

AMI DU PEUPLE

How can I be a friend of a people that votes for the populist right?



Special issue:
Autonomy or Unconsciousness

Read about how 5 personalities fared in this respect toward the end
how they are moved by a presentiment of their post in history

Announcement . Announcement . Announcement . Announcement . Announcement .

Due to a special occasion, the Museo d'Art Contemporani has the honour of presenting a tableau by Alice Ohneland.

The title of the picture is:

L'Atelier du Peintrice (The Painter's Studio)

Allégorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique a la republique Berlin
(Real Allegory Determining a Period of Seven Years of My Artistic Life in the Berlin Republic)

The real dimensions of the picture are projected onto the white walls of the institution as shadows in movement with the help of modern lighting techniques. – mene tekel parsis. The tableau* was to be exhibited on 18 Brumaire 2000, in parallel to the large location-optimization World Fair – EXPO – in an independent pavilion specially designed by the artist opposite the marquees of the merger aristocrats, modernizers of humanity, advocates of wage moderation, pressure groups for genetic engineering and nuclear power, which she so detests.

Instead, they made their appearance and grunted and barked.

You can find the latest *ondits*, speculations and gossip about the lives and ways of thinking of the illustrious part of the depicted persons in the special issue of the journal.

AMI DU PEUPLE

How can I be a friend of a people that votes for the populist right?

Find out in the cafés all around.

* “Le tableau est divisé en deux parties. Je suis au milieu peignant. A gauche sont les actionnaires, c'est-à-dire les amis, les travailleurs, les amateurs du monde de l'art *oppositionnel* et du *discours sociale*... A droite, l'autre monde de la vie der Machthaber, la Undarstellbarkeit de la misère, l'In-der-Kehle-würgen de la pauvreté, la richesse, le néolibéralisme, les exploiters, les gens qui vivent de la mort.”

Legal advise

If you take a look at the reverse side of the picture, you will notice that only those persons on the left half are described. The persons on the right are merely designated with dates.

These dates refer to interviews or correspondences which the painter conducted during the process of creating the picture. Five different friends are introduced. Their self-understanding and their accounts relate in a pretty good way what could be termed the self-understanding of a critical art scene in the 1990s.

When the picture was first displayed in Vienna, these texts were summarized in a newspaper and distributed in the neighbouring cafés.

In the centre of the brochure, you will find a drawing and the description of the figures in the picture, which was copied here and transferred to the Berlin Republic.

Courbet was accused of having initiated the toppling of the Vendôme Column in his position as commissioner for fine arts in the Paris Commune. After the end of the Commune he had to flee France.

The magazine's cover shows the Siegessäule (Victory Column) in Berlin. It is embellished with gilded gun barrels. It is said that these gun barrels were the French governments thanks to Prussia for its help in crushing the Paris Commune.

August 19, 1996
November, 15 1999

This text consists of two interviews.

The first one was conducted for the reader of Messe 2 ok, a conference of political groups and artists' collectives which was held in Cologne in 1995.

The second interview updates some of the questions raised at the time.

A: You asked what our motivation was to conduct this interview. At the Autonomy Conference (Berlin, April 1995) we liked the organization and especially the study group structures. The conference inspired us to adopt similar forms for Messe 2. The second reason for the interview is the attempt to compare two concepts of autonomy with each other, both of which have fallen more or less into disrepute – artistic and political autonomy...

I: ... Okay, in regard to what preceded the Autonomy Conference: There had been revolutionary May Day protests in Berlin for seven years. They were a huge success, but came under the increasing influence of Stalinist and other orthodox organizations, although the demonstrations were still attributed to the autonomous movement, especially in the public eye. The entire autonomous movement, insofar as it still existed, was relatively helpless in face of this. We then began thinking about how we could bring autonomous issues back in again in a stronger way, or whether we should organize another demonstration or action on this day. The discussion ultimately failed because we were paralyzed by the accusation of pursuing a "politics of division", which was of course immediately made. I would say that many people could not stand up to their own position due to group pressure and the fear of isolating themselves politically. With a bad conscience I drove to the countryside on May 1, something which others also did, or they marched behind Stalin and Mao placards gnashing their teeth.

Afterwards there were so-called "review meetings" which were at first relatively big, but after a while only 15 to 20 persons were there. The main point was considering how we could put into words the political essentials of an autonomous stance, i.e., that what really constitutes the autonomous movement, in such a way that we could also gain strength and orientation from conflicts such as those surrounding May Day. A simple delimitation from the bourgeois-reactionary or reformist camps on the one side and communist party followers of all sorts on the other simply no longer sufficed. It didn't allow us to get rid of those people who had recently made their appearance, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall, declaring themselves "autonomous" or "undogmatic", co-determining autonomous politics at general assemblies and attempting to push the entire autonomous scene in a morally and dogmatically defined direction. For months we held highly controversial debates on whether, by dispensing with a claim to sole representation of the truth, we would open the way to arbitrariness; or how it is possible to take action based on one's subjectivity without losing the sense of solidarity. It was about performing this balancing act of conceiving one's own subjectivity, as a source of political action, as both relative and absolute, while at the same time grasping oneself as an acting subject and part of a structure.

A: Can one at all act from a subjective position in the name of a "we" or in the name of ... ?

I: This "we" always exists, even if it's an enigmatic and constantly changing variable. I believe one will encounter the homogenous 'movement-we' much more in the coming years. I was at the event dealing with the "Manifesto Against Labour" held by the Krisis Group in the Rote Salon in Berlin. The room was full of people for whom the concepts of "work" and "workplace" are just as pressing, because they are used in order to deceive us. I now say "us", and you would do the same on such an occasion.

I: ... In retrospect, the mutually insinuated moral demands that hitherto prevailed in the debates on the May Day protests appear so effective because we had no reason based in which stating "No, I don't want to!" is reason enough. In November we drew up a preliminary résumé, a kind of "Recommendation for the Next May Day", in which we for the first time proposed to hold a conference dedicated precisely to these issues. Some people then got cold feet and were afraid we would be accused of being bound up in ourselves and performing self-admiration, something which was then indeed the case.

A: But there had been an entire tradition of conferences.

I: But not on May Day, that was the day you had to take to the streets! And not taking to the streets was a sign of political weakness, something which had to be avoided by all means! I viewed that differently. For me, the Tunix Conference at the TU Berlin in 1978 marked a momentous political awakening; it was the yardstick and model. Okay – so in order to place our idea of the conference on a broader political basis we organized various open meetings during which ideas were presented and discussed. That's where the first big dilemma was revealed: The weaker the autonomous movement became in numbers, the larger the layer of functionaries grew, who all wanted to be consulted and have a say. These functionaries were also present during the discussions and tried to assess what was planned: If it's a success, I have to participate; if it's not, I must distance myself in due time. ...

December 8

I don't know whether the phenomena in which D. was involved can be called conflicts. Maybe they can be termed collisions with the logic of various apparatuses, although the apparatuses can never be clearly defined. It is rather as if these collisions established an opposite side on which one's self-understanding is mirrored in such perfect distortion that one could gain the idea of gradually doing away with this self-understanding.

