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Who Makes the Nazis? – Sven Lütticken (EN)

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/76/69408/who-makes-the-nazis/>

Zwischen Hperkultur und Kulturessenzialismus – Andreas Reckwitz (DE)
<https://soziopolis.de/beobachten/kultur/artikel/zwischen-hyperkultur-und-kulturessenzialismus/>

Seit ein paar Jahren konturiert sich um das Magazin *Muss sterben* und die Münchner Gruppe *No Future Komplex* eine Haltung. Und ich meine jetzt wirklich Haltung, nicht Marke, Position oder was sich Künstler sonst so zulegen und in ihre Lebensläufe hacken. Mit dieser Art Künstler-sein will man eh nichts zu schaffen haben. In einer zusammen getackerten Magazincollage zur letztjährigen Ausstellung *Foutue* im Kunstverein Göttingen erklärt es einer der Protagonisten. Er wolle hier, schreibt er, „eine Person zur Aufführung bringen die zuvorderst auf solche Weise zu schreiben hat, dass es den Lesenden schwer fällt, den Text in Verwandtschaft zu setzen mit dem Kommunikationsdesign des demütigenpräsidenten, des aufgeklärten direktors, des empörten meinungs-konkels, des freundlichen polizisten, des cleveren chefs, des smarten künstlers“. Stattdessen: „Eine Person hinstellen die nicht noch einen tragischen helden in die welt schreibt, sondern sich entscheidet das Komische mit dem Pathetischen zu kombinieren, damit das Eine das Andere immer wieder vom Kopf auf die Füße wirft und andersherum. ein Purzelbaum der immerzu wiederholt: es wird nicht weggegangen. es geht nicht schnell genug. ich weiß, was wir letzten Sommer getan haben. ich sehe was wir tun. mir soll schlecht sein solange es schlechtes gibt.“ (sic!)

Nun wird man sich vermutlich mit den meisten, die über Kunst reden, einig darüber, dass gerade viel Schlechtes ist. Es ist mittlerweile Konsens, dass die Gegenwart abwärts läuft. Nur ist da nach unten für Stephan Janitzky, Mitra Wakil und Sebastian Stein, der in Hannover mittlerweile das *Ruine Headquarter* betreibt, kaum noch Luft. Wenn man sie fragt, leben wir längst in der schlechtesten aller Welten. Es ist aus, alles ruiniert, alles tot und was noch zuckt, *muss sterben*. Kulturpessimismus ist ihnen keine schaurige Beschwörung, die sich Konservative zu torfigem Whiskey zuraunen, sondern produktiver Ist-Zustand. Schließlich ist nichts mehr da, was noch zu retten wäre. Und das, so die Idee, macht Platz, die Dinge anders zu denken. Wer nichts retten muss, kann neu anfangen, kann improvisieren, herumwurschteln, ausbaldorn und entwerfen – auch ohne einen Masterplan zur Rettung der Welt (resp. Kunst). Man setzt nicht auf den großen, alternativen Gesellschaftsentwurf, sondern auf viele kleine Neuanfänge im Humus modriger Restbestände.

Der Ansatz ist durchdachter, als ich es hier zusammenstauche und ein Befreiungsschlag, nicht nur für notorische Pessimisten. Wer mit Verstand strauchelt nicht gerade, um sich schlagend auf der Suche nach Haltegriffen, Glaubenssätzen und Wegen aus der Panikspirale? Zugleich sträubt sich etwas in mir, den Patienten bereits für tot zu erklären. In den Zusammenhängen, in denen ich mich bewege und so etwas

wie Kunst oder ihre Kritik verzapfe, ging und geht es eher um lebenserhaltende Maßnahmen. Zwar glaubte auch in den Anfängen der Galerie BRD oder beim *Donnerstag* niemand an eine spektakuläre Wiederbelebung und große Neuentwürfe – die um den *Intercity* Herumwuselnden wohl genauso wenig. Der Umgang mit dem allgemeinen Schlamassel war und ist dennoch ein anderer.

Vielleicht lässt sich „unser“ Pragmatismus – „unser“ Trotzdem – mit der Arbeit an und in einer Ruine vergleichen, in die Stützpfeiler und ein paar zusätzliche Balken eingezogen wurden. Im Ganzen alles andere als ansehnlich, aber vielleicht sind ein oder zwei Zimmer bereits einigermaßen renoviert. Leitungen wurden überbrückt, bestehende Zugänge behelfsmäßig gesichert und vergammelte Isolations-schichten ausgetauscht; manches wurde ersetzt, anderes verworfen, aber selbst das vom Gedanken getragen, „am Gebilde noch durch Abbruch zu bauen“ (Walter Benjamin). Und dass der Schuppen hinten schon wieder halb eingestürzt ist – erstmal ignorieren, bloß nicht in Panik verfallen. Es geht dabei nicht um Restauration, aber dem neoliberalen Neubau trauen wir genauso wenig – auch wenn sie in leuchtenden Buchstaben „Zukunft“ draufgeschrieben haben.

Folgt man diesem Bild, hätten Janitzky, Stein und Wakil die Ruine wiederum längst verlassen und an ihrer statt einfach eine provisorische Zeltstadt im Hinterhof errichtet. Von Weitem erschiene sie vielleicht ein bisschen anarchisch-hippiemäßig, würde aber in ihrer Konsequenz und Widerstandsfähigkeit durchaus Argumente auf ihre Seite ziehen.

Ich muss die Metapher leider noch ein bisschen strapazieren, um einen weiteren Unterschied deutlich zu machen. Denn für was steht die Ruine? Sie könnte für einen kaputten Staat stehen, für ein kaputtes Verständnis von Demokratie, für bröckelnde Ideale und defekte Selbstverständlichkeiten – und natürlich auch für eine Idee von Kunst, deren Wirklichkeit sich vielerorts abgenutzt hat bis zur Unkenntlichkeit. Mir fehlt allerdings schlichtweg die Vorstellungskraft, dass sich irgendetwas von dem, so kaputt und falsch es auch gebaut ist, auf absehbare Zeit wieder in einem gesellschaftlich relevanten Umfang neu implementieren ließe. Mir geht an *dieser* Stelle derzeit der Optimismus ab, einfach, weil ich sehe, wie gut und perfide die Gegner aufgerüstet haben – in politischer, in sozialer wie auch in kultureller Hinsicht. Und ich glaube tatsächlich, dass die Reste von zum Beispiel Rechtsstaatlichkeit immer noch mehr schützen als bedrohen. In meiner kümmerlichen Fantasie zeitigt alles, was an ihre Stelle treten würde, noch mehr Gewalt und Elend. Gut, das ist entweder krisengeschüttelter Realismus oder einfach nicht sehr kühn gedacht – ich weiß es ja auch nicht. Jedenfalls ist es ein Hintergrund, vor dem nochmal aufregender war, parallel zu Janitzky 03

