says ›I want to speak and be heard‹ is the first prerequisite for being a citizen. Slaves and women had no voice and were thus not heard. So politics has an aesthetic from the very beginning.

**Julia Pelta Feldman**

The question is, not only who is permitted to speak, but also who is heard. You can simply start by listening, and then we'll see where we are. But unfortunately, that doesn't happen very often.

**Elke Buhr**

Isabelle, Sabeth, perhaps you want to respond to Antje and Julia?

**Sabeth Buchmann**

I can think *ad hoc* of a contribution by the still relatively young art critic Ines Kleesattel, who, in a comparison of Jacques Rancière and Theodor W. Adorno, discusses criticism as a space of autonomy on the one hand, and as a space of participation on the other, and compares the two positions. In the end, Adorno comes off a little better in being able to think both together, but what is interesting is that – and how – she argues in line with Adorno in the sense of a polyphonic space of speaking. In the field of younger, feminist criticism, which also refers to the ›old guys‹, there are certainly possibilities for building bridges between a traditional, critical theory and newer approaches.

**Isabelle Graw**

One could also point out again with Pierre Bourdieu that the art world is at best only relatively autonomous, if at all; and that autonomy and heteronomy must always be drawn together; and also that one can never assume an ideal-typical state of autonomy. Autonomy was always a fiction. These heteronomous conditions and frameworks must be taken into account. Nevertheless, I thought it was a bit of a pity that Hannah Black and others criticised more than anything else *that* Dana Schutz had appropriated and painted

this model, and that the question of *how* she had appropriated and painted this model was not in the foreground. This instrumentalising approach to the pictorial source, which enables and facilitates her own painterly rhetoric – that was a very negative experience for me. I find it interesting to shift the view from the *what*, namely which object is appropriated – in my opinion, that was not the problem – to the *how*, with the help of which procedures and what exactly happens there. I agree that the accusations of censorship are problematic. At the same time, Hannah Black's deliberately exaggerated demand was a problem; take the picture and destroy it. That this was deliberately overstated was evident from the rhetoric of the text, but with this, of course, the genie was out of the bottle.

**Elke Buhr**

So, let's now open the discussion to the audience and look forward to the debate.

**Teresa Retzer**

Such a meta-criticism of the way Hannah Black criticised the work of art does not include the fact that she specifically omitted the aesthetic criticism; that is to say, she did not really look at the work of art, but only criticised the framework conditions. This is exactly what continues to happen in our still very strongly colonial structures, that artists, who have a different background than most people here in the hall, cannot produce art that is considered in terms of its aesthetic means, but instead identity politics is once again pursued by curators and later also by critics. I find it fascinating that the statement was very quick and perhaps angry, but it also addressed the fact that African American artists have to prove themselves in a completely different way than *white* artists, and that the framework where they come from and how they have worked their way up, this American Dream, still plays a role. I find it a bit difficult to say that this criticism of Hannah Black is simply weak and shallow.

**Antje Stahl**

I think it is a very, very fundamental problem, which can almost be described as a *cultural clash*. Isabelle Graw's argument relies on a very art historical view. The art historian's object of research is always the work, the aesthetic means, the colour, or even the drawing. It is what happens on the canvas. Visual Culture Studies has established itself in the United States, where it is more a question of a visual culture, where a painting like Dana Schutz's exists among many, many other paintings, and the view opens up. I think it is a basic problem in these discussions that you don't talk about the same thing, but that is also just a presumption that there are simply different traditions.

**Isabelle Graw**

But in Europe as well, there is a socio-historical and a visual-studies tradition of placing different traditions, image productions, in contextual relationships. I think this isolating, formalist view is only dominant in one strand of art history.

**Antje Stahl**

Absolutely; but when you say we have to talk about the work somehow, this school comes through.

**Ana Teixeira Pinto**

There is something about the Hannah Black question that never gets mentioned enough, which is the question of monetisation. Who gets to monetise whose experience and who gets to monetise whose pain? There is a long history of Black cultural production being monetised elsewhere and completely expropriated, and this is something that keeps repeating itself. One thus has to understand the anger. I don't understand the question of empathy here because how can we not empathise with the anger? How would you not feel empathy with someone else's pain in this situation? It's just human.

**Elke Buhr**

Sure, but that's not what I was saying about empathy. My question was: How are we supposed to be empathetic if we're not supposed to imagine how it is to be in the other place?

**Danièle Perrier**

I wonder why Hanna Black is so outraged by Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* and insinuates that a *white* person is not capable of depicting Black suffering. No one has ever raised their voice against the fact that the *white* South African William Kentridge depicts the suffering of enslaved Black people and thus criticises apartheid and its consequences. Empathy has no skin colour. The joint marches in the 1960s were already proof of this. Rather, it is understandable that a *white* person would have empathy for oppressed Blacks at a time when *white* police officers are once again shooting blameless Blacks. So what is it about this image that is so disturbing? Could it be the fact that the abstraction of the shattered face does not do justice to the representation?

**Antje Stahl**

I also have the feeling that we're repeating ourselves. But I don't think it's a question of now granting a *white* artist the right to speak about it, and to be able to do so unconditionally, and to defend the *white* artist's right to speak about it. This is a matter of course! It is rather the other way round, to grant this right to others. It is simply a change of perspective. We are not talking about the *white* artist, we are talking about the African American artist.

**Frida Sandström**

In Sweden, there was recently an essay published by Anders Björkmann, which was reviewed by a few cultural newspapers. He was referring to the right-wing party, the Sweden Democrats, currently represented by twenty percent, who in certain municipalities are restricting culture according to what would, in the 1930s be called a 'degenerate art' campaign. He said that this right-wing populist party is pursuing the very same cultural politics as the alternative left. I disagree with his point, I only quote it. I think this

summarises a lot of what's been said the whole day, also in terms of the conflictual understanding of censorship, but also the hopefulness that I at least feel from listening to all of you. Speaking about autonomy, which was not enough discussed at the beginning of this weekend, I think Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt wrote in their book *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis and Contemporary Art*: »Autonomy, one might argue, thus depends on the purposeful expansion, reorganisation and individuation of heteronomies: those heteronomies that rule, form and reproduce our lives«. Thanks for bringing up examples for how that could happen.

### **William Messer**

I wanted to return to the remark: »First listen to the victims«. I found myself thinking I want to take one step back; first *identify* the victims. It seems as though everyone on every side of many of these things claims victimhood, and sorting that out can be problematic. About censorship; you talked about power, having the ability to censor; yes, censorship always implies power, but attempted censorship is often what we're talking about, which is an attempt to achieve power, sometimes by the powerless or less in power. In the museum, non-inclusion of art is basically considered curatorship. Once the show is on the walls and installed, the attempt to dis-include art is when it becomes attempted censorship. Drawing these lines is always very curious. Cannot including a piece be self-censorship, or is it still just curatorial discrimination? Also, freedom is always something that has to be negotiated; there is nothing absolute about freedom, and it's always limited by how it impinges on others' freedoms; it's always a negotiation. There have been polls where Americans are asked: »Do you support freedom of speech?« And ninety percent do. But if you make a concrete example, and it's something they disagree with, it drops to about forty percent. So, the protection of freedom of speech is not about all speech, because you don't need to protect speech that's accepted. It's offensive speech that needs protection. So you can interpret freedom of speech as freedom to offend. And I would just say, empathy is always a prerequisite if you're going to be an art critic. You have to have empathy.

### **Julia Pelta Feldman**

Historically, some people have been freer to offend than others. That's something that we need to take into account. Again, who is free to speak and to have what they say be taken seriously are questions that can't really be disentangled from the question of general freedom. We keep coming back to the case of Dana Schutz and Hannah Black. I personally also have very strong feelings about it. In fact, I was working at the Whitney Museum in 2017 when the biennial was on and that scandal broke out, and part of my job was to give tours. So my thoughts were formed under fire, as people were looking to me as an authority to explain a set of very complex problems that I did not have a handle on. But what quickly did become clear to me, and what lead Antje and me to speak publicly about this, was not that we necessarily agreed with Hannah Black – certainly we don't speak for her in any way – but that we objected very strongly to the way that her criticism of Dana Schutz was responded to. I think the question of destruction is what, for a lot of people, crosses a line. Censorship is one thing, and talking about who has the right to do



what is another thing; but to destroy a work of art, for a lot of us, that's too far. About the question of attempted censorship; I think we can discuss whether an artist who has no affiliation with the Whitney Museum, writing an open letter saying I want this painting to be destroyed, can be called attempted censorship, when she had absolutely no power to make that happen. What I found myself coming back to frequently is another work of art that addresses this question – not only of destruction but also of the impossibility of an artwork to answer the question of destruction – which was Horst Hoheisel's proposal for the monument to the murdered Jews of Europe. Hoheisel's proposal was to grind up the Brandenburg gate into dust and then scatter the dust on the site marked for the memorial. I think this is a brilliant proposal and an amazing work of art for two reasons that are completely contradictory. It gets at the impossibility of making a new artwork that will really memorialise absence, and also he knew it would never happen. Because at the same time that it was way too little to ask for to destroy the Brandenburg Gate, it's also way too much to ask for. And to me, whether Hannah Black meant it that way or not – I don't speak for her – this logic can be fruitfully used to think about what her protest of Schutz's work means and how we can understand it within the context of, not just the depiction of violence, but actual violence that continues to happen.

***Elke Buhr***

Our time is over, but there will be one more discussion today that probably will also come back to this topic. Thank you very, very much for this very interesting panel.



# **In Focus: Autonomy of Art Criticism and its future**

## **Conclusion Panel**

**INTRODUCTION  
DANIÈLE PERRIER**

**WOLFGANG ULLRICH IN  
CONVERSATION WITH  
KOLJA REICHERT**



***Danièle Perrier***

In their sharp-witted closing statements, the duos Graw/Buchmann and Stahl/Pelta Feldmann postulated the crisis of an art criticism that – through disregard or simply oversight – had long disregarded art by women, as well as by ethnic minorities. They questioned the autonomy of art and even accused it of being an instrument of discrimination. The congress concluded with a discussion between Wolfgang Ullrich and Kolja Reichert regarding art criticism, which has recently been vehemently challenged, as it was, for example, by the Leipzig-based painter Neo Rauch, of all people, who pilloried our guest Wolfgang Ullrich in the media.

Wolfgang Ullrich, who studied Philosophy and Art History and submitted a dissertation on the late work of Martin Heidegger, taught at various universities before becoming a freelance author and critic. His numerous books and essays always deal with topics on the history and critique of the concept of art, art-sociological issues, contemporary visual worlds, and consumer theory with an eye to current relevance. After Ullrich presented a bleak prognosis regarding the role of art criticism in his book *Siegerkunst* (Art of the Vanquisher), he followed up with »Selfies«, in which he addresses the democratised image culture that has spread worldwide; on the one hand, the self-important judgment of art magnates; on the other, the Beuysian utopia that everyone is an artist. Between these two poles, Ullrich repeatedly raises the question of the role of art criticism and how it can assert itself, since criticism is indispensable for the recognition of art. How does the critic Ullrich feel about the freedom of art and the autonomy of art criticism when he calls his blog IDEENFREIHEIT (Freedom of ideas)? Is ›nomen‹ also ›omen‹ and the crossed-out middle of the word symbolic?