The problems started in an exhibition funded by a bank. Now, a "bank" is first of all an abstract structure and the bank's financing is subdivided into orders, constitutions of company interests and executives sharing these interests in a way that is just as abstract as a "bank" is not a subject. The problems arose with the publication of the exhibition catalogue. They affected not only the artists who read prefaces, something which is not at all customary because everyone is so involved with themselves and their work that everything else is felt to be an unpleasant diversion. In this preface, however, a line had apparently been crossed, and the exhibiting artists asked themselves whether it can be the case that a catalogue functions a marketing brochure for the financier, and which counter-measures could be taken: Should the pages be carefully removed with a razorblade and the names of the financiers parodied? Or should nothing be undertaken, for each statement would make it evident that a statement was necessary? Moreover, that would lend the case a degree of importance that would even be capable of breaking into this dense hermetic silence of the producers immersed in their work... That's what the talks were like; they had to result in an indifference in which nobody feels at ease and for this reason demands decency and discretion, as D. formulated it. This means acting as if nothing had happened, because what one addressed didn't exist either. When D. no longer wanted to exhibit his picture, his teacher called him and talked about vague options of further exhibitions if he would remain willing to participate – a kind of threat. But this was, above all, a tacit reproach for his distancing, something which would show the others in a bad light, since it would make public that which had been kept silent about, namely, the embarrassment of being treated in such a way.

Later, D. was a stipend holder in a postgraduate programme. The institution had just been privatized and demanded a great deal of flexibility from its employees and students. D. said it went as far as the institution claiming to be in a state of permanent reform. Its buildings consisted in gutted cavalry barracks and newly constructed buildings geared to transparency and efficiency, with the individual structures connected by glass corridors built at different heights. This description led to the question: What is the connection between a reformed enterprise and paranoid architecture?

D: "The institution has 60 stipend holders, around 40 employees and more than 40 teachers or advisors. Thinking about the fact that there are about one-and-a-half persons looking after each stipend holder gives rise to the feeling of being shadowed. For example, you have a pigeonhole that is filled with 10 to 15 requests each day. It's clear that the institution is working. It makes inquiries at many points and takes comprehensive care of the stipend holders: a bank account, a flat, persons who see to it that the flat is well-furnished, two persons only in charge of fundraising to pay for one's keep, e.g. for a personal sponsor who you visit and must mention in your vita. These are all measures meant to maintain a production disturbed by nothing, so that it runs through well-prepared channels, legitimizes the entrepreneurial autonomy and the financial sources, and justifies the institution. You feel yourself totally ramified and meshed in this institution demanding a social context; it triggers a certain fear, because you are never alone. I sometimes think twice before leaving my studio, which, as opposed to the transparent corridors, is in a closed-off area.

Of course there are stipend holders on whom stakes are set, who receive a twofold budget for material and to whom all visiting critics, museum directors and curators directly linked with the institution are led; and there are stipend holders of whom the institution thinks that they don't work enough, don't socialize enough and that maybe they are a mistake. ... The institution even offers jobs, totally underpaid, as if to draw attention to the difference between the support they offer and one's own work to earn money. It would never consider comparing the pay for these jobs with that of the advisors – that would be its blind spot, so to speak. For what would then have to be addressed is the qualification and knowledge distinguishing the advisors from the students.

In an open letter, we then made proposals, e.g., joint projects or seminars in which both would receive equal pay. This had not existed beforehand; nor had the meeting, a sort of general assembly, which we suggested in the letter. You have to imagine how this institution constantly places great importance on transparency, flexibility and flat hierarchies. But in the end all decisions are made by the director, who each year visits all studios with his catalogue of questions: A type of evaluation in which opinion polling replaces participation and the negotiations having to do with it.

What then began was an endless cascade of counter-proposals, amendments and disputes, preparatory meetings with constantly changing persons who always had to start discussing everything from square one again. At times I gave up and withdrew, only to then write papers setting out basic principles again, which were dismissed but then reappeared a few months later – in a different form and advocated by other people. All this went on for one and a half years. But there were maybe six to eight of us who really wanted to push it through. It was our thing. We had taken on responsibility for it, not toward the outside – all sorts of people had a big mouth in that regard – but toward ourselves; there was no way we could have opted out without feeling as if we had failed and betrayed ourselves. Too much depended on it for us: We had the impression that this conference and what was to be negotiated there had to demonstrate that the autonomous scene still possessed political willpower, one which is also able to enter into a discourse. It had to prove itself whether it was a new beginning or a departure for us. Looking back, I would say it was not only a personal departure for us but the end of the autonomous movement in Berlin in general.

A: Has your assessment in this regard changed today?

I: I now think that I myself wouldn't discern a new movement, meaning a relevant yet unorganized social power, any earlier than the media, because I am no longer in the middle of it. We should beware of drawing conclusions from our own processes of change in regard to the existence or non-existence of movements. Personally, I have sought and still seek to further pursue these basic issues in filmmaking. Whether with films or texts – that's the direction I'm taking. ...

For me, dealing with categories still has to do with how one can create a room to move. And that leads to the question of what the difference is between a political analysis and the inclusion of this analysis in a political strategy. At which point does it turn into the intention and the urgent desire to actually intervene? On account of various debates, I have arrived at the point where the so-called cultural Left is, as it seems, not interested in a strategy debate. Perhaps I am doing these people injustice, because in the end I cannot tell what their political-analytical discussions possibly trigger elsewhere.

A: How did the arguments proceed?

I: Shortly before the conference, there was the last national meeting in Berlin. The situation was a disaster; the preparatory groups temporarily paralyzed themselves to such a degree that some wanted to "give back" the preparatory tasks they had taken on for the conference, as if there were an authority somewhere they could have given them back to. ... But the conference could no longer be called off. It had become – even if only due to the locality – a political issue. After the Humboldt University had denied their spaces, we had announced to the TU that we would simply occupy their rooms. In this respect, there was even quite a degree of mobilization, and pressure was gradually put on the city. ...

The mood was at first shattered. Then there was a discussion round during which everyone stated what the conference really meant for them. But a few then said: "You can call it off or stay at home, we're coming all the same, even if we sit down with 50 people in a garage and discuss what we find important. You can't call it off because we're going to do it anyway!" ... After it became clear that the conference would take place, those who had doubts re-oriented themselves, and then the functionaries joined in again, immediately, back at the coordinating points of the organization, and they were the ones who shot their mouths off at the conference. ...

And everything went well. Around two thousand people attended. ... There were loads of study groups, even spontaneous ones established in addition to those announced. But I must say that a continuous level of radicalness in regard to the issues could not be achieved. That had to do with a structural break inherent to the idea of a conference from the very start.

A: How would you describe this structural break in retrospect?