und Stein eine Ausstellung in Nürnberg zu machen. Die Beiden nannten ihre im Zumikon *Release* und eröffneten einen Tag vor *Der Mensch in der Revolte*, die ich zusammen mit mit Jonas Roßmeißl, Aleen Solari, Andrzej Steinbach und Felix Thiele im Neuen Museum realisierte.* Schon in den Tagen des Aufbaus konnte man die Effekte der unterschiedlichen Herangehensweisen zählen. Während wir uns mit dem Neuen Museum den klassischeren Rahmen, aber eben auch den klassischen Apparat gewählt hatten und uns mit diesem alsbald in den üblichen bürokratischen Kleinkriegen um Aufbauzeiten, Materialabnutzung, Lautstärke und Brandschutz befanden, schienen Janitzky und Stein mit der Wahl ihres eigenwilligeren und nur über ein Restaurant zu erreichenden Ausstellungsorts bereits alles richtig gemacht zu haben. Stets waren die beiden entspannt, genossen beste kulinarische Verpflegung während sich ihre Ausstellungsidee und ihre Ausstellungsobjekte vor Ort erst langsam zusammen zu setzen schienen. Wir dagegen kämpften mit allen erdenklichen Widrigkeiten, die sich unseren *vorgefassten* Themen, Plänen und Entwürfen in den Weg stellten – schlechtes Essen, Bluthochdruck usw. Überdeutlich, dass wir die Unwägbarkeiten und Uneindeutigkeiten lieber gerahmt und an ihrem Platz sehen wollten, nämlich *in* den Arbeiten, wohingegen die Praxis von Stein und Janitzky sie gewissermaßen als Co-Autoren willkommen heißen. Deshalb erscheint ihnen das Museum, an das sie vermutlich eh nicht mehr glauben, als Ort auch viel weniger interessant als eine seltsame, sich über zwei Etagen erstreckende Herausforderung in einem Restaurant. Die beschriebene Haltung verschafft ihnen schon im Vorfeld von Ausstellungen andere Freiheiten und auch eine andere Adaptivität im Umgang mit den gegenseitigen Zumutungen, zu denen die allgemeine Prekarisierung die Akteure des Kunstfelds einlädt. Es scheint für sie keine Notwendigkeit zu geben, genau *das* Material genau an *der* Stelle zu genau *diesen* Bedingungen zu benutzen. Bevor man sich verbiegt, knetet man lieber am Entwurf. Es ist ein Pragmatismus, der an einer anderen Stelle waltet, als in meiner oder unserer Praxis, weil er von anderen Prioritäten ausgeht und entsprechend andere Widerstände produziert. Eine Zeltstadt schützt gegen bestimmten Widrigkeiten weitaus zuverlässiger als eine Ruine, die ihren Gästen mitunter suggeriert, ein stabiles Haus zu sein.

Das Provisorische zieht sich als Strategie durch die gesamte Praxis von Janitzky und Stein und war auch das Augenscheinlichste, wenn man ihre Nürnberger Ausstellung betrat. Vielleicht hatte man von einem der Künstler zuvor sogar noch eine „Freedom Scarf“ überreicht bekommen, eine aus Draht, Anglerperlen und Elektronikresten gefertigte Kette, zu der einem während einer Art Eröffnungsritual außerdem ob-skure Zucker-Drops gereicht wurden. Das ist der

Mood, auf den sie ihr Publikum einsworen: Dies ist ein Spiel, aber bitte nicht lachen. Dies ist Kunst, aber bitte nicht ernst nehmen. Bleib mal kurz in diesem Dazwischen und mach dich auf ein paar Merkwürdigkeiten gefasst... Der ganze Auftritt verweigerte bewusst jede Theatralik, da gab es niemanden, der rumschrie, der John-Bock-mäßig aufdrehte oder irgendwie den Modus wechselte. Aber auch das lächerliche Moment wurde nicht wirklich fokussiert. Da waren nur diese zwei Typen, die dir so eine eigenartige Kette umhängen wollten und es dabei tatsächlich irgendwie schafften „das Komische mit dem Pathetischen zu kombinieren“.

In der oberen der zwei Etagen standen zwei Skulpturen, wobei es Janitzky und Stein vermutlich lieber wäre, man spräche einfach von zwei seltsamen „Dingen“. Schließlich hat man kein großes Interesse am Rucksack der Kunst (an todgeweihten Institutionen, Geschichten, Begriffen), man braucht sie vielmehr als Leerstelle, als möglichst unbefangene Möglichkeit. Eines der namenlosen Dinge hatte Ähnlichkeit mit einem Katzenbaum: ein Holzpfeiler, aus dem Rohre, Stangen und Äste ragten. Das daneben hatte eher etwas von einem Gerüst, an dem allerlei Schnüre, Ketten und Taue eine kleine Plastikkiste und ein Regalbrett hielten, auf dem wiederum eine Topfpflanze balancierte. Eine der Stangen hielt außerdem ein Fotovoltaik-Modul, wie sie in der ganzen Ausstellung immer wieder mal auftauchten, offenbar ohne technischen Nutzen – entweder waren sie unverkabelt oder ihre blau und rot ummantelten Drähte führten ins Leere.

In der unteren Etage durchkreuzte eine mit Tauen gespannte und gebatigte Stoffbahn den Raum. Ein Überbleibsel aus der Göttinger Ausstellung von *No Future Komplex*, in der sämtliche Räume damit zugestellt waren. Auf dem Boden lag ein Teppich aus PVC-Folien, Reflektorstoffen und Aufklebern, der an den Seiten ausfranst. An der Wand lehrende LED-Kacheln tauchten den Raum in unterschiedliche Farben. In einer Ecke stand ein Tisch mit Materialien, die hier titelgebend „released“ wurden. Zwei Poster zum Beispiel – eines zeigte ein erlegtes Wildschwein, an anderes ein mikroskopisches Bärtierchen, das zu fliegen schien. Auf einem Sticker, den man wie alles andere auf dem Tisch einstecken und verbreiten sollte, stand „The System Is Down“, kombiniert mit dem Wi-Fi-Logo – ein Link zur ebenfalls ausgelegten neuen Ausgabe des Magazins: *Wi-Fi muss sterben*. Im diesem Heft gibt es unter anderem den Reprint eines Texts, der 2011 unter dem Eindruck der damaligen London Riots geschrieben wurde. Es ist eines der Formate des ansonsten relativ frei schwebenden Magazins, dass es ältere Texte von ihren eigenen Autoren neu bewerten und ergänzen lässt. Deshalb schreibt Hans-Christian Dany jetzt erneut über Riots, nun auch unter Einbeziehung der Auseinandersetzungen während des Hamburger 04