Kolja Reichert also studied Philosophy, as well as Modern German Literature. His master's thesis *Viewer Spaces in Human Zoos of the Nineteenth Century and in Humanitarian Photography of the Present* testifies early on to his interest in the creation of a space by means of the lens and the subjectivity of the photographer. People, objects, and conditions are related to each other, contextualised, indexed, hierarchised. The question is who dominates the space. The photograph imperceptibly directs the viewer's gaze. Precisely because Reichert is interested in what happens between image and viewer, between art criticism and art, he is particularly suited to probe the delicate question of the autonomy of art and to engage in this *disputatio* with Ullrich.



## **Wolfgang Ullrich in Conversation with Kolja Reichert**

### **Kolja Reichert**

I am very pleased that Danièle Perrier has invited Wolfgang Ullrich to make the closing statement for this conference, and I am also very pleased that Wolfgang Ullrich has invited me to have a conversation with him instead of making a closing statement on his own. In the summer, we experienced the exceptional case of a famous painter making a critic his subject. As I said yesterday in my lecture, I am not quite sure what we see. Perhaps, Wolfgang Ullrich, you could tell us briefly how this painting came about.

### **Wolfgang Ullrich**

I don't know, of course, how Neo Rauch came up with the idea to paint this picture. But the starting point for this was an article of mine that appeared in May of this year in the newspaper *Die Zeit* and in which I considered whether we are currently experiencing a kind of shift to the right with regard to the concept of artistic autonomy – that is to say, whether a concept which, throughout the entire avant-garde and the age of modernism, was clearly defined as being on the left and emancipatory, is now changing political sides.

For me, there were two initial observations. One of these was the previously mentioned text by Julia Pelta Feldman – which was also published a good year earlier in *Die Zeit* – in which autonomy was described as a myth, and in which – something I am also quite willing to endorse – autonomy was criticised as a concept, to which only the privileged are entitled, who, precisely because they are privileged, do not possess certain abilities. Perhaps privilege is a shortcoming in terms of sensitivity and the perception of injustices and inequalities. Therefore, especially if you come from a left-wing, emancipatory standpoint, you must be critical of the concept of autonomy – much more critical than before.

The second observation is more art/sociological. If you look at the globalised art market, you will see that many protagonists are no longer socialised at all with a Western concept of art, in which there is a clear distinction between fine and applied art for example, or even the idea of artistic autonomy. Rather, many come from other cultures and, although they are interested in the same things that people in the West are interested in, it is for other reasons. But what we have observed for the art market can also be said for large parts of the art industry in general – for curators for instance – namely that a pluralisation has taken place here and thus a relativisation of the Western understanding of art. In this respect as well, the Western concept of autonomy is thus on the defensive.

These two developments could also be described in such a way that, on the one hand, autonomy suddenly appears as an idea of 'old *white* men', and, on the other hand, as something like a victim of globalisation. If you bring these two points together and ask who could be interested in autonomy precisely because of this finding, then these are right-wing protagonists who wish to defend the achievements of the 'old *white* men' and who generally have a problem with globalisation. That was my starting point. Then I looked to see if there were already hints of a right-wing adaptation or adoption of the concept of autonomy, and there I found something on various levels. For example, in the programme of Götz Kubitschek's publishing house Antaios Verlag. There one finds works by

someone like Frank Lisson, who has written several books with a very martial concept of culture. For him, artistic autonomy means, for example, feeling a resistance to the mainstream, being challenged to self-assertion, to dissidence. This is a martial understanding of autonomy, which has always been a defence against globalisation, against feminism, against many contemporary trends. And there is a male-glorifying idea of culture being propagated – that is to say, that all great culture can only be masculine because it is created in resistance.

But similar things can also be found in the field of art, not least of all in interviews with Neo Rauch. In his work as well, one finds a self-heroisation as a dissident who feels like a victim of »political commissioners« – this is also his synonym for curators – or of feminist tendencies. The removal of the poem by Eugen Gomringer was for him an act on the same level as the destructions by the Taliban. There are a number of statements that fit precisely into this image of a right-wing understanding of autonomy, which is interpreted as a male-dissident act against a 'politically correct' mainstream.

In my article, I then brought Neo Rauch together with other examples from the artworld, ultimately with the intention of triggering a discussion, especially among left-wing critics of the concept of autonomy. Do we want to go so far as to completely abandon the concept of autonomy? Should we leave it to the right wing? Or do we perhaps want to once again discuss what different concepts of autonomy could be? In accordance with his self-image as a heroic dissident against the mainstream, however, I was now perceived by Rauch as a denunciator and attacked with this picture, which he himself described in an interview as a »well-deserved slap in the face«. I myself, by the way, am just as unsure of what we are actually seeing in the painting: whether it is the critic or indeed the painter who purportedly presents himself here in a kind of lachrymose self-portrait.

### ***Kolja Reichert***

Or the painter who cannot imagine the critic any other way than as a revenant of himself. The circumstances are completely unclear.

### ***Wolfgang Ullrich***

The circumstances are unclear. This is also typical of Neo Rauch and his preference for the ambiguous. What is clear is that, here, an individual is depicted in a very cramped space. One might be reminded of the topos of the artist in the attic – this is also a topos of the autonomous artist – who finds himself at the margins of society – a popular motif from Carl Spitzweg to Anselm Kiefer.

But you can also think of the space as a kind of corridor – and this fits in with the fact that both Neo Rauch and Uwe Tellkamp and many others today talk about how we live in a 'corridor of opinion', that you can only say very little. In East Germany, there is the popular narrative that we live in a 'GDR 2.0', in a new unfree, controlled society, and perhaps Rauch wants to show this 'corridor of opinion' in which we are all now trapped, both the artist and the critic. In this respect, the two come together again, and perhaps this figure has three legs fatally linked together because it wants to be the union of the critic and the artist. The critic is the representative of the mainstream who only looks at where



someone says bad things, and the painter now gives it back to him and paints exactly what is expected of him anyway. A cynical act of self-assertion, which is staged as such.

### ***Kolja Reichert***

In this painting I see the consequence of a climate of discourse in which it no longer seems possible to refer to common objects with questions that one would understand among one another in the first place. It seems to me to be a symptom of the general trend towards personalisation, which I have missed as a piece of the puzzle in the genuinely great panel discussion we just witnessed. It seems to me that every possibility to relate to an object together has been lost. It is unclear what is to be seen in this painting, and above all, there appears to be no interest in or respect for criticism whatsoever on the part of the artist. This makes this picture significant for all of us as critics, especially since your attempt to introduce analytical incisiveness with your essay; to develop questions, criteria, to test the concept of autonomy – this kind of classical criticism has indeed completely disappeared – in a truly exciting constellation of an artist asserting his pictorial power, with a newspaper that first published your essay and then illustrated this painting.

But what urgently needs to become part of this is the process that followed. Each year, Neo Rauch donates a painting for a charity event in Leipzig. This painting was auctioned off for the benefit of a children's hospice, and the property owner, Christoph Gröner, who plays a very important role in the real estate market in Leipzig in particular (Neo Rauch is a Leipzig-based painter, Wolfgang Ullrich is a Leipzig-based art critic), was disappointed that he could not find a fellow bidder at 550,000 euros and so added another 200,000 euros. We are dealing here with a classic case of what you call ›champion art‹; that is to say, the exploitation of artistic achievement for an assertion of power in the cultural space by non-artists, and with a kind of right-wing populist logic to boot. For Christoph Gröner not only bought this painting at auction and, without having to actually say it, took the artist's side – and thus, so the suggestion goes, also the side of artistic freedom; he has also announced another cultural achievement himself, namely the founding of an ›Association for Common Sense‹, in whose foyer this painting will hang in the future, and which will provide ›objective‹ data on the topics of migration, CO2 and climate change. He has left open how this forthcoming ›objective‹ data will relate to the scientific data that already exists. One can imagine in which direction it will go. By not naming it, but only demonstrating his power to co-create reality by announcing ›objective‹ data, legitimised by an artistic, idiosyncratic invention, he has further expanded his power.

### ***Wolfgang Ullrich***

Yes, thank you for presenting this in such detail. I actually think that a clear distinction should be made here between the painting as a performative act by the artist – reacting to a text that annoyed him – and this second stage, that this was obviously not enough for the artist. Although, I think it was also clear from the beginning that it would not stop at this. The picture measures 1.2 x 1.5 metres. This format would not have been necessary if you only wanted to have a painted ›letter to the editor‹ printed in the newspaper.

**Kolja Reichert**

It was described in *Die Zeit* as a caricature and was generally regarded as such.

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

Which I don't think it is. But the other thing is what happened as a result of the auction. The artist apparently did not yet trust his own gesture to have enough power; he thus, as an artist, also distrusted himself to a certain extent and thought that he needed a second purpose for the painting. It now had to become charity. The painting still needed the authority of a fat price, 750,000 euros, but at the same time he risked having an individual owner purchase it, who would set his own purpose. So, if the painting attempts to depict a critic as a ›denunciator‹ or a ›parasite‹, this is further enhanced by Gröner's gesture, because ›common sense‹ is used as a conflictual term by all right-wing and populist movements. It is often used against intellectuals, against the features sections of newspapers, even against science. The [right-wing political party] AfD has ›common sense‹ written in its party programme and, in its name, argues time and again against various groups that are not well-disposed towards the party. It sees itself in possession of it, just as Gröner sees himself in possession of ›common sense‹ when he wishes to establish this eponymous association. This has, of course, also been received in this way, especially in right-wing, far-right extremist blogs.

After the auction, Michael Klonovsky – who is also the personal advisor of the head of the AfD, Alexander Gauland – wrote that a dear dinner guest had passed on an alleged remark by Rauch at the charity event: »In this way, a text by Mr Ullrich had, for the first time and probably only once, provided some benefit. If the painter did not say this himself, I will gladly take responsibility for this observation myself.« With this, it was once again clearly stated, critics actually do nothing useful; they are actually worthless existences, and now an artist has to come and do something charitable – only then have they finally done something worthwhile.

And perhaps another thing that I found symptomatic. The painting was also praised in the magazine *Sezession*, published by Götz Kubitschek's Antaios Verlag: »To portray these guys« – that is to say, the critics, the ›denunciators‹ – »as what they are is the least one can do, and I hope that we will see the painting by Neo Rauch more often in the future, whenever someone has taken the comfort of a longer session to spit out his rubbish against us in the features section. On such occasions, we shall bring it out and hold it up like a shield.«<sup>1</sup>

**Kolja Reichert**

A monstrance.