I: There were three tendencies in regard to the expectations people had: the first was to position oneself more distinctly in political terms via the concept of "autonomy"; the second mainly wanted to conquer one's weaker self, meaning that because one didn't really feel like doing anything anymore, there was the desire of remembering that there is indeed something that has to be done; and the third faction wanted things to once again be as nice as they had been in the past... From these three directions, totally different proposals were made as to what was to be accomplished at the conference. We, that is line 1, always wanted to discuss the concepts and bring together that which actually mobilized us. And we were indeed willing to do so and also demanded that one should first start from the fact that there is nothing one *must* do. The second line, of course, was of a quite different opinion: They wanted to newly discuss all the scandals in the world, from neoliberalism to refugee policies, so as to again make it clear that one *must* do something! And the

The letter and the assembly were understood as if a coup were planned, with the aim of toppling the director. ... The director denied any form of communication except for his speech at the final exhibition. A prize was awarded to ... for a statue. It was awarded with the remark that the statue looked National Socialist-style, that the selection of the award-winners was politically correct in terms of gender and that political correctness is typical German. One could now associate what connections were drawn between political correctness and fascism: The lesson to be learned from this remark is that one is extreme.

We now come to a last example. It's a picture shown in an exhibition financed by a corporation, or rather a catalogue contribution preceding this picture: photos, sketches and texts that referred to the picture and led to D. being excluded from the show. Like "bank", "corporation" is a structure whose act of paying money is subdivided into a fragile layering of orders, company interests and executives sharing this interest in a way that is just as abstract as the "corporation" is not a subject. But this can create a maelstrom that channels the individual employees' need for self-development to the corporation's benefit, just like the reformed institution usually does with the production of postgraduates. This applied to the head of the corporation's culture department, who initially sought a kind of complicity with the artists. ...

D. found this complicity very unpleasant. It is the problem of the agent that he stands in a double complicity, he said, and that would blur the difference between the parties and their interests, while the distance of a business relation achieves the opposite, i.e., it reveals the respective lines of interest. D. stressed how much he would have liked to have negotiated a contract between himself and the corporation. This wish was treated as if it were a little quirk.

D: "It is often the case that conflicts, which – like here – arise over pictures, are deemed disreputable. The artist is regarded merely as a troublemaker. It bothers me when talk is only about the handcuffs in which I wanted to see the corporation's CEO. One mustn't forget that this picture and its counterpart address a relation of questions and their depictions, that a catalogue of questions is depicted and related to the CEO. These handcuffs stand in a relation to the questions and to the person raising them, who also does not remain anonymous and is shown in the second picture. In addition, the handcuffs are children's handcuffs and the tree he is chained to is so thin you could bend it. The depiction is so ridiculous and so succinct. The actual infringement lies in the fact that something is addressed that is not possible and that this impossibility is then painted. The handcuffs have to do with the wish to fixate the immunity of the CEO so as to be able to ask him questions in the first place, questions he then must listen to.

And in regard to complicity, the infringement consists in having summoned the subjects, whose designation is always impossible in a state of complicity, because this leaving aside is what establishes complicity in the first place. It could very well have been – and that was actually the agent's biggest fear – that when coming into direct contact with the financial backer, the respective interests might have stood in such opposition that this agreement to 'do an exhibition' might not have materialized."

One can think about whether these examples are only the problem of the producers who keep silent about any attack on their sovereignty due to the "shame of being treated in such a way", because the acquired sovereignty vital for one's work is thereby deeply harmed in public. Or is all this an example of apparatuses built to channel this illusion of sovereign production? Is it all about whether the necessary lie of autonomy, without which one could not articulate oneself, can be separated from its utilization? But where to with this autonomy, as long as the producers do not create a public sphere on their own? Or do they create "a law of the heart and a rage of a crazy sense of superiority that cannot endure the day like the prevailing order, but instead, in the way it shows itself to it, perishes." But why does the prevailing order take so much trouble over the laws of the heart and its subjectivity?

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third mainly wanted to create a good mood, hoping that this mood would lead to people wanting to take action. Those were the different hopes that stood in each other's way. Line 1 and 3 were there until the end. Line 2, at one point, left. It was too unpolitical for them.

..A: When organizing such a conference, one maybe wants ... to construct a non-hierarchical field?

I: Freedom from domination is not a static concept, but consists of singular points in a social process in which something is tipped over because the old hierarchy no longer functions or is interrupted, and something new has not yet constituted itself. I think it is more about a kind of permeability. ... One who rebels against something takes on the responsibility for doing so, thus tending to assume power again, so that a process is initiated that we prefer to call "permanent revolution".

A: You said that the term "permanent revolution" is linked to the loss of a utopian horizon of history.

I: ...that history has no destination, that the classical models of society are over and done with, that everything amounts to no more than endless, sluggishly moving metamorphosis – that's something one cannot accept either! Utopias are the gravitational field of movements in that they nonetheless continue to produce the illusion of a possible transgression of boundaries. That's what's so crazy. In my view, "permanent revolution" still makes sense as a figure of thought. Yet as a concept it has also proved to be very useful for acting as if one were a bit radical, while basically coming to terms with society. That is a form of self-reduction in thought and perception which I cannot accept. We must see and also endure the fact that making peace with this society is impossible. Not making peace with this society does not imply insisting on any kind of utopia, but to live this "non-peace" on an everyday basis.

A: And what does that entail for political practice?

I: To depart from a politics of complaint and move towards a politics of establishing facts. That is, to shift the question: Not, how can I convince the enemy to refrain from doing certain things, but, what can I do so that the enemy is no longer able to do certain things?

A: The concept of autonomy was discussed a lot during your conference... We raise the question of how and whether this "autonomy" can be detached from the conditions of exploitation that it exists in in the field of art, and whether one can grasp this concept as a political self-understanding.

I: It is a misconception that the idea of autonomy was ever really adopted in bourgeois society. The concept formed the ideological background of the development of bourgeois society, but only in its reduction to the individual, thus becoming the paradigm of detachment as the precondition of competition for power and of all the violence inherent to capitalism. Of course, autonomy has nothing to do with independence. ... A political concept of autonomy would have to refer in a positive sense to the knowledge of the fact that what I want only evolves in the interplay with what others want, that the starting point of action, despite this state of socialization, is always one's own "I want" or "I don't want". ... I can no longer go to a refugee hostel and protect it except if it is clear to me, personally, why it is in my interest. And it doesn't help, by the way, if I construct it for myself, something which is usually the case when others reproach me for this. I have to have the *feeling* that the issue also has to do with what I am concerned with...

A: How do you see this now, when you go to the border camps, for example?
(Protest camps at the German-Polish border against the persecution and denunciation of refugees by the population – self-proclaimed militia – and the Federal Border Guard)

I: The border camp was not allowed to take place where it originally wanted to – on grounds directly at the border. The authorities simply assigned grounds at the edge of the town to the organizers, and the camp went there without complaining. I found that depressing. A thousand people have the power to occupy the location they want. But the organizers said: If we fight for the place now, we won't get to take our political actions. The political actions were what they had prepared, information work etc. That is no longer informed by the desire and the joy of disobedience. They do not understand that when fighting for the place they want, for their presence, this transports precisely the issue they are concerned with on the level of action: We shall not allow ourselves to be closed in!