G20-Gipfels, deren abgenutzten Bildern er viel weniger abgewinnen kann als den damaligen Londoner Plünderungen. Am Schluss seines sehr empfehlenswerten Essays ein Hoffnungsschimmer: „Der 24-Stunden-Tag des Kapitals, die Totalität seiner Präsenz, ist ein Mythos, der heute an jeder Universität gelehrt wird und von jeder bürgerlichen Tageszeitung ständig wiederholt wird, damit alle an ihn glauben und der Alptraum normalisiert wird. Man muss nicht 24/7 für sich werben und seine Existenz als Identität beweisen. Leben muss nicht total erfasst und im andauernden Selbstbeweis gelebt werden, es gibt eine Fülle an möglichen Fluchtwegen, das System hat blinde Flecken.“

In ihrer multiplen Verweigerungshaltung scheint die Kunst von Janitzky, Stein und Wakil ein ebensolcher Fluchtweg zu sein. Wie weit man ihm folgen kann, damit werden Betrachterinnen und Betrachter wie selbstverständlich allein gelassen. Und an der Stelle kann die Arbeitsteilung der Künstler durchaus frustrieren. In ihren Publikationen und Workshops, deren Formate sie zwar auch offen halten und zuweilen ins Absurde drehen, bleiben immer Ein- und

Ausgänge zu Erfahrungswelten, Zusammenhängen und Diskursen, die transformiert, umgeschrieben und entwickelt werden wollen. Demgegenüber erhält ihre Kunst eher die Rolle eines abstrakten Aliens, das Betrachtern ohne Star-Trek-In-Ear-Übersetzer unverständliches Zeug erzählt. Sie ist immer Möglichkeit und Unmöglichkeit zugleich. Man muss das brabbelnde Alien umarmen, um zu gewinnen. Dass man sich dabei ein bisschen kindisch vorkommt, wäre nach Janitzky, Stein und Wakil wohl die verdiente Strafe für jene, die immerzu nach Sinnzusammenhängen suchen und krampfhaft an einer Erwachsenenwelt festhalten, die längst zusammengebrochen ist.

*Stephan Janitzky und Sebastian Stein: *Release*, vom 23. Februar bis 6. Mai 2018 im Zumikon Nürnberg und Jonas Roßmeißl, Aleen Solari, Andrzej Steinbach, Felix Thiele, Steffen Zillig: *Der Mensch in der Revolte*, vom 24. Februar bis 25. März 2018 im Neuen Museum Nürnberg. ■

► Eurogruppe: In your contribution „Artwashing: NRx and the Alt-Right“ to *Texte zur Kunst* (No. 106) you outline how specific forms of accelerationism and cyberliberalism based on the philosophy of Nick Land linked with the alt-right movement in 2016. At the same time you register a strategic interest in circulating these ideologies in the context of art. In particular, you sense that art exhibited under the label „post-internet“ is prone to ideology: with its blend of New Age esoterica and cyber-dystopia, „post-internet“ would be a fertile supplier of images for the alt-right. What exactly is the problem with this art?

► Ana Teixeira Pinto: The term „useful idiots“ was employed by Megan Nolan in her article for *The Baffler*, and does not reflect my opinion (though, in general, I agree with Nolan’s analyses). I also would not say that post-internet is a „fertile supplier of images for the alt-right.“ If anything it’s the other way around: post-internet oftentimes mines alt-right iconography. Whether this appropriation results in affirmation or critic is what I find worth debating: in my view post-internet is a naturalistic, hence affirmational style. That said: iconography does not play a central role here, the overlap between NRx and post-internet happens via their shared cyber-libertarian leanings. Millennials, in particular, are nudged to align their identities with startups and social media platforms (much as their parents did with the American Dream or with upward mobility) and to misrecognize its entrepreneurial modes of subjectivity as evidence of freedom and autonomy, because the survival of capitalism hinges on digital tech. AI took over Wall Street in in-flight magazines as the new capitalist frontier: the only fast growing sector in the economy and the sole compelling attempt to project another phase of capitalist accumulation beyond the – already exhausted – neoliberal one. But the digital economy changes the processes through which technology is accumulated as capital, and the resulting class relation is at odds with the reproduction of social life, at least as we currently organize it. Having private companies as the sole providers of essential public services implies a fundamental division between haves and have nots, the winners (allegedly the digital natives) and losers of the digital turn. Cyber-libertarianism opens a toxic conduit between the resulting social anxiety and the crypto fascist fantasies of the alt-right:

a) „Meritocratic“ doctrines tend to bleed into out-right racism (if you believe everything you have was gained through merit rather than accumulated privilege the reverse also holds true: those who fail economically must be unmeritorious; once you extrapolate that rule to the global stage you end up saying, like the neoreactionaries do, that Africa is underdeveloped because of their cultural failings).

b) The gov-corp model championed by cyberlibertarians is the Trump doctrine, basically a supras-structural form of fascism.

The alignment of futurity with technology also has a racial dimension, the Documenta for instance was disparaged for not being „contemporary,“ that is, for not displaying enough works that make usage of digital technology or refer to social media, a criticism which basically devalues the experiences of non-whites as anachronistic and passé. Hence the “problem“ with post-internet: it is the style through which chauvinistic epistemes accrue cultural capital, and by extension, economic value.

► Eurogruppe: To challenge movements like alt-right in the US and identitarianism in Europe, you call for more political organization. By contrast, today the art world is largely defined by discourse and symbolic gestures. How could this resistance be organized, also with regard to questions of aesthetic practice?

► Ana Teixeira Pinto: The AfD does not have an aesthetics, nor does it align itself with futurity or technology. Marc Jongen, unlike Nick Land, is not a cult figure in the art-world even though their views are strikingly similar. That said, these movements are now networked into a „fascist internationale“ (their term, not mine) so maybe this point is moot. At any rate, we need more political literacy: its not defensible to circulate a certain jargon without properly qualifying it because it lends it a legitimacy it should not have. This does not concern the art-world solely but the art-world is very vulnerable because transgression is a genre, and „the devil’s advocate“ a socially sanctioned artistic persona. At the same time criticism is pathologized and rendered illegitimate, particularly when it comes to teasing out the ideological implications of certain tropes or idioms. What can be done? Aesthetically speaking I think it’s fundamental to not to confuse transhumanism (technologically enhanced male fantasies about immortality or omnipotence) with post-humanism (the attempt to expand subjectivity beyond the human). Some artists like Zach Blas, Johannes Paul Raether or Melanie Gilligan for instance are able to depart from digital naturalism brilliantly, so I am not concerned about contemporary art per se...