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

Yes, like a monstrance. And, here, I am actually only meant to represent an entire

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1 Till-Lucas Wessels, »Sonntagsheld (112) – Neuer Rauch aus alter Asche«, in: *Sezession*, 3 June 2019, URL: <https://sezession.de/61347/sonntagsheld-112-neuer-rauch-aus-alter-asche> [last visit on 18 November 2020] [translated].

profession. Neo Rauch has often made pictures directed against critics and let his fantasies run wild. He has, for example, taken the story of Apollo and Marsyas as his motif. The god Apollo is challenged, provoked by Marsyas, whom he then punishes for this sacrilege, and in this picture Neo Rauch thus equates Marsyas with the critic. What is at stake here is a certain understanding of art criticism which is outrageous but at the same time has a great tradition. And that is why we must almost be grateful to Neo Rauch again for having made use of this iconography, because it makes it perfectly clear that we are also dealing here with the scolding of intellectuals, with the scolding of critics, as was already typical in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is suddenly returning now, after decades of being far from conceivable.

### **Kolja Reichert**

Albeit in a changed media environment, which is, of course, related to the increased moral debate that developed with the advent of the newspaper. One can see a parallel – as Gustav Seibt recently did in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* – that we are now also experiencing a media transformation that creates new relationships between subject, society, work, and image. I find three things exciting, which are basically interconnected: First, the critic is the ›loser‹ from the outset, because he or she doesn't produce anything...

### **Wolfgang Ullrich**

Or only shit.

### **Kolja Reichert**

Exactly. This implies a logic of enhancement, in which only that which creates something is valid, not that which counts out, compares, sorts.

Then, connected to this, criticism is responded to with pictures. One could be happy about the fact that there is such a lively discussion, if it were indeed a discussion and not just a transference. Your gesture of criticism, which is open to response; which is an invitation to reflect and negotiate and to counter-position; is answered in a different kind of manifestation, namely in the form of a painting with visual power. We see, in an exemplary way, what we experience everywhere. The argument is replaced by the strong suggestion, the strong image, the counter-assertion – as the American president does.

The third thing that is also connected with this: What is the location? These two questions interest us today. What is the location of the artwork, and what roles does autonomy play? The work of art here really seems to be nothing more than a ›token‹, a certain gaming piece in a continuum of processes in which Gröner is just as much an author as Neo Rauch. It seems to me as if a new medium has pushed itself in front of art, a kind of arena in which the struggle for assertion and visual power is fought, and in which the work of art itself and its qualities no longer play a major role. I now beg your indulgence when I compare the case of Dana Schutz to this, which is completely different in terms of its preconditions and context. It reminds me of this however, in that there was also a debate there which did not revolve around what artistic decisions were made beyond the choice of subject.

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

Yes, well, we can gladly make this comparison. In fact, I have a similar problem with Dana Schutz as with Neo Rauch. I found it very interesting how Schutz reacted to Hannah Black's letter. She very quickly, and also a bit superficially, referred to an attribution of her identity as a mother. At this point, I would have actually expected her to justify why she took this particular photo of Emmett Till as her starting point, and not another one where he is seen as a smiling young man looking forward to the life ahead of him. If it's about pity, that would probably have been a better starting point. She might also have had to ask herself why she has often been interested in subjects in her work that deal with destroyed faces. When, in 2006, the Ukrainian politician Viktor Yushchenko was the victim of an assassination attempt involving a toxic substance, she also painted his destroyed face. In this respect, *Open Casket* is also part of a tradition within her work, which further intensifies the problem and makes the questions more justified as to why she painted this picture in the first place.

Was she perhaps ultimately interested in something quite different from what she said afterwards? Of course, you have to look at this painting closely, but above all you have to consider the context. But then I must actually say that I would have preferred that this picture had never been painted.

**Kolja Reichert**

I do in fact think that the mistake already lay in the choice of motif. There is a detailed portrait of Dana Schutz in *The New Yorker* by Calvin Tomkins,<sup>2</sup> who accompanied her for half a year during the creation of this painting. The starting point was her dismay at the police violence against Black citizens. The question for me is then why, of all things, she has to essentialise Black suffering in this way by choosing this central motif of the Black civil rights movement. But if this image is so important to her, I ask myself why she has to stage this virtuoso painting theatre, which protrudes three-dimensionally into the space and recreates the destruction of the face; and why she is trapped in her painting, in her being a painter. If she had wanted to recall this motif, she could have hung a copy of the original photograph on the wall, even against the background of her painting practice.

I am grateful for Antje Stahl's comment that, in the criticism of the painting, it was about consciously omitting how it was actually made. But I would be interested to know what one achieves by doing this, when one distinguishes between the subjects with their respective histories, their privileges, their experience of historical continuities, when one completely omits from this continuum the respective formulation within the work, and it is only a question of who may refer to what. It seems to me that this leads to a production of positions between which the corridor is missing, in which a common view, a common question could emerge.

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2 Calvin Tomkins, »Why Dana Schutz painted Emmett Till«, in: *The New Yorker*, 10 April 2017 (placed online on 3 April 2017), URL: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/10/why-dana-schutz-painted-emmett-till> [last visit on 18 November 2020].

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

We seem to agree relatively well with regard to the ›how‹. The ›how‹ was unsuccessful. But I would go even further and ask the ›that‹ question, whether someone like Dana Schutz, with her position in today's art world, could have managed to find a form which would not create the problem Hannah Black addresses in the letter; namely that the painting would once again become part of a ›happy few‹ lifestyle. One cannot prevent this picture from perhaps being placed into contexts that are extremely insensitive to what its subject actually is. In this respect, it is a kind of politeness whether one does this as an artist or not; as if she had no other subject with which she could articulate her artistic position in the same way!

We had a similar case in recent German art history when Gerhard Richter painted his *Birkenau* cycle in 2014. One can ask: Is it really a wise decision for an artist in his position to address this theme? Isn't there also the danger that the paintings might end up in collections where such a theme is in very bad hands? Richter had already protected himself in advance by inviting Georges Didi-Huberman to his studio, who had already reflected on the original photographs and the pictorial-ethical questions at a high level in a book. And Richter protected himself all the more by finding an abstract solution, so that certain forms of abuse are no longer possible. In doing so, he has perhaps also prevented a reaction similar to that which Dana Schutz experienced. Nevertheless, I find the attitude equally problematic and would go so far as to say: if an artist plays a role in a particular sector of the art industry then it is no longer appropriate nowadays to make use of certain themes, because things that are difficult to reconcile simply collide there. This creates a dissonance that is very difficult for me to bear.

**Kolja Reichert**

Since when has this been the case, and why was it not the case before?

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

This has to do with the fact that, today, when you see a picture by Gerhard Richter, you always know how expensive it is, in which settings such pictures appear, who can afford them, what the people who afford them are doing with them for other purposes. Perhaps the works suddenly have a function that is incompatible with certain themes, even against the will of the artists. If Dana Schutz really wants to repent she can also donate money to an appropriate organisation or do something completely different to fight injustice. I don't think she can do this with such a painting.

**Kolja Reichert**

This would be an answer to the question: »How can an artist react to the increasing feudalism?« How can one find a morally secure place within feudalism? But wouldn't it be desirable that artists – since they produce both the most general and the most private thing there is, namely works of art; and since they are protagonists in that branch of the global economic system that most clearly represents the concentration of mercantile power in fewer and fewer hands; wouldn't it be better to talk about money, about the

distribution of wealth? Wouldn't it be truly indispensable to finally also link aesthetic and moral discourses to economics, and not only to the question of how to behave? But rather: how does economic distribution relate to our sensitivities and our feelings of power or powerlessness?

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

Yes, of course, but you don't have to become a great critic of capitalism, you can stay in a narrow field and simply realise that certain works are so strongly branded by a high price that this is stronger than the subject itself or the intention of the artist. This is perhaps a ›Midas problem‹ that some artists today may face, that everything they do turns to gold but is no longer useful for other things. This is a development of the art market boom of the last decades, and that's why I find it all the more regrettable – also all the more sad – that an artist like Neo Rauch, who would have had the chance to free this painting from the categories of possession and money in the first place, should have once again branded it with a large price and thus simultaneously made a kind of plutocratic populism possible.

**Kolja Reichert**

Before we move on to the joint final discussion, I would like to return briefly to your essay and your understanding of autonomy. Was your diagnosis that art largely abandons the idea of autonomy combined with a kind of feeling of loss; or was it a sober description? In principle, you did not counter the narrowness you described; the narrowness of the autonomy of art and the artist with the autonomy of the self-assertive, defensive citizen who is not bound to any higher power (except his common sense!). What would be the concept of autonomy you would set against this?

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

Yes, I am ambivalent about that myself. I am also of the opinion that the concept of autonomy has often been thought too one-sidedly, too martially, not only by today's right-wingers but already in the avant-gardes. But I would make the fundamental difference as to whether autonomy, as in the case of someone like Neo Rauch, is understood as self-assertion – whereby a discourse of sacrifice is also immediately involved – or whether it is understood more as self-determination. That is to say, one tries to find a place where one can develop something as independently as possible from external ascriptions, which is then exposed to a public sphere.

At the beginning we briefly showed the painting by Jörg Immendorff: *Wo stehst du mit deiner Kunst, Kollege?* (Where Do You Stand With Your Art, Colleague?, 1973), in which the concept of autonomy is also problematised, but perhaps a constructive or optimistic answer is given in contrast to the answer given by Neo Rauch. Here, we see an artist sitting in his studio and thinking about how he could contribute to the history of art. At the same time however, there are political circumstances that make this effort seem ivory-tower-like. He is called out onto the street where his creative talent is needed – and he is torn between the two sides. On the one hand, the painting is a plea to dispense with autonomy and instead place oneself as an artist in the service of a better cause. On

the other hand, it is itself again a picture painted by an autonomous artist, who perhaps means that he has the right or privilege to be able to do something in a self-determined way. In this respect however, he is perhaps also a role model for others. What he does is present the appearance of a better world in which autonomy is no longer merely an ideal that very few have to some extent realised, but has become universal. And in this respect, it is the idea of autonomy as self-determination – as in the long tradition from Friedrich Schiller to Theodor W. Adorno – and not just as self-assertion. That is a fundamental difference that I would like to make.

### **Kolja Reichert**

I believe it is truly crucial to make a further distinction between the various concepts of autonomy that are in circulation. Doesn't Adorno's concept of autonomy offer the possibility of finding a way out of this personalisation and isolation into individual positions which are condemned to close themselves off further and further in automatic multiplication logics; in which the same forms of discourse are presented over and over again? I think that Adorno's concept of autonomy could really be made strong again, insisting that the artist is not a private subject, as represented in Rauch's painting. This is a corridor in which one can break out; aesthetic practice, not only making, but also viewing, criticism, the precise description of the picture, the complete continuum; not the description of one social constellation on one side of the work and then the other on the other side of the work, but the complete description of the constellation, in which every single brushstroke is connected with the social economic political world around it. That would be my plea following our conversation.

### **Wolfgang Ullrich**

Yes, I can only agree that, in the case of the tradition of the concept of autonomy, which should be at least partially rehabilitated, there is a strongly utopian moment – and precisely the idea that what is at the moment perhaps only possible on an insular level should, in a better world, be given general validity. And this utopian moment, this positive concept of freedom, is something I cannot see at all in a painting like *Anbräuner*.

### **Kolja Reichert**

Ladies and gentlemen, we would now like to hear from you. Thank you for letting us talk for so long.