At the beginning, xxx was something like a 'positing' for me that seemed to have fallen from the skies. It was totally unclear – and there was also no "analysis" of this – which so-called field of this cultural landscape we wanted to enter with what we did. For those involved at the time, xxx could be associated best with a band in which the most various things one likes or doesn't like are dealt with: the appeal of commercial pop culture, the new media's concept of reality and the ensuing theories, the legitimate and illegitimate intellectual world of texts, magazines and publications from the radical leftist and subcultural field of politics with which we were loosely associated – broadly dispersed references to artistic and political phenomena. Looking back today, I notice that **we were driven by a notion of how knowledge can be acquired in a different way than via the university** or these art academies with their notorious relapses into 19th-century structures. Hardly anyone I had to do with had any idea of how to actually make a profession out of one's studies in the arts or humanities. Perhaps also because, from a student point of view, the precariousness of university places and existential pressure felt less threatening.

To find a job that was okay here and there came more natural than imagining a lifelong profession. Perhaps it was somewhat clear to everyone that such arrangements were also a trend in society – one which everyone talks about nowadays: flexible highly qualified workers as a none-binding human resource for modern companies.

But let's return to this strange – today maybe no longer even comprehensible – climate of dissolving authority, of discovering formations of power and knowledge by oneself, and to our activities and delimitations. E. had scraped together a bit of money and bought video equipment, and we then started making feature films, remakes and clips. In formal terms we were oriented towards theatre because, as far as space and money was concerned, that was a possibility to organize live performances. We by no means wanted to call what we did in xxx art. When we began in the early to mid-1980s, art was associated with neo-conservatism and a concept of painting we could not relate to. On the other hand, we found the affected, authenticity-seeking behaviour in the off-theatre scene just as bleak: alternative spectacles, totally unbroken male go-getting, the most awful female roles. We wanted to be a lot less specific, but at the same time more concrete, when we termed our performances 'theoretical television' or when we played 'theatre' with mixed feelings to avoid calling the relationship between text sequences and visual material a multimedia performance – another shallow term in the art business. Those were more or less the existing fields which we wanted to counter with a different desire – the desire for a pop surface, because it made more references to the perception of what concerned us, and because at the time pop was not as sold-out as it later was in the Love Parades with wagons of the Christian Democratic Party or with those new guitar heroes who have no problem cooking together pop, Saving-Private-Ryan-fascism and the trademark of one great mind or the other to a neo-mythological primeval soup.

We always considered our stage a screen. I think the pieces were often perceived along the lines of an unaffected purism dealing with product aesthetics, consumption and displays of subjectivity: the way you wear a jacket, move your body at the mixer, do language routines, and the way it is all presented when speaking about current affairs we were concerned with, about political issues and that which characterizes the sign-like interrelations between all of it.

One example I recall is an interview with the musician Sheila E. that we narrated backwards in 'Foucault's Theatrum Philosophicum' as part of a talk show in which Warhol and Artaud, played by two persons, meet. A central theme of our pieces was to transform media images into figures of language that all had to do with expressing subjectivity in one way or the other.

We performed in off-theatres, halls, vacant shops, the event rooms of houses occupied by squatters, and later occasionally in galleries and art societies. Locations that were in no way connected to each other. We did all this because we were affected by the spaces which always enabled other possible thematic approaches.

What we had in common with the autonomous movement was perhaps an interest in living conditions as a form of politics, which is always also a conglomeration of embraced clichés in which one can move about for a period of time and which could sometimes be called "intensity" and sometimes "transience". That which is allegedly typical of a late-capitalist feeling of life and can be theoretically best defined by addressing issues of identity. Yet it must be said that this was not concrete political work, because we couldn't bring that in line with our idea of distance; **maybe it was also the fear of dedicating ourselves to a form of meaningful practice.**

We then performed a play called 'bath of an autonomous woman' that dealt with texts mainly drawn from the revolutionary cells, which we were familiar with from the magazine Interim. We regarded the anti-state attitude they formulated as a gesture that could be transferred to the fields we were working in, their working conditions, their dependencies on the implicit question related to the identity of 'self' or 'we' which was demanded, on the one hand, and which we wanted to counter, on the other, **without "acting like a radical" in this field, which it desires as long as it is not affected by it.**

I attended a panel discussion in Hanover held by the anti-Expo initiatives. I asked what the initiatives should do and the answer was repeatedly: "imaginative actions". I replied: Everyone wants your imaginative actions – even the Expo (the World Fair that took place in Hanover in 2000) would probably pay for them. If you say the Expo is shit, they don't give a damn. You have to express yourself in a language they understand, and in regard to the Expo that means doing damage! They were totally appalled. Then you know where you're at. You could soon commission an advertising agency to conceive such left-wing campaigns.

A: I've criticized several "political interventions" in art in a similar way, that they shaped their actions in line with the same communicative dictate as the post-Fordist campaign culture. Afterwards, I found this accusation unfair. I had the feeling of criticizing a basically "good cause", whose efficiency and straightforward functionality I found nauseating, however, perhaps because I sensed a lack of radical negation. ...

A: Did you ever have concrete fantasies of overthrowing?

I: What should I overthrow?

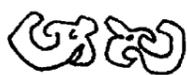
A: The government, of course!

I: Take control of radio stations and airports? Oh, come on... A few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, autonomous circles in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg thought about what they would do if West-Berlin were a liberated zone: provide health services, children's education, housing etc. The idea was based on the four powers withdrawing, West-Berlin becoming an autonomous city-republic, peaceful coexistence, with a socialist state in the East, the capitalists in the West, and nobody interested in West-Berlin. I strongly polemicized against the concept at the time, because I deemed it so naive. Today that makes me angry, because I hadn't recognized that desire can unfold a real power and that it can indeed have an effect on the slogans of day-to-day politics when one pictures more precisely the way one would like to have things and what problems that would then entail for one.

A: What is your prospect?

I: I hope that what will remain from the autonomous movement is the message that it is necessary and possible to do what you think is right, without having to establish a star programme or attain positions of power that only then legitimize one's actions in the first place. The question pertaining to the degree to which power is the precondition of political influence must be relativized, for the power of a movement becomes all the more stronger the less it places hopes in it. Speculation always heralds an end.

A: While doing research, I read about the conspiratorial societies of "equals", of "families", of "seasons", of the "factory", the models of which were regarded as far to atomized, pluralistic and utopian in the age of the organized proletariat. So many parallels can be seen today. To again come back to autonomy: The Saint-Simonians wore their clothes buttoned on the back so as to draw people's attention to the fact that one is dependent on the other.



What I find more than astounding today are the accounts of the self-proclaimed chroniclers who never formulated or devoted anything themselves, but now like to present themselves as participating observers. You always come upon the same short-term memory that goes back to the end of the 1980s when the Eastern bloc began to collapse, then it continues with the fascination by activist groups in the United States of which a handful of people are supposed to be the German-speaking counterpart. The interfaces between art and politics, if they can be roughly categorized in this way at all, were much more intertwined and started with a totally different understanding of politics than the one associated with the history of activism, for example.