But to answer your question directly: You are conflating two different meanings of the word „organization.“ I said that in order to counter a political movement one has to organize oneself politically, and that no-platform is a legitimate political tool, but that does not imply one has to form a formal „organization“ in the sense of an institution or party; not that I am against formal „organizations“ but I don’t think it makes sense to ask in such abstract terms how would such an „organization“ concretely look. ■

This present, at least, is over. I mean the contemporariness of contemporary art, or what that has been taken to mean in the past ten years. It looks emaciated; or maybe it has just gotten old. The art world is headed for its well-deserved next grand crisis. Governments are shrinking culture budgets, corporations are paring down sponsorship programs, and while the major galleries are cutting staff, the field behind them is being thinned out by the fight for survival among the small and medium-size ones. The current sense of insecurity speaks from the securities being put on display: just as the Italian central bank recently circulated photographs of its gold reserves, galleries now showcase their non-contemporary assets. In a parallel development, the likelihood of contemporary exhibitions that take a less slickly practiced approach, that are maybe a bit odd, ambiguous, incautious, and unexpected, is growing.

I can hardly wait. Contemporary art had gotten caught up in its own repetitive loops. Most people contented themselves with listless reconstructions of things that had been seen before – with a dash now of folklore, now of activism: creative stagnation that made up for its lack of actual forward motion by coquettishly waving the banner of social progress. Relevance was a matter solely of the subject matters. The messages, typically simple, political, educational, increasingly eclipsed what art might have grappled with beyond them or on its own terms. In retrospect, one might label the phenomenon “educational art.” The phrase would refer not to a specific style, but rather to a certain lack of interest in form and the history of form. Primarily, however, “educational art” would designate the didactic self-image that dominated contemporary art and its dissemination in recent years: every exhibition needed a teaching plan – which would be laid out in ever-expanding wall labels next to works that no longer be required to stand up for themselves.

It remains to be seen whether contemporary art will recover, and if it does, how. But before I roll out the carpet for the crises of the next present, I want to use this opportunity to give the one that’s passing away a proper send-off. I lived through it as an artist, critic, exhibition organizer, and staffer at German art universities. My appointments were temporary; my financial situation, unstable; the careers and future prospects, precarious. That’s pretty par for the course in the field, so I’m not complaining, just answering a question before you even ask: Do I really think that I, from my limited vantage point, can write a persuasive farewell speech to ten years of evolving art history? No, I don’t. But someone’s got to start somewhere ...

The best place to start is with what came before:

the decade the Belgian historian Anton Jäger has called “postpolitical.” He means the long 1990s, when people found postpolitical happiness, for example, in gunning through the industrial society’s ruins from Manchester to Berlin at 125 BPM and exploring the tender effects of MDMA. “Suddenly everybody felt that there was this utopia that was very real, and you could actually live this utopian dream,” Wolfgang Tillmans, an exemplary artist of the period, is on record as saying. The example in literature is Michel Houellebecq, who represents the flipside of the coin: Houellebecq-style depressive nihilism, Jäger argues, favored the period’s decline of political engagement in parties, civic associations, trade unions, or churches just as much as Tillmanian hedonistic naïveté did.¹

Yet the art of the 1990s, not unlike the decade’s youth culture (techno, after all, was just one of many, and not even the biggest one), has other stories to tell as well. The story, for one, of an extraordinarily politicized scene whose grassroots-organized project spaces popped up in empty storefronts and derelict industrial compounds in the wake of the crisis that hit the art market around 1991; and the story, too, of a criticism whose authors filled the pages of art journals, city magazines, and hand-stapled fanzines across the German-speaking countries with impassioned debates over how to write the histories they teased from the art on view. Where this arena of conflict still spawned divergent scenes, the waves of outrage generated by educational art aimed at conformity. For the latter, in its peculiar “fusion of privatized self-representation and political enthusiasm,” was all about “hyperpolitics” – Jäger’s term for the largely affect-driven re-politicization that to this day has not ebbed yet has done little to change the low level of institutional participation.²

The waning years of the postpolitical era, in particular, established vital prerequisites for the shift toward educational art. The dawn of the new millennium not only brought an unprecedented boom in the art market; more generally, it saw the emergence of a new cultural constellation. Its archetype was the hipster, who tapped the repertoire of aging subcultures for his style, but without adopting the rigor of their symbolic orders.³ The subcultures were increasingly devoted to the preservation of their traditions and customs, which made the nonchalant sense of entitlement with which the hipster helped himself to what he could use look all the fresher. That’s how he sauntered into the art world, too, and ran into ever more of his peers at trendy openings. When I enrolled in art school, in 2005, he was certainly already on the scene. For 2004, he is attested in an interview in which Mike Kelley railed against younger colleagues who would rather be pop stars: “fucking hipsters” who gave their pathetic neo-Pop Art a subcultural veneer 07

but no longer even tried to venture outside the culture, which might mean running the risk of making themselves look ridiculous.⁴ In 2007, Steve Jobs brought the first iPhone to market; the hipster had vanquished the nerd (and the Open-Source idea with him). Now art, too, was supposed to do both: look cool *and* think big. It became easy and expansive, like it was meant for double-page spreads in inflight magazines; it was made in sprawling open-plan studios that positively begged to be photographed for home-tour features in architecture magazines. The old factory floors filled with small-to-medium-sized art businesses, which paid considerably higher rents than the cash-strapped project spaces and techno clubs of the 1990s. Even the auction houses eventually got in on the contemporary art action, which removed the last lingering doubt: “big art” needed “big names.” Its handy directory was a trilingual illustrated volume produced by Taschen-Verlag: *Art Now – Artists at the Rise of the New Millennium*. In contrast with earlier books that had served a similar purpose, it made no effort to contextualize the current scenes, questions, or stylistic tendencies. The new discursive order consisted of names that everyone who wanted to be part of this novel fun activity called “contemporary art” needed to memorize. Each “position” (a common euphemism for branding in the art industry) had its own little story to tell, at most loosely connected to an art history whose movable pieces it quoted without even pretending to try and add a new chapter to it.

The artists of the hipster era did not form groups or scenes. Nor were they outsiders anymore; they were the high-priced equivalents of a newly minted consumer product category: “premium mediocre.”⁵ The enormous diversity and innovative energy of the old subcultures they tapped was a product of the strict boundaries these subcultures enforced against one another and, signally, against the importunate demands of a mainstream that felt zombified. Yet the 2000s also saw something being pulled off that went beyond the usual commercial cooptation of subculture: the near-complete commercialization and domestication of such secessionist impulses from the instant they first stirred. The Web 2.0 and the platform economy would eventually refine the marketing of individually curated lifestyles to even greater perfection. In that sense, the hipsters were the analog vanguard of those digital prosumers whose consumption now churns out forever new, because “personalized,” remixes of the same old shit. In their cultivation of conformity framed as individuality, they perpetuated the hipster credo of yore: be different, but stay compatible.⁶ The art world was fully on to how that worked; its protagonists had stormed Facebook’s gates by the time it became a mass phenomenon. It was just tailor-made for all the lifestyle and curriculum-vitae optimizers who had

flocked to the party that was art in the 2000s.