### **Sabeth Buchmann**

Thank you for the very interesting discussion. What strikes me right away with this painting by Immendorff – and I was inspired by the dialogue about it – is this: Where does the figure of the critic appear in the history of modern iconography? For we have, on the one hand with Immendorff and on the other hand with Courbet, who includes Charles Baudelaire in his studio picture, the advocate and protagonist of the modern concept of autonomy, a dialectic of autonomy and partisanship. Courbet also takes sides in the leftist struggle. Here, we have autonomy or partisanship –and one could say, to put it bluntly, this is what Neo Rauch does in his otherwise relatively trite picture (trite because it is

freed from allegory), the partisanship for an iridescence into the right-wing milieu. In this respect, he stands in such a tradition of realism. There is an iconographic history to this.

What came to my mind in parallel was the debate in the early 1990s around Martin Kippenberger, Werner Büttner and Co., Albert Oehlen, where there was a critical revision by Helmut Draxler at the Kunstverein in Munich regarding the provocative or provocative potential of Kippenberger's *Ich kann beim besten Willen kein Hakenkreuz entdecken* (I Can't for the Life of Me Discover a Swastika, 1984). Draxler stated: »What was perhaps still interesting in the 1980s as a provocation against a social democratic consensus is – at the latest since Rostock, Hoyerswerda, Solingen – an affirmation of a right-wing form of occupying the cultural hegemony.« I wonder whether, in this context, Neo Rauch is yet another form of aggravation.

### **Wolfgang Ullrich**

But not in the sense of an ›ironic gesture‹ or an ›artistic playing with symbols‹. Jonathan Meese has already been mentioned earlier, an artist who also tried to bring the most heavily burdened symbol – the Nazi salute – back into the field of art and thus give it back its polyvalence. I would also evaluate artists in the early 1990s in this sense – Kippenberger, Oehlen, Büttner – who wanted to set a counterweight with, one could justifiably say, a very arrogant self-image as artists. But I cannot see such a playful or even ironic moment with Neo Rauch; he genuinely sees himself as oppressed, in the ›opinion corridor‹, in the ›GDR 2.0‹, and surrounded by informers and people who are not well-disposed towards him. Neo Rauch thus also assumes, for example, that the label ›New Leipzig School‹ was only introduced to denounce the Leipzig painters. If one now puts this into a political context and sees that Neo Rauch is not alone here, it takes on a different connotation and also a different explosive power. In my article, I also mentioned other artists, and if you live in Leipzig you can also notice one or two other things. I really do find it exciting to describe this difference again, which is also overturned in the self-image of the artists. Certainly, Kippenberger and Oehlen were similarly androcentric like Rauch, but it still had a different connotation.

### **Kolja Reichert**

Yes, their practice represented a certain opening. One can always ask of course, ›opening to whom?‹, but I think there was an opening in the sense that one could enter into this discourse. One could enter into this performance of freedom of movement and polyvalence, and it was not a matter of defining and asserting positions, although the economic aspect always works against this of course. In this interesting line of tradition that you have opened up, Sabeth, you can also see Courbet's painting *The Studio* as an anticipation of today's economy of attention, in which it is a matter of reinforcement and in which one depicts one's own network, absolutely; but in Rauch's work, I think the sad thing about this picture, this impression of a lack of freedom and narrowness that I feel comes from the fact that it is ultimately not just partisanship for the right spectrum of opinion but partisanship for itself; for me, it is a symptom of this sense of being trapped in one's own position. This is, I think, regardless of the political positioning, a certain portrait of the



subject formation that is dominant today, the profile that has to constantly strengthen and defend itself against attacks.

***Sabine Maria Schmidt***

I wanted to ask again about a thought that I actually found most fascinating. It is, of course, pleasant for us to reawaken art historical traditions or to think again about a painterly style in detail and about criteria of quality with regard to painting, but to be honest, I don't think that makes much sense and is actually almost naïve, because the main picture is the auction picture, which for me is like a triumphal picture – you have your trophy that you present. More than anything else, you can distribute this picture in a completely different way. As long as this iconoclastic controversy took place in the features section, I found it super interesting. There's a painter and a critic, and that's somehow a cultivated or more or less uncultivated dialogue. But it's now continuing further, it's now in other forums, and it's actually about a completely different political issue. You made an important point; the whole thing is actually an attack on an entire professional field or on intellectuals, and I think it would be more exciting if we were to think about what is next. Let's wait until the picture is pulled out again, or until the next one appears. I'd rather talk about that again.

***Kolja Reichert***

I would like to reiterate my point. I believe that we can no longer recoup this image of the real estate entrepreneur who purchased this painting at auction. But we can continue to look at it, and we can continue to look at the original picture or the reproductions that are available to us. I feel more empowered when I describe this picture than when I say that this political positioning of Neo Rauch is highly problematic. It is, but I have learned other things, and I am paid for other things, fortunately. I have the rare privilege of having a lot of space for my thoughts in a big newspaper, and I feel the obligation to use this space to analyse pictures as well. I think it is crucial to look at how the picture was painted. I think it is absolutely important to show what is bad about it. It is important to take it apart, to take apart the whole constellation, the networks behind it, of course, but also the painting itself. If we give up on demonstrating to our readers the tools of the trade – also demonstrating the joy of these processes, how to describe a picture and how it falls apart through the description or through the confrontation with other pictures; exposes itself through comparisons with other pictures, until every single decision has really become transparent and the picture loses its power – if we give up on that just because we are also in this shaky logic of forced positioning then we lose our own freedom, and then we also lose our power to provide for freedom.

***Wolfgang Ullrich***

When I, as an art sociologist, analyse what Rauch did with the painting, with the auction, how he now deals with the reproduction rights; and when I look at the whole context, it is much easier for me, as a critic, to come to a clear position than if I had to decide whether it is a good or a bad painting. That's why, for me, art criticism is primarily art sociology, and after a case like this, even more so. I see it as my task as an art critic to bring

art sociological categories to bear. This does not mean that one should not look closely at how something is painted or in what iconographic traditions it stands.

### **Kolja Reichert**

When Banksy's *Girl with a Balloon* was auctioned at Sotheby's, I didn't feel responsible at all to report on it; better not show it at all. That is the big question today, *cancel* or criticise, *de-platform* or criticise. After half a year, when the picture suddenly appeared in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart hanging next to a Rembrandt, and I felt how great the malaise among artists in Stuttgart was, I understood it is my damned duty to explain what is uninteresting about this work of art and this action, and to lower the journalistic value – that had accumulated massively by simply reproducing the same story over and over again – by contemplating and analysing. Why is it uninteresting; why is the hanging daft; why is the combination with Rembrandt absurd; why is the discursive framing by the Staatsgalerie dishonest? This is just one anecdote, but many are thankful that someone did it. Of course, this only happens when we make our presumptions, when we make our subjective view of art available. Only then is it possible to make a reversal in this multiplication logic. This is not a plea against art sociology, but I do think that both are important.

### **Wolfgang Ullrich**

For me as a sociologist of art, it was not only a question when it appeared in the Staatsgalerie, but rather already when it appeared at Sotheby's, at the auction, and even before this shredding story took place. The fact alone that such a work of art is given a prominent place as the last lot at such an auction in such a place is an interesting finding from the point of view of art sociology, and reveals how something has changed, since a globalised art market has no problem with someone like Banksy, unlike someone who still has a rather conservative, classical concept of artistic autonomy.

### **Jamie Keesling**

I would like to ask a question about autonomy within emancipated politics. Adorno's concept of aesthetic autonomy refers more to art as such than to the artist. The emancipatory potential of art lies in its ability to exist both inside and outside society. The ability of criticism to acknowledge this possibility of freedom associated with art is dependent on emancipatory or left-wing politics, historically seen from Adorno's perspective.

I wonder if or how you think about the limits of our ability to speak about art from a standpoint of autonomy, to criticise it. If we are faced today with a complete lack of coherent or effective emancipatory politics – there is no international left-wing network today – to what extent does this leave us with criticism as a way of talking about the autonomy of art, or art in general? There is no left wing today, there are no emancipatory politics, so how can we think about the autonomy of art, which is substantial for the freedom of art, if these are not given? Is this a factor, the ability to criticise, to speak about art?

### **Wolfgang Ullrich**

I see my modest task as, at the most, trying once again to recall the tradition

of the concept of autonomy, and also to recall the complexity that has always lay in this concept of autonomy, in order then to see which strands of the history of ideas one would like to make stronger again, which one would rather criticise and adopt.

**Kolja Reichert**

My answer would be: on the one hand, I think our freedom is quite enormous, the freedom to find forms, to express and describe things, to change perceptions; and that, I believe, is our central task as critics. And then it is also important to keep the categories clearly distinct from one another. I have the impression that, since the 1990s, we have experienced a mixing of categories between artistic and political vocabulary, and sometimes it seems to me that both art and politics are weakened in the process. One cannot of course assume that every work of art is equally political. I think that the intrinsic value of the aesthetic – and I now sound as if I was born a hundred years ago – but the intrinsic value of the aesthetic is, I think, so important today. I am now re-reading Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* because I have the feeling that, in a time in which everything is so thoroughly aestheticised, and so much politics and commerce is done with aesthetics, we must rediscover the freedom that lies in the aesthetic, a freedom also to step out of our enclosures and once again allow and demand polyvalence. This takes place nowhere better than in the field of art – except perhaps online in memes, where it also works.

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

I would disagree somewhat. I believe the aesthetic and the political have never been so clearly separated. One has often wished for this, so here we are again dealing with an ideal that has always existed, to understand autonomy in such a way that everything beyond the aesthetic plays no role at first. But especially someone like Schiller, and almost all the great thinkers of the concept of autonomy, were highly political figures.

**Kolja Reichert**

But the precision and persistence with which he attempts to set politics and aesthetics in relation to one another is something I do not see today.

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

That's true; but we have, of course, a dangerous mix today, especially if we stick to the right spectrum. Perhaps one more example in this context: Another artist I mention in my article in *Die Zeit* is a painter from Dresden, Sebastian Hennig, who is less interesting as a painter than as someone who is very strongly networked in the right-wing scene, and who last year wrote a book together with Björn Höcke titled *Nie zweimal in denselben Fluss* (Never Twice in the Same River). There is a key passage in the book when Höcke enthuses about Caspar David Friedrich, identifies with his *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, and describes his role as a politician in aesthetic categories of German Romanticism. The politician thus sees himself in the role of an artist – and here one can see how an understanding of autonomy that circulates in the political right in particular is given a completely different urgency.

**Thomas Sterna**

I would also like to come back to the fact that, under the conditions of attention capitalism, where attention is the main commodity – as Reckwitz presented this quite eloquently – this purely aesthetic view is always a bit problematic for me. When you look at who was present at this celebrity event where the painting was auctioned off, and who accompanied it without commentary, whether it was Christian Lindner [leader of the liberal Free Democratic Party of Germany] or some starlet from the cultural sector, then the question arises for me: What does it actually mean for a society when such an event goes smoothly, and at the end someone can stand there and say that he has the trophy and is now founding this ›Association for Common Sense‹? You really have to take into account what that means in total.