Beforehand, we didn't think at all about which field we could appear or intervene in more strongly. People repeatedly approached us and we constantly tried to participate in festivals. It was a very naive notion of creating a public, of what one actually wanted from this public, for what reasons and how one addressed others. I think it wasn't really clear to many how to assess such a concept of intervention. We thoughtlessly trusted in that which we had to convey being naturally comprehensible. On the other hand, this resulted in our joining up with all kinds of people who shared a similar interest, and through this approach the borders between the fields of art, music, politics etc. at first did not appear as if they couldn't be crossed. Field theory was a hardly examined topic, and what was at the fore was probably the kick we got out of arriving together with others at points and problems in this world that one could actually communicate and do something about. **This also meant getting away, enjoying a vague connection to people who are also interested in constructing action, meaning and new spaces.**

But I know that during this time I was less and less satisfied with the division of labour in the group, that is the division between the person who wrote and those who did all different kinds of things, while always also acting, and that there was this separation between the author and the others according to the gender principle. I needed a different context than a group in which, over time, this division of labour could no longer be overcome. And even when we tried to do so internally, it was always newly constructed again from the outside. I then began studying in order to establish this other context and to get away from these in-group formations that were the negative effect of these loose, apparently undefined communicative fields. Within just a few years the self-understanding changed: Persons who until then had nothing to do with the university or academy gradually decided to start studying, maybe because of the feeling that this was a better alternative to the unpleasant forms of jobbing. I was attracted by feminist and culture-theoretical debates that were held in diverse university circles more readily than in the art field, for example. And I additionally felt – or imagined to be – closer to a social potentiality that appeared more progressive than the rituals and primate-like pecking orders in the art world, which we by that time had become quite familiar with. Sometimes these expansions were very productive, at others they buzzed without any direction into nowhere – confused cross-references between artistic and political issues and academic text production.

Yet all this offered the possibility to establish one's own set of instruments, where the art field became a secondary, albeit important, arena. It was a real discovery to regard subjects as consisting of discourses and debates: In this way, self-alienation could be described not only as a history of suppression, of women for example, but also as something productive: To reveal interests and the institutions for which the individual subject repeatedly makes itself available as an efficient instrument of assertion. But the moment one learned to take discourses into consideration, the way one viewed patterns of subjectivity changed: The fact that subjectivization has to do with the compulsion to repeat power relations was taken up in those areas of art that were dedicated to questions of inclusion and exclusion in the tradition of queer or feminist art practice. At issue was, of course, to locate social changeability in the subjects themselves and not in abstract systems. **When the issue was the political ability to act, then precisely in the question of how someone who gets up in the morning to start working constructs him/herself in regard to social instructions.** I never understood such questions as enhanced instructions on how to act or as an experimental model for a better consciousness. In this sense, Butler was far too elaborated to deal with the emotionalism of emancipation and liberated subjectivity. For me, that was more like a set of instruments to criticize certain forms of hegemonic narratives at the level of theoretical analysis and to open up the conceivability of political opposition: In the end it was the question whether the "logic" of so-and-so can only function in this way or also differently.

If you ask me about the transfer of all this feminist critique of the subject that was updated by Judith Butler, Donna Haraway etc. to the field of art, I would say it was only partially successful, although it did give rise to a certain understanding of politics that clearly left its marks. This cannot be reversed by a revival of authenticity-artistry that believes it can access meaning regardless of who uses it when and for which purpose: whether in the national interest, for gender-specific reasons, within state, aesthetic or other kinds of contexts. In this respect, the New Wave subjects of the early 1980s were more elaborated with their scepticism about history. 'Mode & Verzweiflung (Fashion & Despair)' instead of Wagner & Stalin. Or 'Tanz den Mussolini (Dance the Mussolini)', the punk song, that had to do with enjoying an increase in alienation and nothing

February 17, 2018 20°

The salon of the Inter-Oceanic Art Club, Marrakech. The midday sun is shining through glass windows. Floor cushions are arranged in groups, with The Alba lounging on one of them. On a bar that has seen better days, two Duralex glasses with ice and three-year-old rum. Behind the bar, Hanuman quarters a lemon.

“The beginnings, yes, the beginnings...,” Hanuman says, trying to find a thread. “Under the conditions of those days, it was our aim to convey something negative with our works, to show an unfulfilled possibility – and to simultaneously demonstrate the impossibility to realize it under the prevailing conditions.”

Hanuman squeezes the lemon quarters over the rum. “At the time, we entertained the idea of building glass swimming bridges through public spaces, swimming bridges that cross and traverse flats, traffic lights, offices, and public squares.”

While the lemon juice creates cloudy streaks in the Havana Club lying heavy, full and oily in the glass, THE DOG THAT SECRETLY SMOKES A PIPE comes in and lies down on an empty cushion.

“The issue was that pleasure is not a private matter. That a) this is inserted as a utopian demand: pleasure is not a private matter – something swimming stands for – and that b) it is only a small private pool which can be unambiguously regarded as merely a sign and not an improvement of the actual situation. More of a test, a device one can use but that doesn’t really work as a solution. The actually existing desire to swim in public space is infinitely larger than a pool...”

“Let’s drink to that.” The Alba raises her glass. “At the time they wanted everything to be one-dimensional: artistic core statements that can be summarized in one word or one sentence at the most.” The Alba lights a cigarette. “You still smoke?”

“Sure, thanks.” Both smoke.

Alba’s gaze darkens. “Years of work in contexts that the artists had developed with a huge amount of self-organization, networking and independent organs of reflection encountered an – also economic – emptiness in the business. It was actually easy then already to say that mediation, of course, belongs to artistic work. Yet a short time later all that was again reversed: an influential finger was raised and everybody stood at attention...”

Hanuman steps to the window. Momentarily, he does not feel like thinking back to those discouraging times of indecision. Sure, when taking their first stumbling steps and making provisional attempts they partook in preparing the end. Their elitist arrogance was probably even necessary to elude the organized boredom of the language controllers and to place the view of the political ‘square’, who stared at the powers that be like the mouse stares at the snake, from the head back on its feet...

Immersed in thought, he believed a foreign voice was speaking to him when he heard himself say: “For a year there was a functioning group context in the city which had developed out of discussions at the university; it was pretty aggressive and aimed at doing away with the wearing-a-black-suit of these machos and the art-individualism stuff by no longer being able to negotiate anything. We organized the first didactic exhibition in the space of a friend. We thought about what we liked to do most: travelling, being a tourist. We thematized...”

Albert the Refuse Chute: “He said *thematized*...”

We *thematized* exactly *that*, because the idea of not having to work is actually the reason why one starts doing art. We shot various photos of parks, amusement parks, fair devices as the mirror of the city and the social production conditions and added these didactic, systematic explanations and the spoon-feeding apparatus modelled on the museal practice of mediation in the form of audio tours using walkmans that were just getting cheaper. The idea was to depart from this era of not-wanting-to-mediate, this cliché of **I must understand art directly**. This appropriation of mediation resulted from the consideration that the apparatus of mediation is the most effective element to determine the meaning. At the same time, this appropriation of the museal practice of mediation, when reflecting on the form, turned into something else. You had the headphones on, you listened to explanatory words. But the meaning was of course created on a third level.”