And everyone seemed to be profiting from the favorable exchange rate for symbolic capital. The discursive laissez-faire of those years drunk on their own success kept loosening the bonds that tied contemporary art to classical education and being in the know, which was in any case seen, and not altogether unfairly, as an instrument of educated-middle-class protectionism. Over time, though, the distrust of the canon was extended to any attempt at aesthetic and qualitative nuance in talking about art. This shift initially went largely unnoticed because much of the scene simply didn’t care for what passed for discourse beyond gossip and business talk. But by the time the “big names” started deflating because reports of commercial success grew scarce as the financial crisis set in, the party had left so much discursive vacancy that the post-internet art that appeared on the screen that year probably could not but fizzle out as a fad. In the exhibition *Speculations on Anonymous Materials*, it at least achieved a final momentum of form: it laid out a “world” at the Fridericianum in Kassel whose internal interconnections and external linkages were aesthetically obvious without being named as such or fully narratively articulated.⁷ As critics, we were strict (too strict, perhaps). We took umbrage at the concupiscence of an art that wanted to get into bed with technology without getting naked.⁸ As an artist, though, I thought: now here, at long last, is a proposal that’s worth arguing over!

Only the art world itself had lost the capacity to respond with anything other than unconditional affirmation. For the productive dynamics of boundary enforcement and a more or less autonomous negotiation over what is art or what distinguishes good from bad art had long been supplanted by a tendency to take vague guidance from other cultural fields (first the subcultures, later fashion or, now, technology), whose invocation in art had to serve as evidence that one had kept pace with the times. Like the hipster, the art of his era wanted to be different yet compatible with the eternal present out there. The American art critic Sean Tatol recently gave an apt summary of the post-internet apologists’ recipe: “All you had to do was post the stupidest picture you could think of on Instagram, find the newest Soundcloud rapper, wear clothes that shouldn’t go together, do some drugs, etc., and you were just about set. Our cultural consciousness,” he went on, “was breaking apart into a million pieces, and it made for a brief feeding frenzy on detached signifiers as they dissolved [...]”⁹ In retrospect, that looks like the final gasp of the hipster era: cloud rap, ketamine, and Balenciaga substituting for those “dissolving signifiers” that the 2000s had extracted from analog subculture. In 2016, DIS’s Berlin Biennale brought down the curtain on it.

The dilemma faced by an art so thoroughly calibrated to meet the current vibe is obvious: instead of doing its thing ahead of or next to the present, it is forever busy trying to catch up with it. When the commercial interest waned and contemporary art lost plausibility as an innovation engine for the creative class, it urgently needed new arguments; that would be a first proposed explanation for the pervasive success of the educational art that rose in its stead: rather than economic effects, it promised beneficent ones – primarily, to turn (or educate) its beholders into better humans. If that sounded too heavy-handed, you dressed up the education as “sensitization,” the learning as “unlearning,” and the better humans as the “new perspectives” that opened up before their eyes. Educational art was able to draw on an entire arsenal of rhetorical superpowers. If you invoked them insistently enough, you soon found yourself tempted to believe that even the most fatuous work “shattered toxic structures,” “empowered marginalized perspectives,” “deconstructed gender roles,” “healed historical traumas,” “decolonized social patterns of thinking,” etc., etc. Art had not been in demand as a source of problems before, and so it was not a big step now to hailing it as “part of the solution.”

For the art world itself, this shift also served to stabilize a framework of meaning that it was no longer able to articulate under its own steam. And how could it have? The art criticism that lived online was a shadow of its erstwhile printed self, and as its object no longer elicited serious engagement, people’s self-assurance became shaky. The party was over, so was the era of record auction results, and other forms of societal recognition were needed. The promise of educational art conveniently matched a shift in the practice of distinction within the academic middle class toward what the sociologist Eva Illouz has portrayed as a new formation of symbolic capital she calls “moral capital.”¹⁰ In this formation, the mere performance of a specific, axiomatically posited body of knowledge is evidence of superior moral standing and the attendant social status. In this way, what educational art misconstrued as “political” so as to peddle it as “political” salvaged the cultural business of social distinction: where art had put a fine sense of taste on display, it now dressed its shopwindows with its moral sensitivity.

Initially, this was mostly about a fairly nonchalant combination of fashionable cool with shallow ambitions to make the world a better place. The same was true outside art: the politster who succeeded the hipster in the early 2010s related to politics as the hipster had related to the subculture. He was somehow political as the hipster had been somehow hip, without letting any consistent frame of reference constrain him. He also adopted his predecessor’s attitude of entitlement. As the hipster had ransacked

the dusty relics of the subculture, the politster helped himself to bits and pieces from the social movements of earlier decades. “The Future Is Female,” that was the kind of slogan whose history you didn’t need to know anything about to flaunt it on a T-shirt in 2015. Like the hipster, the politster had no experience whatsoever of the distinctive cultural logic of conspiring against the cultural mainstream that might have at least eroded the divisions between different backgrounds. He kept to his own kind, which is to say, he never ventured beyond the academic milieu. A jute bag saying “There is no Planet B,” after all, was not a provocation against his parents – on the contrary, it earned him an A+. Adolescents accordingly sought distinction not by setting themselves apart from their peers but by directing their ire against other milieus: upward, against evil billionaires; downward, against a petty bourgeoisie vaguely associated with right-wing politics, whiteness, and toxic masculinity.

As it happened, the shift toward hyperpolitics that commenced at the time politicized all segments of society – often in diametrically opposite ways. In that sense, the rise of right-wing populism was arguably the flipside of the same coin. Shared structural features would include the repetitive narrative format, which made its stories palatable via alarmist opinion channels or cozy feelgood podcasts. They were what made political discourses an unquestioned part of people’s ties to their milieu, putting them in a mental state known as “cognitive ease” in which claims seem plausible regardless of their truth content simply because, thanks to their felt familiarity, they can be thought more quickly. Critical thinking, on the other hand, requires the opposite, an effort to think slowly in response to complexity: what is called “cognitive exertion.”¹¹ Simple and catchy language, pleasing visual presentation, unambiguous emotional cues, and constant repetition – all these favor cognitive ease, and it is easy to see which state social media promote. It took no hard thinking but only a swipe to get from #catcontent to #refugeeswelcome and back. That is how, in the art world as elsewhere, more and more people who would previously have described themselves, without shame, as apolitical now became politicized.