**Wolfgang Ullrich**

I totally agree. We have talked a lot about this event and the charity. Maybe just one more thought about it. A charity event where so much money flows is, of course, also a kind of protection for the artist. If you compare how Uwe Tellkamp was criticised in public discourse when he spoke out against the refugee policy during his speech in Dresden in 2018, and his own publishing house immediately distanced itself from him, then that is a big difference to what is happening with Neo Rauch. Too many people have too much to lose and therefore do a lot to make sure that someone like that never falls into discredit. Someone from another field has a much harder time.

**Sebastian Baden**

I would like to bring the concept of political iconography into the discussion. I worked together with Wolfgang Ullrich with students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe, and now that I work for a museum I believe the opportunity for us art critics, mediators and curators is to strengthen the analysis of this picture. That is why I can only support the idea of Kolja Reichert, who tries to describe what the picture Rauch painted is actually about and how badly it is painted – just as Aby Warburg and Michael Diers and Erwin Panofsky taught us to describe a picture.

It is just as important to disclose this to our readers and to talk about how propaganda and so-called right or left connoted images express themselves. Neo Rauch enters into this discourse; fortunately he has painted a picture, and since it is our profession to describe what he does, we should not only use this ability of ours to discuss this among ourselves in this room here, because I think we are all professional enough to know what kind of picture Rauch has painted. It is more relevant to bring the discussion to a wider audience. As Wolfgang Ullrich mentioned, his forum as a journalist is a very important organ and I would like to ask you why we do not strengthen this reading of political iconography – in the sense of Warburg – much more in the public. It may seem like old classroom wisdom but it is obviously once again relevant in times of ›alternative‹ politics.

**Kolja Reichert**

That is my opinion as well. I also do not wish to secure my position forever and keep it uncontaminated from problematic and right-wing contents. I wish for a certain

projection of the general, which, of course, always remains fictional but which allows me to say: in this society everyone has the right to be discussed and criticised and analysed, but above all every aesthetic production. In this respect, I would never have a problem with giving the art of someone from a different political camp the honour of art criticism. On the contrary, I think you have to look into the eyes of all these cowardly, hypocritical liars who claim that you can no longer say certain things – as if you had been allowed to say them without any problems in the past – and these strange rabbits jumping back and forth, who throw out ideas about certain things and then say they didn't mean it; these discourse shifters; you really have to look them in the eye and say: I'm not talking from my position alone, but let's adopt together a position of the general, the imaginary, and from which we can talk about your statements and your pictures. Your painting is bad for this and that reason, and if you don't join in the discussion and fraternise instead with yourself, then you lay no claim to this position of the general. But then you are also not entitled to the privileged role of a victim in a dictatorship of opinion.



# Appendix

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHIES  
ILLUSTRATIONS  
NOTES OF THE EDITORS  
CONTRIBUTORS TO  
THE CONGRESS  
IMPRINT





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Florian Arnold studied philosophy, German language and literature in Heidelberg and Paris. After a doctorate in philosophy (Heidelberg) and a second doctorate in Design Studies at the University of Arts and Design Offenbach, he currently teaches at the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design as academic staff. He is editor of the *Philosophische Rundschau* and scientific advisor of DIVERSUS e. V.

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Sabeth Buchmann (Berlin/Vienna) is an art historian and critic, as well as a professor of modern and post-modern art history at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Together with Helmut Draxler, Clemens Krümmel and Susanne Leeb, she publishes »PoLYpeN«, a series on art criticism and political theory published by b\_books (Berlin). Since 1998 she has been a member of the advisory board of the journal *Texte zur Kunst*. Selection of publications: Ed. with Ilse Lafer and Constanze Ruhm: *Putting Rehearsals to the Test. Practices of Rehearsal in Fine Arts, Film, Theater, Theory, and Politics* (2016); co-author with Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz: *Hélio Oiticica & Neville D'Almeida, Experiments in Cosmococa* (2013); *Denken gegen das Denken. Production, Technology, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Helio Oiticica* (2007).

**Elke Buhr**

Elke Buhr is editor-in-chief of *Monopol*, the magazine for art and life, in Berlin. She studied German Language, history and journalism in Bochum, Bologna and Dortmund and worked as a trainee at Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne. As an editor in the Feuilleton of the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, she was responsible for the art section and dealt with all aspects of contemporary pop culture. She has also published texts in *Die Zeit*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *art* and *Modern Painters* and has written award-winning radio essays and features for WDR, BR, SWR and HR. Since 2008 she has been a member of the *Monopol* editorial team, initially as deputy editor-in-chief. Since May 2016 she has been editor-in-chief of the art magazine. She has three children and lives in Berlin.

**Rafael Cardoso**

Rafael Cardoso is an art historian and writer. He is the author of many books on the history of Brazilian art and design, most recently *Modernity in Black and White: Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). He is a member of the postgraduate faculty for art history at Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Instituto de Artes) and a guest researcher at Freie Universität Berlin (Lateinamerika-Institut).

**Hernán D. Caro**

Hernán D. Caro is a doctor of philosophy (Humboldt University of Berlin). He works as a freelance journalist for the feuilleton of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* and for various media in Latin America. From 2014 to 2016 he was a trainee and later an author at the Spanish TV editorial office of Deutsche Welle in Berlin. Since 2014 he has also been editor for journalistic projects of the Goethe-Institut in Colombia and Brazil and the art magazine *Contemporary and América Latina* (C&AL).

**Thomas Edlinger**

Thomas Edlinger is artistic director of the Donaufestival in Krems. He works as a radio producer (FM4 – Im Sumpf, Ö1), cultural journalist, author and lecturer at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna at the Department of Art and Knowledge Transfer. Current books: *Der wunde Punkt. Zum Unbehagen an der Kritik* (2015); with Matthias Dunisi: *In Anführungszeichen. Glanz und Elend der Political Correctness* (2012).

**Julia Pelta Feldman**

Julia Pelta Feldman is an art historian, curator, archivist, and salonnière. She holds the position of postdoctoral research fellow for the project Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge, which is part of the Institute Materiality at the University of the Arts, Bern. Julia completed her dissertation, *Charles Simonds and the 1970s*, at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Focused on art since 1945, her research interests include the periodization of recent art, conservation history and theory, performance and ephemeral media, modern and contemporary craft, and social justice in the art world. Julia has worked at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Grey Art Gallery. She is also director of Room & Board ([www.roomandboard.nyc](http://www.roomandboard.nyc)), an artist's residency and salon formerly based in Brooklyn, which is now commissioning socially-distanced artworks.

**Maja Fowkes & Reuben Fowkes**

Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes are founders of the Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art, an independent research platform focusing on the art history of Central Europe and contemporary ecological practices. They head the Postsocialist Art Centre (PACT) at the Institute of Advanced Studies, UCL and codirect the Getty Foundation-supported research initiative Confrontations: Sessions in East European Art History. Recent publications include a co-authored book on *Central and Eastern European Art Since 1950* (2019), Maja Fowkes's *The Green Bloc: Neo-Avant-Garde and Ecology under Socialism* (2015) and a special issue of *Third Text* on *Actually Existing Artworlds of Socialism*

(December 2018). They have contributed chapters to *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology* (2018), *Doublespeech: Hungarian Art of the 1960s and 1970s* (2018) and *Extending the Dialogue* (2017). Their curatorial projects include the Anthropocene Experimental Reading Room, the Danube River School and they are also founding members of the Environmental Arts and Humanities Initiative at Central European University Budapest. They are both members of the UK branch of AICA.

### ***Belinda Grace Gardner***

Belinda Grace Gardner is an art theorist. She received her M. A. degree in English and German literature and linguistics at the University of Göttingen, as well as a doctorate in art theory and visual studies at the Braunschweig University of Art with a dissertation on figurations of the ephemeral in current art. Based in Hamburg, Germany, she has been active as a freelance art critic, author, editor, university lecturer, and independent curator in the field of contemporary art since 1990, publishing extensively in catalogs and books, as well as in print, radio, and online media. She has taught for many years at various universities and art academies with a thematic focus upon pictorial concepts of love and the ephemeral, art in public spaces, as well as transcultural and transmedia constructions of reality, identity, and memory.

### ***Isabelle Graw***

Isabelle Graw founded the journal *Texte zur Kunst* in Cologne in 1990 together with Stefan Germer<sup>†</sup> and has been its editor ever since. Since 2002, she has taught art theory and art history at the Staatliche Schule für Bildende Künste (Städelschule), Frankfurt a. M. Together with Daniel Birnbaum, she founded the Institute for Art Criticism there. She lives and works in Berlin and Frankfurt. Selection of publications: *Die bessere Hälfte. Künstlerinnen des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* (2003); *High Price. Art Between The Market and Celebrity Culture* (2010); *Texte zur Kunst. Essays, Reviews, Talks* (2011); *The Love of Painting. Genealogy of a Success Medium* (2018). Co-ed. with Daniel Birnbaum: *Canvases and Careers today. Criticism and it's markets* (2008), *Under Pressure. Pictures, Subjects, and The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2008), *The Power of Judgment. A Debate on Aesthetic Critique* (2010). Co-ed. with Ewa Lajer Burcharth: *Painting Beyond Itself. The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition* (2015).

### ***Sarah Hegenbart***

Sarah Hegenbart is an art historian and philosopher. Currently, she is fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Greifswald. After successfully completing a Master of Studies in Ancient Philosophy at the University of Oxford and a master degree in Philosophy and Art History at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, she received her doctorate at

the Courtauld Institute of Art in London on the subject *From Bayreuth to Burkina Faso: Christoph Schlingensiefel's Opera Village Africa as postcolonial Gesamtkunstwerk?*. In her habilitation project *Diagnosing post-truth politics: Dialogical art and Black aesthetics* she is currently researching the normative demands of transcultural artworks as a research fellow at the Chair for Theory and History of Architecture, Art and Design under Prof. Dr. Dietrich Erben at the Technical University of Munich. She is also preparing the monograph *Oper der Ambiguitäten: Christoph Schlingensiefel's Operndorf Afrika* and the anthology *Dada Data: Contemporary art practice in the era of post-truth politics*, which she is publishing together with Mara Kölmel.

### **Jörg Heiser**

Jörg Heiser is art critic, curator and lecturer. He is Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Director of the Institute Art in Context at the University of the Arts, Berlin. In 2018, he was co-curator of the Busan Biennale in South Korea. From 1998 to 2003, he was editor, from 2003 to 2016 co-editor-in-chief of *Frieze*, from 2011 to 2016 also editor-in-chief of *frieze d/e*. Recently published: *Double Lives in Art and Pop Music* (2019).