Alba responds: “Perhaps because it would then become evident how mediation functions, how unfounded it is and so illegitimate that the appropriation automatically turns into a caricature... But that also turns the caricature into something anti-authoritarian because it doesn’t force the audience to believe it. That is of course a gesture directed against those professional groups that claim mediation as identity.”

Hanuman responds: “And as power... Mediators believe that a meta-language exists with which one can communicate things.”

“GONG.” Albert intervenes with a clatter. “This round clearly goes to Alba, point deduction for Hanuman due to semantic tautology...”

Precociously looking Zebra Bernd, attracted by Albert’s tinny voice, looks inside through the window.

The Alba: “How do you see the differences between the groups in the city and the nice-to-meet-you artists in the exhibitions?”

with cultural or aesthetic identification. It could be worthwhile here to try and compare conceptions of subjectivity. ‘Tanz den Mussolini’ toyed with fascist subjectivization, as identification with it, in order to not become its symptom. Arch-Wagner plays with fascism as a myth so as to once again strive for it symbolically – for himself? Or for others?

After xxx, when one gradually knew how things went, I noticed that once I expressed myself publicly, I always got into an argument, usually with some guys who had legitimizing functions in the art field, mediators, writers ... And that this aggressive conduct was certainly meant to mark a cut, to reinforce a position of: Now it’s my turn to speak. When legitimizing persons are called into question, then the claim to an opposing power is immanent. I have always experienced speaking at events and panel discussions as an extreme confrontation with my own position within the respective power structure. I always sensed that it is a polarization technique to make room for one’s own voice. It also happens to you when – due to whatever temporary disillusionments – you don’t feel like it. The fact that the critique of power relations again materializes in a kind of “power to be heard” is at times certainly only a phantasm, but a productive one.

But when I’m invited today, it is a confirmation that is simultaneously relativized, because it is usually not tied to binding structures but always remains in this non-commitment of representation that the very next moment subjects you to the hither and dither of critique as establishing difference or consensus: this arranging oneself with the small possibilities, this operating on the constraints and regulations, this digging clear rooms to manoeuvre, and time and again these loops of reflection. Of course they are part of the positioning in which you can also somehow shit on this kind of criticism-posing, decisionisms running through the same channels that what you reject also runs through, where the faucet is sometimes opened and at other times shut. But the game functions if you have the feeling of being able to interrupt it without having to project yourself onto an external position. Unfortunately those moments in which such interruptions are indeed celebrated are rare. It doesn’t work with the classical female gesture of renunciation. Blockades against certain assumptions of power – power is a pretty simplified term. But you know what I mean.

If you ask me about a possible rehabilitation of “autonomy”, then I naturally ask myself what it means to demand something like personal autonomy within a network of economic, institutional and state interests. At any rate, I again value a concept such as autonomy higher, even if its definition has become more complicated and ambivalent. We know that the autonomy of self-determination and decision-making, as it is usually defined, is a Eurocentric construction, a privilege that depends on affiliation. Yet one can be neither completely for nor against autonomy without throwing out the baby with the bathwater. And if this is the case, ‘autonomy’ must then be discussed under entirely different premises: from the perspective of the privatization of public property and taking into consideration the history of the concept of autonomy, its proximity to the protection of vested rights. **I would also distinguish between an autonomy that must be applied to the rights of producers or the so-called expression of opinion, and an autonomy that merely reduces a thing or an individual work to the status of a modern antique in the white cube again.** On the other hand, in the institutions I have to do with, I do not intend to simulate an autonomy where none exists. But instead of the rhetoric of creating room to move within the system, it could again be called for to make excessive demands. Nothing is worse than regarding oneself as the symptom of power-related constraints which one believes to fathom. That is the shabbiness, so to speak, of meta-reflection. I don’t believe it is about the point of correctness, for that has to do with the technique of shifting which is inherent to power constellations. Instead one must explore far more intensively possibilities regarding whether things must always run according to an explainable ‘logic’ or whether they can run differently.

CSU

November 2

Precociously looking Zebra Bernd: "The real problem in such mainstream contexts is that the contents evaporate. In the art business, the interest in contents is extremely small in the end. I don't know if anyone there is really involved in any interesting debates."

The Alba: "Some dash contents on the eyelid like a speck of cosmetic pigment, others use it to keep their hermetic prayer wheels in motion. Contacts are only electrified because they are two poles, or how else is communication electrified?"

Albert: "Through impurity."

Precociously looking Zebra Bernd thoughtfully leans back: "In the debates on refusal, I always said that one shouldn't let the art business get away with it, namely, in regard to what it means within a bourgeois definition of artistic freedom. In this country, it is the only instance where freedom of speech is legally protected without restrictions. And that is something you must make use of if you also have to do with other interests in the business."

Albert: "Let's say it's the supposition of bourgeois freedom that one wants to play off through impurity."

The Alba: "When did you break with the trendy curators' exhibitions?"

Precociously looking Zebra Bernd: "Hanuman no longer wanted to continue demonstrating the negation of the possibility of changing something, demonstrating 200 times how the border between private and public space is constructed in this society and what it effects. He wanted to try the exact opposite and break through this border. At first there was the idea to do a project in urban space, in a self-determined, collective fashion and on one's own authority, against all development plans, because that's how one likes it, and without a legal or financial basis."

Hanuman: "It was clear from the beginning that one collaborated with people who had little to do with art debates: squatters, social workers, other neighbours, people involved at the level of neighbourhood politics, school, church. And that what we had been working on wound up in an entirely different reality: realizing a planning itinerary, working with questionnaires, developing new settings in situations in which language doesn't suffice and other media have to be used."

This reached its peak in spring of 1996. There was an exhibition in all shops around the property, in which the shop owners and office workers – extremely different people – had to be convinced of the project and the exhibition. ... Two days later there was a voting they hadn't told us about, with which they wanted to push their development plan through. So we had to call up all elected representatives and reach those responsible on the preceding evening. We met several representatives before the voting began... One came to my table in the canteen, dressed in a Glencheck jacket, and I was wearing a similar one. And then you talked with someone like that, it was embarrassing, from one jacket wearer to the other..."

I didn't feel like an actor, it was more like a stage play the way the speakers of all parties outdid each other citing from our brochure, and the guy from the Christian Democrats stepped to the lectern and said: I actually belong to the hardline faction, but..."

Albert the Refuse Chute: "Those are maybe the nicest moments – when one notices that one has seduced potential opponents to pushiness in regard to convictions."

The Alba: "And then?"

Hanuman: "It went on for years, it was what I would call a classical conflict, in which the nomadic war machine is always absorbed by the state that conquered it in the shortest period of time if it is not able to completely destroy it."

"And of course you hadn't reached that point yet," the precociously looking Zebra throws in.

Hanuman: "The authorities didn't want to pay, they didn't want unusual things to evolve that looked different than what urban planning normally looks like. One had to do with very real authority types, there was always the danger of adapting oneself – talking like the authorities do, planning according to official time tables, complying with official conditions. Discussions become juridical and economic. That had an impact all the way back to the group itself."

"It was a tough time," the precociously looking Zebra Bernd reminisces. "It's fine as long as you can maintain control. If not, then you have to depart with a fanfare, so that the antagonistic character of desire production under the prevailing conditions remains visible."