The political identification that educational art offered them was a vaguely left-wing smorgasbord of selective critiques of power with aspirations to global applicability. It frankly helped itself to the substantial groundwork laid by the social subsegment of contemporary art whose self-image as socially critical dated back to the 1990s and had held steady – see above – through the postpolitical party years. Juliane Rebentisch, with reference to Arthur Danto, described it as “interested art” that loaded up on political, cultural, and social knowledge, subverting the Kantian notion of disinterested 09

pleasure.¹² One encountered this interested art at the world's biennials, in the pages of *Texte zur Kunst*, at *Kunstvereine*, and in newly established degree programs in critical or curatorial studies, where it anticipated many of educational art's concerns (identity politics, postcolonialism, questions of gender), but without ideologizing them to the same degree. It had also already devised, and worn out, the rhetoric that credited art with superpowers capable of transforming society and the grant-writing economy to which that rhetoric catered. In that sense, educational art was a win-win deal with the battered commercial faction: the politster brought a breath of fresh air to the slightly musty locales of interested art, while a political discourse in simple language buffed up venues whose hipster clientele had stopped showing up with moral capital and a new framework of meaning. Art students were grateful for the slimmed-down theory curriculum, and *Monopol* was happy to be on the right side of history for a change.

Of course, such fraternization exacted a price. Ai Weiwei and a handful of "global stars" aside, educational art reliably disappointed the market's hopes for new "big names" and international markets. The protagonists of interested art, meanwhile, watched with barely contained anger as people pilfered its buzzwords without paying any particular attention to the history of its discourses: institutional critique, relational and antagonistic aesthetics, the distribution of the sensible, context art, and all the other debates around the interrelation between form and content, art and politics ... It didn't matter much to educational art that the Whitney Biennial had discussed the "Cultural Politics of Identity" as early as 1993, or that postcolonialism had been debated at documenta back in 1997 and had been the central subject of Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11, which, by the way, had also invited visitors to put a halfpipe to use – twenty years later, in the same place, that was touted as a novelty, as was collective creative praxis. Undeclared recycling was educational art's go-to mode, and not just in its formal choices: to cast its educational mission in the most flattering light, it glorified even the most insipid rehash of historic controversial engagements as a "bold shift of perspectives." The sales-boosting aura of the new remained part of the packaging; original aesthetic approaches or contents were few and far between. Even when the political feelgood programming took on an ideological edge and entered a phase defined by the incipient culture war, the art world was playing catch-up with the trend. And although it persuaded itself that it was operating in noble opposition to populism, it replicated populism's polarizing dynamic in positively exemplary fashion: year after year, its denizens recited the same litany of iniquities while issuing each other certificates of moral integrity, successfully outsourcing all ambivalence to absent

parties, to whom they were eventually compelled to ascribe immoral motives – how else to explain why the evil just wouldn't come to an end? Hence the growing urge to put names and faces on those absent parties, to take up the fight and rid the world of misery at long last. This logic was part of the basic arithmetic of demagoguery that history had been through a hundred times before. And it was effective on both ends of the polarization scale: on the right, the "woke agenda" of an irrational elite haunted every sphere of life; on the left, "fascism" dawned in every expression of a right-of-center political view. Once you'd caught on, political alarmism in the face of the adversary ceased to be a nuisance and became a daily thrill. Algorithms knew and still know that and flood your feed with the most polarizing contributions from the other side, whichever side you're on, while only your own side's noblest exponents get to embody its self-image. This basic figuration of "the established and the outsiders" (Norbert Elias) codified both sides' identifications, though this time both projected their adversaries into the establishment position ("mainstream media" and "libtard elites" vs. the "Springer papers" and "white supremacy") so as to put resistance lipstick on the piggish disinhibition of their own authoritarian affects. Either way, the conclusion was unequivocal: it's the others that are the problem!

"The painting must go!", an open letter in March 2017 imperiously demanded, the verbatim repetition of the phrase making for a steady drumbeat between paragraphs oozing with self-righteousness.¹³ The missive marks the ideological turning point in the chronology of educational art, setting the tone for countless open letters that would be the dominant theme of art-world news reporting for the next several years. The reader probably remembers: the painting that needed to "go" was on view at the time at the Whitney Biennial, where it had previously drawn little attention – a highly abstracted painterly adaptation of a well-known photograph showing Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old victim of a racist lynching in Mississippi in 1955. The boy's mother had chosen to have his disfigured body photographed so that the whole world would be able to witness the savagery of the crime. A little over six decades later, a British artist argued in said open letter that the American painter, by virtue of her skin color, had no right to address the boy's suffering in her art and – as she put it – "transmute [it] into profit and fun." However little the writer's own jeremiad and the career boost that followed had anything to do with "profit and fun," though, the ban on the subject she proclaimed did not apply to herself, who identified as Black. "Till was made available to Black people," she was certain, without disclosing who had so made him available. It was the first time that the deeply impressed art world between New York and Berlin got a 10

taste of uncompromising “supercritique” – Illouz’s term for an accusatorial practice that eludes any rational counterargument (and deprives itself of any capacity for self-critique) by disqualifying a priori the reason-based distinction between myth and reality, between signifier and signified, as an instrument of repressive powers.¹⁴ The “truth” of a supercritique – as well as the claim based on it that one is speaking for the oppressed, ensuring one’s escalation dominance – is sustained solely by the performative certainty of the one proffering it.

Now, one might describe the art discourse, too, as a self-referential contest in which both sides are perpetually tempted to gamble the critical distinction between myth and reality in pursuit of escalation dominance. Yet even this game presupposes a distinction between the signifier on display and the signified being asserted, just as it presupposes artists who advance assertions in the first place rather than merely illustrating curatorial theses. In this regard, Hannah Black, an artist in her own right and the open letter’s author, filled a gap: the ideological certainty and authoritarian severity of her demands electrified the news coverage of the affair and catered to a pent-up yearning for conflict that had found no outlet during the harmonious party years. Even so, the most salient quality of the debate she prompted, which bewitched the scene with hot flashes of culture war, was its wretchedness. Countless opinion pieces about “artistic freedom” versus “cultural appropriation” wilted faster than the present; even years later, reading them yields no insight whatsoever.