### **Liam Kelly**

Liam Kelly is Emeritus Professor of Irish Visual Culture at Ulster University, Belfast. He holds a B. A. (Hons.) degree in the History of European Art from the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, and a PhD from Trinity College, Dublin. Selected publications: *The City as Art: Interrogating the Polis* (1994); *Thinking Long, Contemporary Art in the North of Ireland* (1996); Co-ed.: *Liam Gillick – Big Conference Centre* (1997); *Art and the Disembodied Eye* (2007); *The School of Art and Design, Belfast 1960-2009* (2009); Ed.: *Brian O'Doherty – Collected Essays* (2018). He was Director of The Orpheus Gallery, Belfast, (1986–92) and The Orchard Gallery, Derry, (1996–99). He was a member of the Visual Arts Committee of the Arts Council of North Ireland (1981–1986), member of the Executive Committee, Association of Art Historians (U. K., 1990–93), member of the BBC N. I. Audience Council (2007–2010), board member of the Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast (2008–12). He is a former Vice-President of AICA International, organising their annual congress *Art and Centres of Conflict: Outer and Inner Realities* in 1997, and was the inaugural Chair of the AICA Commission on Censorship and Freedom of Expression and currently Chair of the AICA Congress committee.

### **Norman L. Kleeblatt**

Norman L. Kleeblatt is an independent curator, critic, and consultant. Former Chief Curator at The Jewish Museum, New York, Kleeblatt is known for his well-crafted and broad-ranging exhibitions, as for example *Action / Abstraction: Pollock, De Kooning,*

and *American Art, 1940–1976* (2008), *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth and Justice* (1987) and *John Singer Sargent: Portraits of the Wertheimer Family* (2000). More recently, he organized *Mel Bochner: Strong Language* (2014) and co-curated *From the Margins: Lee Krasner and Norman Lewis, 1945–1952* (2014–15). Kleeblatt's articles have appeared in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Art Journal*, *Art News*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and *Hyperallergic*. He has been the recipient of grants from the Getty Research Institute, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Rockefeller Foundation and currently serves as president of the United States section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA-USA) and secretary of the board of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School, New York.

### **Alexander Koch**

Alexander Koch is a gallerist, curator and author. Since 1998, his numerous exhibitions and publications have stood up for socially oriented art. From 2000 to 2005 Koch was a lecturer at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig. Since 2008 he has been co-initiator of *Neue Auftraggeber* in Germany and co-founder of the KOW gallery in Berlin. Since 2013 he has been developing *Neue Auftraggeber-Initiatives* in Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa and other countries. Since 2017 he is the director of the *Gesellschaft der Neuen Auftraggeber* in Germany.

### **Erden Kosova**

Erden Kosova is an art critic who contributed to the organisation of *Young Curators Academy*, a side event of the 4th *Berliner Herbstsalon* at Maxim Gorki Theater. In 2018, he received the *Weltoffenes Berlin* fellowship of the Berlin Senate with the support of *Apartment Project Berlin* and *Artists at Risk*. He recently published the *Sess* newspaper in the frame of *Sis Collective's* exhibition *In the Blink of A Bird* (*neue gesellschaft für bildende Kunst Berlin*, 2019). Kosova is in the organizational board of the *Meduza Foundation* (Amsterdam), and in the editorial board of Istanbul-based e-journal *red-thread.org*.

### **Mischa Kuball**

Mischa Kuball, conceptual artist, has been working in the public and institutional sphere since 1977. Since 2007 Mischa Kuball has been a Professor for public art at the Academy of Media Arts, Cologne, and associate professor for media art at Hochschule für Gestaltung/ZKM, Karlsruhe. Since 2015 he has been a member of the North Rhine-Westphalian Academy of Sciences, Humanities and the Arts, Duesseldorf. In 2016 he was honored with the German Light Award.

### **Delaine Le Bas**

Delaine Le Bas studied at St Martins School Of Art London. She is a cross disciplinary artist, working with her late husband the artist Damian Le Bas on their installations *Safe European Home?* (2011 ongoing) and in 2017 producing the stage artworks and costumes together for *Roma Armee*. Her works have been included in Prague Biennale 2005 & 2007, Venice Biennale 2007 & 2017, Gwangju Biennale 2012, 3rd Of The Project Biennial Of Contemporary Art D-O Ark Underground Bosnia & Herzegovina 2015, Göteborg International Biennale For Contemporary Art Extended 2015, Critical Contemplations, Tate Modern 2017, ANTI – Athens Biennale 2018. Delaine is one of the artists for Casablanca Biennale 2018–2020, FUTUROMA Collateral Event for Venice Biennale 2019 and was working on costumes for *Rewitching Europe* which premiered at Maxim Gorki Berlin 1st November 2019. A new installation and performance was commissioned by Gorki for 4. Berliner Herbstsalon *DE-HEIMATIZE IT!* 2019.

### **Jacques Leenhardt**

Jacques Leenhardt studied philosophy and sociology and is director of studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. He is particularly interested in the exchange between cultures. Selection of publications: *Lecture politique du roman* (1973); with Robert Picht: *Au Jardin des Malentendus. Le commerce franco-allemand des idées* (1990); *Lire la lecture* (1982 and 1999); also several studies on the relations between France, Brazil and Latin America. As an art critic, Leenhardt was a correspondent of the *Journal de Genève* in Paris for almost 40 years. Leenhardt was President of AICA at the time of the German reunification and is now Honorary President. As curator of various exhibitions on ecological themes, he initiated a landscape art project on the site of a former open-cast mine near Bitterfeld. Recent art-critical texts: *Laura Lamiel, Une histoire personnelle de l'art contemporain* (2019); *L'Odyssée culturelle de Jean-Charles Pigeau* (2019).

### **Harry Lehmann**

After receiving a master's degree in physics and mathematics at the Saint Petersburg State University, with further philosophical studies in Berlin, Harry Lehmann earned a doctorate at the University of Potsdam in 2003 with a dissertation based on a systems-theoretical approach toward aesthetics. In the last years, he published a great number of essays and several books about art philosophy, music philosophy, aesthetics, and art criticism: *Die flüchtige Wahrheit der Kunst. Ästhetik nach Luhmann* (2006); *Die digitale Revolution der Musik. Eine Musikphilosophie* (2012); Ed.: *Autonome Kunstkritik* (2012); *Gehaltsästhetik. Eine Kunstphilosophie* (2016); *Ästhetische Erfahrung. Eine Diskursanalyse* (2016). Also visit: [www.harrylehmann.net](http://www.harrylehmann.net) and <https://www.youtube.com/user/HarryLehmannVideo>

### **Gregor H. Lersch**

Gregor H. Lersch is head of exhibitions and curator at the Jewish Museum Berlin. Recently he curated presentations by Mischa Kuball, James Turrell and Eran Shakine. Currently he prepares an exhibition by Yael Bartana to be opened in 2021. At the Martin-Gropius-Bau Berlin he coordinated and co-curated exhibition projects like *Side by Side. Poland-Germany. A thousand years of art and history* (2011) and *The New Hebrews – A century of art from Israel* (2005). From 2013 to 2016 he was lecturer at the Chair of Art and Art Theory at European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder and received his PhD in 2020 on the international relations of art in the GDR.

### **Catrin Lorch**

Catrin Lorch, born in Frankfurt am Main, is an art critic and editor in the feature section of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. After an editorial traineeship, she studied economics, art history, German literature and urban planning in Frankfurt, New York and Bonn. As curator and director, together with Rosanne Altstatt, she directed the Videonale, Europe's oldest video festival, until 2001. She then began as an author and critic at *Blitzreview* and published texts for *Kunstbulletin*, *Frieze*, *Artforum*, *Texte zur Kunst* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, among others. In addition, she has written catalogue articles, among others on Stefan Hoderlein, Jason Dodge, Tris Vonna-Michell, Martin Boyce, Nairy Baghramian and numerous other contemporary artists.

### **Oliver Marchart**

Oliver Marchart is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Vienna, before that he was Professor of Sociology at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. His most recent book publications include: *The impossible object. A Post-Fundamentalist Theory of Society* (2013), *Thinking Antagonism. Political Ontology after Laclau* (2018) and *Conflictual Aesthetics. Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere* (2019).

### **Arlette-Louise Ndakoze**

As a philosopher, fiction writer, and curator, Arlette-Louise Ndakoze researches on pan-African sciences and their forms of mediation. Since September 2020, she is artistic co-director of the art space SAVVYContemporary – The Laboratory of Form-Ideas, a place focusing on the premises and practices of a co-living in the multidimensional common, while deconstructing ideologies of oppression through the arts and its potential for transformation. A.-L. Ndakoze focuses on the connection between text and sound. In the broader sense between spiritual-immaterial and physical-material spheres – those spaces of possibility in the making. For more than ten years, A.-L. Ndakoze has been drawing on

artistic and intellectual movements – in Rwanda in particular, and across pan-African cultures in general – with research on philosophical disciplines, sonic history, literary scenes, and the link that holds cultures together to this day. A.-L. Ndakoze co-guides the radio SAVVYZARR, a transposition of SAVVY Contemporary on air, launched in June 2020. In this sonic world of potentialities, forms of pain move to channels of their liberation.

### **Paul O’Kane**

Paul O’Kane is a writer, artist, and lecturer in fine art, critical studies at Central Saint Martins College, London. With his partner Bada Song, Paul translated the works of the late Korean critic Lee Yil for the publication *Dynamics of Expansion & Reduction* in the AICA series *Art Critics of the World*. Based in London, Paul completed his PhD in History at Goldsmiths College in 2009. He has written for various leading art and refereed journals, including *Art Monthly* and *Third Text*. Experimenting with the role of the online cultural critic, Paul blogs under the title *A Few Words A Week On Art & Life In London* and is a founding member of *eodo*, an artists’ publisher with whom he has written, designed, published and disseminated several books. These publications blur distinctions between artist’s book and essay collection. *Technologies of Romance*, his most prominent publication of this kind to date, spawned a series of symposia and other launch events at prestigious London institutions, including Whitechapel Gallery, Matts Gallery, South London Gallery and Science Museum London. Paul’s photographic, video and other art practices, as well as other examples of his experiments in art writing can be found at [www.okpaul.com](http://www.okpaul.com)

### **Danièle Perrier**

Danièle Perrier studied art history, archaeology, Romance studies and philosophy in Basel and received her doctorate in Vienna. Her path led from medieval research for the Academy of Sciences in Vienna, to contemporary art, initially as chief assistant at the Krinzinger Gallery in Vienna. In 1991 she became founding director of the Ludwig Museum Koblenz. From 1999 to 2012 she headed the Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral in Bad Ems and supported the emerging media art and the dialogue between cultures. She has published all the writings of the Ludwig Museum and the Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral and is writing for [www.Critica-ZPK.net](http://www.Critica-ZPK.net) and EIKON. Since 2013 she has been a member of the board of AICA Germany and its president since 2016. She is Chair of the Fellowship Fund Committee of the international AICA and a member of the Censorship Committee. [www.perrier.at](http://www.perrier.at)

### **Ana Teixeira Pinto**

Ana Teixeira Pinto is a writer and cultural theorist based in Berlin. She is a lecturer at the Dutch Art Institute (DAI) and Leuphana University, Lüneburg. Her writings



have appeared in publications such as *Third Text*, *Afterall*, *Springerin*, *Camera Austria*, *e-flux journal*, *Mousse*, *Frieze*, *Domus*, *Inaesthetics*, *Manifesta Journal*, or *Texte zur Kunst*. She is the editor of *The Reluctant Narrator* (2014) and of a forthcoming book series on the antipolitical turn, to be published by Sternberg Press.