The Alba: "How did it continue for you?"

Hanuman: "I personally had the great desire to do something without having to consult others. ... As opposed to this, a part of the group worked on a draft statute to vote per people's decree that the development plans and the construction measures in the city are to be made transparent. It was about gaining more influence in the city districts by means of democratic procedures."

Precociously looking Zebra Bernd: "That mercilessly amounted to a yes / no decision, to majorities and the counting of empty heads one should not have joined together with in this country during those times. I find it more important to

Alice Ohneland. Berlin . Paris . Geneva

The London cellar theatre 'The Brecht & Cruickshank Shnitzel Tavern, Jazz and Rateringhof Cellar, Original Snack and Spaghetti House'

Dear Mr. Manager,

Thank you very much for your kind effort to pass the following letter on to Mr. von Delmont.

Sincerely

Dear Mr. von Delmont,

During the research I am currently conducting at the Institute for Post- and Proto-Fascist History of Economics in Ludwigsburg (department Bund Deutscher Industrie (Federation of German Industries), former Reichsindustriebund / archive index no. BDI / cult. Managm.Strat. / 90-99) ((cultural management strategies))) I by chance came upon a file that contains an interrupted record of your lecture at the newly opened Fair Pavilions in Leipzig. As is noted in the file, the lecture abruptly came to an end because Mrs. Ötger was suddenly taken ill. In further archive volumes, in the censorship section, I also found an unpublished contribution of yours containing hypotheses on the new worldwide absolutism which I found extraordinarily inspiring for my current culture-historical thoughts. While reading it, so many questions came to my mind that I decided to write you a letter. I made use of my former contacts to the clandestine political art scene and soon made a strike. Who can describe the excited joy with which I am looking forward to a correspondence. Please do not let me down!

I would like to ask you about the motives of your friend D., who at the time ran an independent salon amidst the fawning courtiers of the small state of K. and was able to maintain an autonomous production. Please tell me about the considerations, the origin, the course, and the end of this salon.

I would also like you to tell me more about the motives behind the last presentation of your friend D. in K., in which you, as I have been informed, played a significant role. What considerations, what interests prompted him to pull off this brilliant coup? Were there consequences? What are the future plans?

I hope to hear from you soon.

The Brecht and Cruickshank Shnitzel Tavern

Jazz and Rateringhof Cellar, Original Snack and Spaghetti House

+++++Our Special Offers +++++
Pizza Siemens Tomatoes cheese mushrooms 5800 £
Pizza Sony Tomatoes cheese salami ham..... 7200 £

All prices incl. service flat rate, inflation charge, VAT. Price fluctuations of more than +/- 10% stock market index are used to correct the daily price. Trade cards of the fractal economy are valid as currency, unfortunately we must charge a processing fee of 2%.

Our tip: the gift coupon ... be good to yourself, pizza or spaghetti, as you please!

Reply _____ Ref: Your fax dated 11-3-99

Dear 'Alice noLand',

We received your letter and today dispatched it to Mr. von Delmont. However, we have been informed by his office that he has recently travelled overseas, though we are expecting him to return towards the end of the month to attend the big Cologne meeting: "The Summerhouse - 25 Years of Laughter, Merriment, Texts and Stories about Aesthetics" with the surprise release of the new Riddle-Gypsy-Wurst-Mizzler-Disk in MPx format, "In the Middle, please please", a performance by the 'German Boy' and a tombola of object editions of unknown origin.

Greetings!

The Brecht and Cruickshank Shnitzel Tavern Jazz and Rateringhof Cellar, Original Snack and Spaghetti House

Brand NEW!!! +++++
Pizza Artworks! Now as a Pizza Chart Pie!

A compilation of the most delicate ingredients based on the results of the most recent polls on the exhibition of Carsten Höller at KunstWerke.
50% pro, 15 % contra and 35 % undecided, that means
50% tomatoes 15% cheese and 35% mushrooms for our Gourmet Pizza!!!
All this and much, much more (a glass of Chianti) for measly 5800 £
Pizza Höller (limited edition)15% tomatoes 50% cheese 15% salami 7200 £

All prices incl. service flat rate, inflation charge, VAT.
Price fluctuations of more than +/- 10% stock market index are used to correct the daily price. Trade cards of the fractal economy are valid as currency, unfortunately we must charge a processing fee of 2%.

The gift tip in the month of June: be good to yourself, pizza or no pizza, as you choose!



infringe against this apparatus wherever possible, and then things do get antidemocratic in the sense of the democracy that is forced upon us. I don't think anything can be created in a legalistic way."

The Alba: "Let's return to the seduction of people; they are usually seduced so as to seduce reality itself or to gain accomplices when infringing."

Precociously looking Zebra Bernd: "The Left entangled in democratic rules had forgotten that there is something like a politics of desire."

Albert: "They disregarded the many possibilities that in the absolutely over-productive society of the time appeared on the horizon. One of them is seduction and the state of being an accomplice in the production of desire."

"That's a big concept: the production of desire," Bernd continues. "It mainly takes place at moments in which mass access to the means of production is possible. And increased productivity, in combination with the trend of falling profit rates and its dumping methods, repeatedly makes the means of desire production available: punk fanzines through photocopiers or electronic music in studio quality on a PC one can purchase for a maximum of 3,000 DM. So the production of desire has been on the agenda since then."

Albert: "I find it logical that, at the time, magicians, jugglers, show masters or entertainers came to their minds when they tried to describe their self-understanding. You, the Alba, had written a text on the end of repressive tolerance, since at the turn of the century the systems no longer needed to provide evidence of their liberality, the flimsiness of which was evident in face of the ban on employing teachers considered to be radical, the bugging operations and the emergency laws – a stage that was upheld for just one show or a single season. But it was enough for the game which for the reason of wanting to be played doesn't care much about legitimizations."

Since the lie was then superfluous in this society and simply abolished, the stage no longer sufficed even for the feigned truth discourses and tragedies; we instead carried the illusoriness around in our own person, our own body and our own conditions.

Precociously looking Zebra Bernd: "If they were at a point of fully integrated capitalism at the time, which spread not only to the last corners of the world but endeavoured to advance into the last corners of subjectivity where both disintegrate in abstract dancing commodity values, then this was naturally also released as a symbolic field that could be occupied in all directions." Bernd dilates his nostrils and his gaze turns glassy. "What we thought about against this background was the question of how what with Benjamin can be described as materialistic philosophy can be transferred to artistic production. In my view, Benjamin sought to develop a materialistic philosophy in which cognition was to directly arise from the material (of the culture industry), that is, through the unexpected juxtaposition of the material. If reality in capitalism crumbles to abstract figures, then Benjamin counters this abstractness on the level of philosophy. Philosophy responds stating that the world disintegrates into symbolically readable products: to read, read, read everyday life, to speak with the material. That comes close – and he knew this – to artistic methods such as Surrealism, Dada, montage. And that's an ambition I would like to develop – to do art in this materialistic manner."

"Great, the way he just said it again," Albert is proud of his smart friend Bernd, who now places his hoof on the windowsill preparing to recapitulate the conversation. THE DOG WHO SECRETLY SMOKES A PIPE stretches and leaves the room.