“Artists who peddle wiggly lines and colors as representing emotion should be run off the streets,” Ad Reinhardt demanded in 1960 without raising a scandal, and his *Thirteen Rules toward a Code of Ethics for Fine Artists* are as entertaining to read now as they were then.¹⁵ If, by comparison, the open letter does not stand up as a piece of writing by an artist, it’s not the rigidity of its refrain (“The painting must go!”) that is to blame but its evasions into a vaguely ideological register, the way it continually chokes up on its own supply, and the lack of any sense of its own position and language, in short: its form. That said, it may at bottom be more fruitful to speculate about the purity of color than about the purity of identity. Black, though, writes about “Black pain” and “Black culture” and the “barbaric realities of racial and gendered violence” that underlie her life in the name of “Black communities in the US and worldwide,” a position she takes for granted. There’s no question that racist and gendered violence was and is barbaric – anywhere in the world. But it remains questionable which cause, or whom, it serves to project American realities onto the rest of the world. There was little to suggest, for example, that she also had in mind the same year’s rapes

of dark-skinned girls in Mali by the lighter-skinned troops of the jihadist coalition. And might it not obfuscating rather than revealing if only members of a summarily globalized “Black community” were licensed to make art about violent realities like these? Supercritique, however, defeats such objections with moral stridency: counterarguments could not but be motivated by sinister intentions. That’s how a considerable part of progressive identity politics’ hard-won social credit came to be gambled away on divisive essentialist show fights.

In the early 1980s, Gayatri Spivak had conceived of “strategic essentialism” as a – that’s right – strategy designed to enable marginalized, subaltern experiences to stand their ground against a hegemonic discursive power that would keep them mute. Her purpose was not to declare identities absolute and make them available for essentialist worldviews.¹⁶ Those who signed up for the higher cause in 2017, by contrast, embraced essentialism the way the fanatic reads scripture: literally. That year, the Trump whisperer Steve Bannon waxed enthusiastic about the growing essentialism of left-wing “identity politics”: “The Democrats ... the longer they talk about identity politics, I got ’em. I want them to talk about racism every day.”¹⁷ After all, the primary achievement of this politics – whatever credit it deserved for raising awareness – was that people were once again being routinely and openly categorized by skin color and gender made a comeback as an essential distinction that was prefixed to polite conversation the way that “Ms.” or “Mrs.” had been. Who could blame young people for compensating for the gray areas that had been squandered by inventing ever new categories? Outside of queer subculture and a few academic enclaves, Generation Z celebrated a stereotypical view of gender unlike anything seen since the 1950s. Even in the liberal art world, non-categorical thinking was soon considered unimaginable or suspected of having cheated on its obligatory privileges check. Hence the doggedness with which people clung to the very identities they persistently claimed to be deconstructing.

“The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx discusses the general perplexity at historic turning points: people seek refuge in superannuated categories and concepts; they squeeze themselves into threadbare uniforms and reenact the battles of the past in an effort to make sense of the present.¹⁸ Educational art dressed itself up in old aesthetic costumes, and that was not the only way in which it was a throwback; the cardboard sword of its increasingly vocal activism owed its symbolic use value to the rampant nostalgia for tales of political heroism – and was accordingly blunt against populist regression and the global comeback

of authoritarianism. Even “Western imperialism” got polished up once more as a political projection screen in which educational art beheld its likeness as a rebel force. While the West’s real-world alliances and the political constellations they had sustained were eroding, educational art – Marx again – “anxiously conjure[d] up the spirits of the past to [its] service.”¹⁹ A newcomer at the costume party of its new old worldview was the “Third World,” now renamed “Global South,” which supplied the required contrast with the evil West. Conveniently, this contrast also made the political realities of countries like China, Russia, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran disappear. They, and places of similar stature, entered the conversation as promising potential locales for new biennials, fairs, or gallery branches – not as objects of critique in the educational art those venues presented. Conditions in the less powerful countries of the “Global South,” too, did not merit study at any level of detail as long as the crude templates of European colonialism and Western imperialism made all iniquities look the same.

None of this had much in common with the critical approaches of postcolonial thinkers like Spivak or Stuart Hall. Their critique of hegemonic power relations was neither one-sided nor ideological. In today’s India, Spivak recently emphasized again in a radio interview, much more violence and inequality have their origins in the millennia-old caste system than in the comparatively short period of British colonial rule. Her greatest concern with respect to India, as well as China and the African continent, was the current resurgence of such traditional power structures and the exploitation and corruption they entailed.²⁰ That does not make colonialism any better or efforts to come to term with its legacy any less relevant. In the framework of German educational art, though, such distortions of reality added to the impression that its fixation on broad-brush antagonisms like Black/white, woman/man, South/West served less to combat global injustice than to uphold its own, fairly Western worldview.

Besides those “others” who were to blame for the misery, this worldview had room for a second category of “others” cast in the part of the immiserated, ideally as the victims of a “Western modernity” with which the protagonists – in a paradoxical blend of hubris and self-abasement – identified. These “good others,” then, were perpetually obliged to question “our” perspectives, to illuminate the dark side of “our” enlightenment or the metaphysical void of “our” modernity, in short: to grant absolution; by the same token, it was stipulated that they needed to remain what they allegedly were: others.

“Spiritual instinct before reason,” the spirit of the times wrote on a wall at the 11th Berlin Biennale, quoting the Chilean filmmaker Francisco Huichaqueo, whose installation evoked relics of South

America’s Mapuche so as to liberate them from their “colonial incarceration” in German museums. The sonic “encounter between his people’s belongings and their ancient song,” the accompanying copy claimed in the period’s characteristic parlance, constituted a “spiritual preparation for their inevitable return to their home, among their people.”²¹ Terms like spirituality, faith, homeland, and people figured with some frequency in the discourse of those years – just not in connection with those who were ashamed of “our” modernity. They assiduously sought to frame “global perspectives” and smartly left the rediscovery and idealization of their own homeland, their people, their faith to their right-wing culture-war competitors, who, for their part, have no need for the “good others” because they are their own favorite victims.

Most protagonists of educational art were at heart well-behaved academics. The figure of the artist had shed its feral reputation; even postcolonial incantations of the “spiritual instinct” rarely rose above conversational volume. The greater the admiration they felt for the next archetypal cultural figure’s disrespect for boundaries and transgressions: the political activist was permitted everything they wouldn’t have tolerated in anyone else. He was allowed to be quick-tempered, blustering, angry, aggressive, and verbally abusive. Not despite but precisely because of his lobbyist-style partisanship, he had come to enjoy greater credibility in the art world than experts or politicians striving to balance diverse interests. Activist’s statements were memorable, maximalist, and livened up the political conferences of biennials and major exhibitions, where people made themselves comfortable with the downfalls of the world under discussion by telling themselves child-friendly story of how everything would be made alright. The contradictions of real-world politics would have been just a distraction. For there was something else the activist had in common with educational art: their business was not in solving political problems, but in lending *expression* to them and wresting symbolic effects from them – another parallel to populism. When it came down to it, the construction or toppling of monuments was more important than changing the conditions being objected to. In this regard, too, Hannah Black had written a model letter in 2017.²² It’s not that real-world politics is conducted in a neutral zone entirely divorced from the symbolic register, but in those hyperpolitical years, the balance between them was completely out of whack.