### **Lisbeth Rebollo Gonçalves**

Lisbeth Rebollo Gonçalves is the President of AICA International. She lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil, and is full professor at the School of Communication and Arts at the University of São Paulo, working in the post-graduation programs. Rebollo Gonçalves is a researcher in the fields of Modern and Contemporary Art. She has been director of the Museum of Contemporary Art of São Paulo and also President of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics (AICA Brazil) from 2000 to 2006 and 2010 to 2015.

She has worked as a curator for Museums and Cultural Centers. Publication of essays and books, writings in catalogs and specialized magazines. Since 1996, she has been collaborator of *Art nexus Magazine*.

### **Kolja Reichert**

Kolja Reichert is an art critic and curator who lives in Berlin. From 2017 to 2020, he was responsible for the art coverage of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, after managing the art coverage for *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (2016 to 2017). Previously, he worked as editor for the magazine *Spike Art Quarterly* (2014 to 2016). He studied philosophy and Modern German Literature at the FU Berlin and wrote his master's thesis on viewer spaces in 19th century »human zoos« and contemporary humanitarian photography. From 2006 he worked as an author in the review section of the *Tagesspiegel*, later also in *Welt am Sonntag*, *Die Zeit*, *art*, *Weltkunst* and *frieze d/e*. In 2015 he curated the group exhibition *Produktion* at the Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder with Harun Farocki, KP Brehmer, Franz Erhard Walther, Heinrich Dunst, Renzo Martens, Brace Brace and Cécile B. Evans. He has also taught at the Universität der Künste in Berlin, the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland FHNW in Basel and the Städelschule in Frankfurt a. M. In 2012 he received the Prize for Art Criticism of the German Kunstvereine and Art Cologne, in 2018 the Will Grohmann Prize of the Akademie der Künste.

### **Uta M. Reindl**

Uta M. Reindl is art critic and curator. She publishes in specialist magazines, daily newspapers, catalogues. She is the editor of *Kunstforum Spanien im Aufbruch* (Vol. 94, 1988) and of *Kunst in Spanien* (1992, with Gabriele Rivet). From 1996 to 2010, she curated together with Georg Dietzler five editions of the interdisciplinary exhibition project *Art*

*Special: Hansa with artists and students.* In 2001, she curated BCN-CGN, a city-wide festival with visual arts, literature and new music from Barcelona in Cologne, 1999, 2010, 2019, she was the curator of a group exhibition with artists from North Rhine-Westphalia in Madrid: *Renania Libre*. Since 1996, she organizes the critics' platform *Critical Rhineland*. In 2002, she organized the art critic symposium in cooperation with Kathrin Luz. Since 2016, she is vice president of the AICA Germany.

### **Miguel Rivas Venegas**

Miguel Rivas Venegas is Doctor in Art History from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2018). Having developed his PhD research as an invited PhD researcher at the Humboldt Universität and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, his work focuses on the compared analysis of visual communication and language use of transnational fascism (1931–1945) and contemporary national-populism. Currently he is working on his postdoctoral research, which will be developed at the Institute for Romance Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, and has recently joined the research group *Hate Pictures – Bildpraktiken und aversive Emotionen in der visuellen Kultur des Politischen* (Technical University of Berlin).

### **Stefan Römer**

Stefan Römer is a de-conceptual artist and art theorist; since the mid-1990s international exhibitions and publications, initiator of the Art Activists »FrischmacherInnen« in Cologne. In 2000 Stefan Römer was awarded the *ADKV-Art Cologne-Prize for Art Criticism*. His dissertation *Strategien des Fake – Kritik von Original und Fälschung* was published in 2001. From 2003 to 2009, he was Professor of New Media Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, and since then has taught internationally. His feature-length essay film *Conceptual Paradise* (2006) on the movement of conceptualism was presented internationally at film festivals and in solo exhibitions. With his book *Inter-esse* (2014) and the forthcoming follow-up volumes, he argues for a de-conceptual practice of contemporary art. He is currently working on the experimental film *ReCoder*.

### **Thomas E. Schmidt**

Thomas E. Schmidt studied philosophy, literature, linguistics and art history at the universities of Munich and Hamburg from 1978 to 1988. Since 1989 he has worked as an editor for ZDF in Mainz and since 1994 as a feuilleton editor for the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. From 1999 he was head of the feuilleton section of the daily newspaper *Die Welt* in Berlin, from 2001 deputy head of the feuilleton section of the Hamburg weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, since 2005 correspondent in the Berlin office. Last book publication: *Wiederkehr des Menschen. Natur und Natürlichkeit im digitalen Zeitalter* (2018).

### **Sabine Maria Schmidt**

Sabine Maria Schmidt is an art historian, curator and art critic. She received her doctorate in 1997 on the Public Monuments by Eduardo Chillida. Since 1997 she has worked internationally as an institutional and/or freelance curator (including for Kunsthalle Bremen (1997–2000/ 2013–14), Edith Russ House for Media Art (2000), Wilhelm Lehmbrock Museum (2002–2007), Museum Folkwang (2007–2012)). Since July 2019 she has been curator of painting and sculpture at Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz. She has published continuously for magazines and daily newspapers since 1992. She has edited and contributed to numerous monographs on contemporary art. She mainly focusses on the examination of the reception of modernism, changing media cultures, the question of today's conditions of art and its social relevance, the moving image, the image as document and aesthetic event, and the development of art in public spaces. As an adjunct professor, she devotes mostly to the history of photography. Since 2012 she has been a member of AICA Germany, from 2017–2019 she was engaged as vice-president.

### **Antje Stahl**

Antje Stahl works as an author for the cultural section of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) and as a lecturer at the Institute for History and Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich. In 2018 she won the Michael Althen Prize for Criticism for her text *No more Frauenghetto, bitte* and in 2019 she was awarded the ADKV Art Cologne Prize for Art Criticism. From 2017 to 2019 she was editor of the cultural section of the NZZ's »Architektur & Design« (Architecture & Design) dossier, before that she worked as an editor for *Monopol – Magazin für Kunst und Leben* in Berlin and as an author for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Antje Stahl studied art history, Modern German Literature and philosophy at Humboldt University Berlin, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and New York University. She lives and works in Zurich and Berlin.

### **Małgorzata Stępnik**

Małgorzata Stępnik, PhD Hab. in Philosophy, PhD in Sociology, is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences and Journalism, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. She is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), the Polish Institute of World Art Studies, and the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Lublin (as Treasurer). She is an author of two monographs and numerous articles – published in *Arts and Cultural Critique*, among others – dedicated to modern and post-modern aesthetics and philosophy of art.

### **Wenting Tao**

Wenting Tao grew up in China. In 2014 she moved to the US, completing a Bachelor Degree in Studio Art and Mathematics at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, followed by a Master of Fine Arts in Painting at Pratt Institute in New York. She has regularly published reviews on gallery exhibitions in New York in online magazine *Hyperallergic* and print magazine *The Brooklyn Rail*. She currently lives in New York. Her winning submission was first published in *Hyperallergic* in May 2019.

### **Wolfgang Ullrich**

Wolfgang Ullrich studied philosophy, art history, logic/theory of science and German language and literature in Munich. He completed his master's degree in 1991 with a thesis on Richard Rorty, and his dissertation on Martin Heidegger's late work in 1994. He then worked as a freelance author, lecturer and consultant. From 1997 to 2003 Ullrich was an assistant professor at the Department of Art History of the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, subsequently he held guest professorships at the University of Fine Arts Hamburg and the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design. From 2006 to 2015 he was Professor of Art Science and Media Theory at the Karlsruhe State Academy of Art and Design. Since then he has been working as a freelance author, cultural scientist and consultant in Leipzig.

### **Julia Voss**

Julia Voss studied German language and literature, art history and philosophy in Freiburg, London and Berlin. Her doctoral thesis in art history was published in 2007 at S. Fischer Verlag under the title *Darwins Bilder. Views of the Theory of Evolution 1837–1874*. Until 2017 she headed the art department of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and was deputy head of the arts section. Her book *Hinter weißen Wänden/Behind the White Cube* (together with Philipp Deines) was published in 2015. She currently holds an honorary professorship at Leuphana University in Lüneburg and writes the biography of the painter Hilma af Klint. Her column *Fragen Sie Julia Voss* appears in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*.

### **Ellen Wagner**

Ellen Wagner is art researcher, independent writer, critic and curator. Her texts have appeared on *Faustkultur*, *Artblog Cologne* and in *Springerin*. After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Nuremberg, she received her doctorate at the University of Arts and Design Offenbach under Prof. Dr. Christian Janecke, Prof. Dr. Juliane Rebentisch and Prof. Gunter Reski. Her dissertation *Falsche Signale. Strategien der Mimikry in der Post-Internet Art* will be published by Diaphanes in spring 2021. Ellen Wagner is currently

a research associate at the University of Arts and Design Offenbach, treasurer of the German AICA and president of the Kunstverein Mañana Bold e. V., Offenbach.

### **Marek Wasilewski**

Marek Wasilewski is a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, Poland, and Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design in London. He is a professor at the University of Arts in Poznań and director of the Municipal Gallery Arsenal in Poznań. He is a member of AICA. In the years 2000–2017 he was editor in chief of the bimonthly cultural magazine *Time of Culture*. He published in magazines such as *Art Monthly*, *Springer*, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, *the International Journal of Education and Art* and *Switch on Paper*.

### **Sarah Wilson**

Sarah Wilson is Professor of the History of Modern and Contemporary art at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. Recent publications include: *Figurations + 68*, *Le monde visuel de la French Theory* (The Visual World of French Theory 1, 2010); *Picasso/Marx and socialist realism in France* (2013). She was principal curator of *Paris, Capital of the Arts, 1900-1968* (London, Bilbao, 2002 / 2003) and *Pierre Klossowski* (London, Cologne, Paris, 2006), and co-curator of the First Asian Biennale/Fifth Guangzhou Triennale (Guangzhou, China, 2015). Sarah Wilson was appointed »Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres« by the French government in 1997 and in 2015 received the AICA International award for distinguished contribution to art criticism. [www.sarah-wilson.london](http://www.sarah-wilson.london)



**Fig. 1** Thomas Sterna, *Our Curator*, photo print behind acrylic glass, 2014, (1/5), 110 x 80 cm, based on a secret live projection with an outdoor graphics projector. Courtesy of the artist/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

**Fig. 2** Ganzeer, *Tank vs. Bread-Biker*, 2011 – the picture shows a military tank against an everyday bread delivery boy on a bike. Created during »Mad Graffiti Weekend«, in May 2011 in Cairo, a collaborative graffiti initiative that was started in response to military tribunals. The panda was later added by an artist who went by the name of Sad Panda. Photo: JoAnna Pollonais. Courtesy of the artist

**Fig. 3** *I really don't care* – First Lady Melania Trump visits Immigrant Detention Center On U.S. Border. Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

**Fig. 4** Andrew Knight, a Trump supporter, holds a sign of »Pepe the frog«, a conservative icon, during a rally in Berkeley, California on April 27, 2017, mocking the Black Lives Matter movement. Ironic Nihilism is the (official) existential philosophy of the alt-right. Photo: JOSH EDELSON/AFP via Getty Images

**Fig. 5** The Vaporwave style combines images of Greco-Roman marbles with Tron like grids, pastel colours and palm trees, tying the mythical origin of Western civilization to the American dream and the tech industry – see Daniel Oliva Barberos Vaporwave artwork »*Evolution*« and *life in vaporwave flavours*, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/183192706@N05/48475685782/>, Creative Commons Reconocimiento 4.0 International License.