Virginia Craven

Dear 'Alice Noland',
Mr. Delmont asked us to send you the enclosed letter.
Greetings!

The Brecht and Cruickshank Shnitzel Tavern
Jazz and Rateringhof Cellar/Original Snack and Spaghetti House

+++++ Pizzas we don't understand! +++++

"Hello Albert", the Pizza Subservient for measly5800 £
From each consumed pizza 20 £ are paid into the venerable "Hello-Albert-Greeting-Card-Account"
FGI Pizza, F as in filled, G as in German recipe, and I as in ideal as always 7200 £

All prices incl. service flat rate, inflation charge, VAT.
Price fluctuations of more than +/- 10% stock market index are used to correct the daily price. Trade cards of the fractal economy are valid as currency, unfortunately we must charge a processing fee of 2%.

The spoil-yourself tip in July ... allow yourself something, pizza or spaghetti, it doesn't matter, enjoy being spoilt for choice!
+++++

To
Alice Nolandé
Berlin-Paris-Geneva & Cie

Dear Madame de Nolandé,

When we imagine that the coming year with its three nulls could be a container of possibilities and new beginnings, then it is nevertheless not a neutral period of time. Protruding into it are the loops of the contemporary weaves of meaning, the steps at its entrance are steep and slippery from the soap of the system surfers.

That was no different around 10 years ago, and for the beginning of the F-Space you mentioned it was necessary that it placed itself as an empty space at the peak of the rubble tip of time. However, this relatively simple assertion then resulted in numerous things: a strong interest in those layers of the rubbish heap that were hidden by the top crust of what had just been declared rubbish and not yet perished in the general canon of historiography. The "connectibility" and "exchange" of these explorations with like-minded persons implied a revaluation of the then obsolete values of communication, distribution and the establishment of networks, which are today again catchwords of horror.

Okay, in this regard the undefinedness of such an endeavour was curiosity, the will to change, to have everything (else), everything except tough contemporariness. Then, experiments, archiving instead of producing, the lack of a system, searching for forms and meaning, and occasionally... finding. All were more processes than results, more puberty than diary. My friends wanted to develop the F-Space into a model that can be tested at various places according to the respective conditions.

Was it possible to establish a context for debates in different situations? And in what relationship does this context stand to all other stories of the present? Such a trial is always a political and aesthetic one, it leads to parallel developments and interconnections, to difference, critique and actions.

This all took place at the fringe of the field defined as art. We can also say in a small "autonomous field of cultural self-determination". You notice the quotation marks, you notice that the matter now begins to falter, you notice that a production that took place outside of utilization in terms of content is about to attain a value.

The attractiveness that this marginal context of debate developed implied influx and de-differentiation. The critique of cultural values had created new cultural values. That came as a surprise to us, although it's nothing new. The consequences thus necessitated led to different camps.

I don't want to talk about "success", but precisely those persons received the usual package of money-power-influence who read the catchwords out of the shattered remains of the described scene and sold them. This even rougher de-differentiation embellished the picture of "Corporate Rococo" with a matching and representative frame, on the surface of which the empty peels, mussels and snail shells of the political and aesthetic 'cultures of dissent' are arranged to pleasing ornaments. The rich marquetry served to adorn the locations, it is a cultural ostentation in international competition that along with the reduction of public welfare is meant to attract global investors. For it is not the invasion but the retreat, the absence of investors that the nation-state deems a threat. The 'creative' curators are the masters of ceremony. With culture as a bait, the entrance of the investors is accompanied by the cheerleaders of the art business.

Okay, you know that yourself. But is an outside conceivable that – should it possess much sought-after resources or new inventions – would not be utilized? So if we presume that nothing is initially possible outside this theatre of utilization (?)... then I think we can and must continue to switch between the auditorium and the stage and to play along, if necessary, in different roles and masks in order to give the play a different direction.

A few years ago, a friend constructed a parallel to this development briefly described above in an exhibition in Cologne.

The pretext was the *Gründerjahre* and the Fin de Siècle around 100 years ago that, similar to the 1980s and 90s, marked a deeply reactionary and cultural-bourgeois era.

The nationalist bourgeoisie celebrated a young emperor and the industrial and economic success of his colonial policies. Against this background, the German feuilletons constructed the artist image "Richard Wagner" as King Ludwig's court artist and master of a nouveau riche, educated bourgeoisie.

They shared a common cause, subjects were meaningless, production was collective, and the "product" was the quality of exchange that shaped this community.

After the failed revolution, idealism again strove for the artwork that was to be a container for all philosophical, political and aesthetic qualities. The aura was now no longer attributed to the progressive community but to the subject and the artwork he created. Its fate is described above.

But back to the exhibition. Several stages and pictures were on display, the viewer could develop different perspectives on diverse theatre models; one could stand on a stage in the gallery space and grasp through observation, and was thus also an actor in the play of constructing meanings and artist images. In the side room there was a protest march against this play, half hidden behind a curtain.

For the sake of simplicity, I would like to cite one of the last letters of my friend. Since I don't know where he presently is, I presuppose his tacit consent.

Mon cher ami,

It's 6 o'clock in the morning and I can no longer sleep, the day has finally come!!

The exhibition is like a fine, sharply cut crystal with shining surfaces. People won't recognize themselves in it, that's how natural it will come to gaze into this mirror. Only once the image starts jumping and the viewer grasps himself as an actor on this stage, will he perhaps be able to perceive the many perspectives from which he can see the theatre and himself in it.

Certain parts are placed in front of him on different stages: as parody, arabesque, comedy – quite seriously placed and only brought to life by the invitation to recognize his role in what he observes.

Of course, the theme of Wagner provides the surface onto which the entire criticism of the situation in K. can be projected against its historical and cultural background, also to borrow arguments and tools and pretexts for narrations from there. The levels can be easily named: The historical background for the phase of bourgeois culturalization and restoration in which we are presently living and in which we are realizing the role of an artistic avant-garde in a decidedly uncritical manner as regards its aesthetic preferences; accompanied by a journalistic-critical apparatus that is ready to affirmatively apply the ideas, theories and 'political' conceptions it has read about to this innovative-conservative art.

The game is open and, for me, a nice exit to artistic nothingness and anywhere, because solutions were found in this exhibition that lead further away from this narrow traditionalistic understand of art, and art laughs at itself, itself.

Please come if you can find the time, even if its after the opening. I'm looking forward to your opinion!

Adieu, my dear friend!

S. D.

The letter makes me sad, and I would like to add a few words on the reception of the exhibition.

Who likes to see himself confronted with the realism of a shaving mirror? And who likes to see himself as an actor in a play in which one is in the end nothing more than an ornament of power?

The show's intention was to propose to the former friends a critical assessment of their own position in the art business. But that did not take place. Instead there was secret outrage and embarrassing whispers behind the back of the artist and silence. The going-away present for the former fellow travellers of a common cause was not unpacked.

You would like more details? Here I must disappoint you. The first fireworks and firecrackers are already to be heard, I must hurry.

Farewell,

W. v. D.

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