

Art Criticism and Discrimination

Panel 10

MODERATION
ELKE BUHR

ISABELLE GRAW
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ANTJE STAHL
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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.¹ 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.² 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.

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‹.³ 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

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

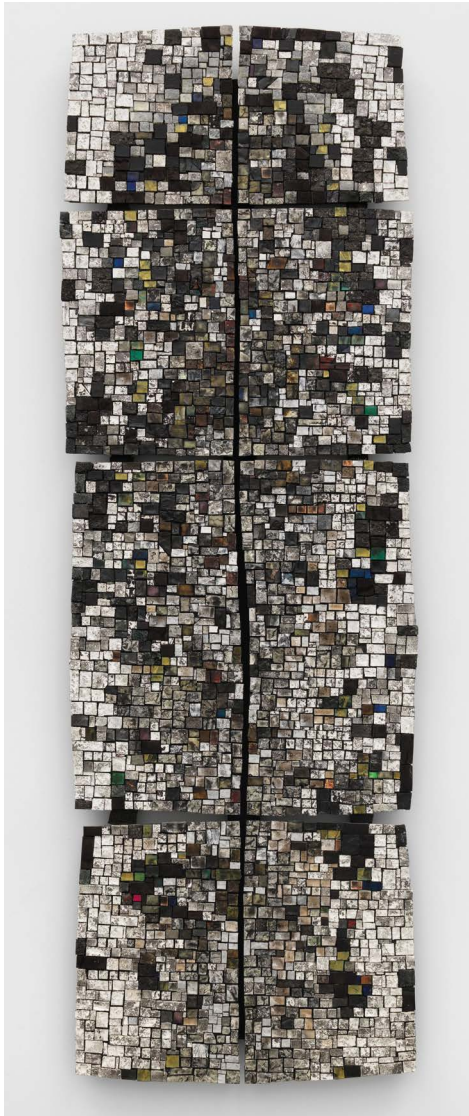


Fig. 37: Jack Whitten, *Totem 2000 VI Annunciation*
(For John Coltrane), 2000

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.¹ 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.² 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).³ 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

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.«⁴

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.«⁵ 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.«⁶

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

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!‹⁷

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

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.

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.¹ 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.«² Martin Erwin Renner, AfD member of parliament, added: »Over the years, a conformist, politically correct cultural *juste milieu* would develop as a result.«³

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«. ⁴ 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 »purgés« 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«. ⁵ 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 Ribl, »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«.⁶

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«.⁷ They were also repeatedly said to long for »politically correct art«.⁸

›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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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«.¹¹

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«. ¹²

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. ¹³

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

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?«¹ 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.)

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.² 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.«³

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.⁴ 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.«⁵ 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.«⁶

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.«⁷ 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

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.«⁸

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.