**Fig. 6** Christoph Schlingensief and Thomas Goerge, photo collage, sketch for the Berliner Schloss, 2009 (poor picture quality is intentional). © Thomas Goerge

**Fig. 7** Old Norse Vikings Festival (1927), Shetland Islands, from *Britain on Film*, still. Courtesy of the BFI National Archive

**Fig. 8** Demonstration in Granada, 8 March 2018, *Junta Granada Informa*, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Manifestaci%C3%B3n\\_8M\\_Granada\\_\(40655987562\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Manifestaci%C3%B3n_8M_Granada_(40655987562).jpg)

**Fig. 9** Guerrilla Girls' first press release, 6 May 1985. © Guerrillagirls, [www.guerrillagirls.com](http://www.guerrillagirls.com) (vistit 7 May 2020)

**Fig. 10** Invitation to the discussion event *The #MeToo Age: Power & Gender Equity in the Art World*, 21 February 2018, LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions), Los Angeles, California, <https://welcometolace.org/event/the-metoo-age-power-genderequity-in-the-art-world/> (vistit 7 May 2020).

**Fig. 11** Jenny Saville, *Propped*, 1992, oil on canvas, 213.4 x 182.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

**Fig. 12** Dziewczynstwo and COVEN Berlin: *Bedtime*, 2018, installation view at Galeria Miejska Arsenal, Poznan. Photo Irek Popek. Courtesy of Galeria Miejska Arsenal, Poznań

**Fig. 13** Paweł Bownik and Zbigniew Rogalski: *A Ten-Minute Break*, exhibition view at Galeria Miejska Arsenal. Photo Tytus Szabelski. Courtesy of Galeria Miejska Arsenal, Poznań

**Fig. 14** Zbigniew Warpechowski, *Co jeszcze?* (What else?), at the exhibition *Strategies of rebellion*, Galeria Miejska Arsenal, Poznań. Photo Archive. Courtesy of Galeria Miejska Arsenal, Poznań

**Fig. 15** Marcin Dudek, *Steps and Marches*, installation view, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Edel Assanti, London / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

**Fig. 16** Marcin Dudek, *Total Event*, 2017, lead and steel, 130 x 25 x 28 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Edel Assanti, London / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

**Fig. 17** Ewa Axelrad, *Shtamah*, 2017, installation view. Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield, London

**Fig. 18** Burial of the Múcsarnok, Budapest, 10 August 2013. Photo Gabriella Csosz

**Fig. 19** Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), *Autoportret* [Self-portrait], 1938, pastels on paper, 50.4 x 70.3 cm. Courtesy of Muzeum Śląskie w Katowicach [Silesian Museum in Katowice]

**Fig. 20** Internet appeal by Osmamkavala.org to free the journalist. Courtesy: Anadolu Kültür.

**Fig. 21** Delaine Le Bas, *The Scream. A Woman With Nothing To Lose*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix, London

**Fig. 22** Delaine Le Bas, *My skin is mine*, manuscript, 26 March 2015. Courtesy of the artist

**Fig. 23** Andrea Fraser, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics* (Detail), 2018, archival digital pigment print, 175.26 x 152.40 cm. Courtesy of the artist



**Fig. 24** Mischa Kuball, *res.o.nant*, 2017, installation at Oranienstrasse 1, Berlin-Kreuzberg. Photo Archive Mischa Kuball, Düsseldorf/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

**Fig. 25** Mischa Kuball, *res.o.nant*, with the poem by Paul Celan *Oranienstrasse 1*, installation at Oranienstrasse 1, Berlin-Kreuzberg. Photo Archive Mischa Kuball, Düsseldorf/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

**Fig. 26** Mischa Kuball, *res.o.nant*, Jüdisches Museum Berlin. Photo: Alexander Basile/Archive Mischa Kuball, Düsseldorf/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

**Fig. 27** Harun Farocki, *Inextinguishable Fire*, Filmstill, 1969. © Harun Farock GbR

**Fig. 28** Harun Farocki, *Inextinguishable Fire*, Filmstill, 1969. © Harun Farock GbR

**Fig. 29** Stefan Römer, *ReCoder of Life*, still, 2018. Courtesy of the artist/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

**Abb. 30 a-b** Stefan Römer, *ReCoder of Life*, still, 2018 (actress: Jennifer Katanoyoutanant). Courtesy of the artist/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

**Fig. 31** Zheng Guogu, *Visionary Transformation of the Tranquility of Heart*, 2016, oil on canvas, 210 x 149 cm. Courtesy of the artist, Vitamin Creative Space, and Eli Klein Gallery

**Fig. 32** Zheng Guogu, *Honeymoon No. 7*, 1996, C-print, 60 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist, Vitamin Creative Space, and Eli Klein Gallery

**Fig. 33** Zheng Guogu, *Visionary Transformation of the Purification*, 2011–2013, oil on canvas, 203 x 138 cm. Courtesy of the artist, Vitamin Creative Space, and Eli Klein Gallery

**Fig. 34** Zheng Guogu, *Ultra Violet Visionary Transformation No. 2*, 2014–2015, oil on canvas, 208 x 147 cm. Courtesy of the artist, Vitamin Creative Space, and Eli Klein Gallery

**Fig. 35** Zheng Guogu, *The Vagarious Life of Yangjiang Youth No. 16*, 1996. Courtesy of the artist, Vitamin Creative Space, and Eli Klein Gallery

**Fig. 36** Jack Whitten, *Black Monolith X (The Birth of Muhammad Ali)*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 213.4 x 160 cm. Photo John Berens, © Jack Whitten Estate. Courtesy of the Jack Whitten Estate and Hauser & Wirth

**Fig. 37** Jack Whitten, *Totem 2000 VI Annunciation (For John Coltrane)*, 2000, acrylic collage on plywood, 182.9 x 60.3 x 5.2 cm. Photo Dan Bradica, © Jack Whitten Estate, Courtesy Jack Whitten Estate und Hauser & Wirth

**Fig. 38** Ilse Lafer (ed.), *Deculturalize*, exhibition catalogue Museion Bolzano, Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2020. Photo Lineematiche – L. Guagagnini/ T. Sorvillo @Museion

**Fig. 39** Emmett Till's mother Mamie Bradley speaks to the press after her son's kidnapping and murder. Photo Ed Clark/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images

**Diagrammes 1-5** Diagrammes adapted from Niko Switek, Jan Philipp Thomeczek, André Krouwel: »Die Vermessung der Parteienlandschaft vor der Bundestagswahl 2017 mit dem Bundeswahlkompass«, in: *Regierungsforschung.de*, 5 September 2017, <https://regierungsforschung.de/die-vermessung-der-parteienlandschaft-vor-der-bundestagswahl-2017-mit-dem-bundeswahlkompass/> (07.11.2020).

In order to capture the diverse contributions not only of the speakers but also from the audience for further discussion, it was crucial for us in preparing the publication of the 52nd AICA International Congress to include both the presentations and the ensuing discussions in this volume. The discussions have been transcribed in a faithful manner that seeks to preserve the liveliness of what was actually said. Subsequent abridgements and stylistic revisions to make the discussions easier to follow were made in consultation with the contributors. All texts in the publication have been edited for consistency of content in both languages, with one exception, the introduction by Jacques Leenhardt, which is printed in the original language, French, instead of English. This decision was made because French is one of the official AICA languages.

The editing of the German version was the responsibility of Ellen Wagner, while the (British) English edition was revised, edited, punctuated and proof-read by Paul O'Kane, in dialogue with Daniele Perrier, except for the text by Belinda Grace Gardner, which was translated and edited by the author herself. The translators are named below the respective texts. The English version of the contribution by Paul O'Kane has been included as an updated version, so that slight variations from the German translation are possible. Where discussions were held bilingually, the names of the two translators are given without further attribution.

Taking advantage of the possibilities of a digital publication, we have inserted links between individual contributions in the text where it seemed appropriate to clarify cross-connections between the various panels. Occasionally, an image link has also been made available. All links were last checked for functionality on 30 March 2021. We ask for your understanding, should, in the meantime, one or the other link no longer be available.

Gender-appropriate language has been used where the authors of the individual texts themselves made use of this.

In the case of the panel discussion on censorship, Vivienne Chow's voice had to be excluded for political reasons. In the case of the presentation on review processes, ›Rez@Kultur: Rezensionenprozesse online‹, by Claudia Roßkopf and Anna Moskvina, reproduction was dispensed with in favour of the thematic coherence of the chapter. During the congress, the lecture, which was based on statistical studies, gave rise to a lively discussion about the algorithmic analysis of art-critical texts and the attitudes of the authors conveyed in them. For the present publication, however, this contribution seemed to us to expand the context in a new thematic direction, which suggests a deepening of the examination of digital challenges in a still upcoming framework.

Last but not least, we would like to draw your attention to the video recordings of the congress and also cordially invite you to visit the photographic documentation of the events on the homepage of AICA Deutschland.

Video recordings of the congress:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpdRr1iBseje7qjfJ3l6EOg>  
photographic documentation: <https://www.aica.de/52/>

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Organisation and coordination of the congress in Berlin: Mabel Ascheneller

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Simultaneous interpretation: Agentur Lilian-Astrid Geese

Recording Cologne: Nestor EDV-Service

Recording Berlin: Benjamin Zuber

Photos: Jelena Ilic, Cologne and Anja Teske, Berlin

Catering: Ahoi Kultur

Booklet design: Felix Kosok, Studio 069

Website: Rolf W. Weber

Editor: Danièle Perrier  
AICA Deutschland e. V., c/o ZADIK, Im Mediapark 7,  
50670 Cologne / District Court of Cologne VR7006  
[www.aica.de](http://www.aica.de)

Coordination: Danièle Perrier

Editing: Paul O'Kane  
with Julia Dissel, Liam Kelly, Jamie Keesling

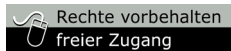
English translation: Gérard Goodrow,  
as well as Belinda Grace Gardner and  
Julia Pelta Feldman for their own texts.

Copy-editing: Paul O'Kane, Danièle Perrier

Transcription: Schreibkommunikation Michaela Bernoth

Graphic and editorial design: Anna Ranches, Bureau Mitte  
with Merle Kubasch

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet  
at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.



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Published at [arthistoricum.net](https://www.arthistoricum.net),  
Heidelberg University Library 2021.

The electronic open access version of this work is  
permanently available on <https://www.arthistoricum.net>

urn: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-ahn-artbook-891-4  
doi: <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.891>

ISBN 978-3-98501-025-7 (Softcover)  
ISBN 978-3-98501-024-0 (PDF)