The culture war was about who wins when everyone loses. For me, another illuminating demonstration of this rule was the discussion initiated by a second open letter in the fall of 2018. Two curators were criticized for not including enough female artists in a group exhibition they had put together in Düsseldorf.²³ Before I withdrew, the show

was going to include a video by me. That, at any rate, was the reason why I followed the ensuing debate on Facebook down to its ugly details. (I don't use social media, so I've rarely had the opportunity.) The exhibition did feature a striking preponderance of male artists: twelve men, two women, and three mixed-gender collectives. However, it was not representative of the previous work of the curators, Alain Bieber and Florian Waldvogel, or the general composition of group exhibitions at the time.²⁴ In any case, the NRW-Forum, with its pop-cultural slant, was not exactly where the art world was happening. Why, then, did people nonetheless single out this exhibition as a textbook example of the "systemic exclusion" of women and of "artistic stances outside the European and North American canon"? Because they could. When it came to sending an "important signal" against "real experiences of sexual and racist marginalization," what felt like a plenary meeting of the German art world, with over 1,200 signatories, was virtually guaranteed.²⁵

What arguably made this a textbook example, though, was the dynamic of the ensuing Facebook debate, in which a circle of active users around the activist, artist, and professor at the Braunschweig University of Art Candice Breitz quickly came together around referring to the two curators only as "bros," "buddies," "guys," or "dudes" with "big white male egos." They worked themselves up into a frenzy of critical mudslinging fueled by the usual alternation between mutual assurances of their own political bravery and further denigration of their adversaries (the evil curators). "Dicks," especially those of said "dudes," played a prominent role and were depicted in numerous variations – it was like you were back in high school, except in this instance, every single one of the participants was a well-established art school teacher, curator, artist, or gallery owner. They delivered their malice with full-throated conviction; again the supercritique principle was in effect, so the temporary activists had carte blanche. One museum director could not resist the temptation to regale everyone with an old photograph of her colleague in a pink suit standing about with six other "buddies" – suggesting, contrary to fact, that he was just then celebrating his opening in Düsseldorf in that getup, a big fat grin plastered over his face.

Waldvogel responded with a pamphlet of about ten pages released just before the exhibition was scheduled to open in which he tried to take a public stand. Except it didn't really matter how and with which arguments he sought to defend a universal feminism against a "bourgeois mainstream feminism." It took less than five minutes for his essay to be knocked down with a single comment, along the lines of: "Yet another guy trying to mansplain feminism to us ..." People also noted that he for his part was now laying into Breitz with everything at his disposal, which

came across as insecure and thin-skinned, as did the artist's riposte: Waldvogel, she wrote, was just hurt; his counterattacks merely demonstrated that he could sense the "impending loss of his privileges." Indeed, nothing was heard from the curator for several years afterwards. Breitz, meanwhile, went on Instagram to thank *Monopol* for her rise in the ranking of the "most influential personalities in the art world" from 83rd to 25th place – and expressed her delight at a little more justice in this world.²⁶

Similar episodes abounded. Double standards became as commonplace in the orbit of educational art as in a community of priests. The moment people believed themselves to be acting in the name of a noble cause, they no longer even thought to feel the slightest hint of shame for their self-righteousness. If they did happen to notice that their adversaries – and competitors, let's face it, for appointments and privileges – might actually want the same things as they did, there was still the certitude of supercritique: the others wanted it for the wrong reasons. In the present instance, the abject schoolyard bullying on Facebook served the higher purpose of raising awareness of structural inequalities, whereas Waldvogel's remarks on feminism could not be motivated by anything other than the desire to silence female artists.

Elsewhere, the art critic Dean Kissick wished for more "difficult work made by artists who are willing to challenge or simply disregard conventional morality in some way." The obvious response, again, was to engage not with his argument but with the imputed base motive. He could only be thinking of art "that reproduces systemic degradation,"²⁷ an essay by the professors Kerstin Stakemeier and Ana Teixeira Pinto suggested that circulated in late 2019. Illustrated with an 1885 painting that shows Faustus and Mephistopheles illuminated by the fire-glow of hell's kitchen, it explained to *Texte zur Kunst's* readership why there were only two stances left concerning the relationship between art and politics: the good one and the evil one. People like Kissick, the authors argued, were in truth just scared of seeing art "within the wider *imperial* context." They only pretended to defend "artistic freedom"; their true objective was "to buttress an otherwise immoral edifice. The term we want to suggest for this," the authors continued in flawlessly executed *Texte zur Kunst*—speak, was "social sadism." Kissick, Kippenberger, capitalism, the alt-right, Trump, and other "privileged subjects on a rampage" possessed of a "nationally sanctioned cis-gendered able body" – ultimately indistinguishable from one another in their evil intentions. Not to forget, obviously, "the West," "colonialism," "liberalism," and finally, "freedom," that "foundational fantasy [...] that laid waste to whole societies."

Needless to say, academic criticism accusing contemporary artists of reactionary schemes

were nothing new; think only of Rosalind Krauss's and Benjamin Buchloh's attacks on the neo-Expressionist painting in early 1980s Germany. But Krauss and Buchloh made their arguments primarily on an aesthetic plane, and they were met by a diverse non-academic art criticism that was voluble in its retorts. In the 1990s, too, personal conflicts with political subtexts escalated in the art world. Readers who were in Berlin will recall the artist duo Art in Ruins, who, after becoming the target of a contemptuous cartoon in 1992, were said to have broken into the office of the artists' magazine that ran it, smashed everything to pieces, and left behind vicious threats of violence. Yet in this instance as in others, the outrage one would have expected was by far the only response from a diverse community of art critics, who hardly spoke with a single voice.²⁸ That was exactly what the present-day discursive field has lacked, which is why any polarization between good followers and evil haters has resulted in a superficial homogenization of the spectrum of opinion within the art milieu. When there are only two sides, one had better pick the one that's winning. The open letter won out over open debate.²⁹

Even before the covid pandemic, this growing sense of unity more and more often evinced signs of conspiratorial thinking that went unchallenged, including the reduction of political and historical complexity to simple narratives, a belief in hidden powers and malicious intentions, the overinterpretation of coincidences, and a strict dualism of good and evil. In this regard, the documenta curated by the Indonesian collective ruangrupa marked another culmination – and the prelude to educational art's final act. The exhibition conveniently wore its dualistic heart on its sleeve, on Kassel's Friedrichsplatz, and for honesty's sake, it would have been better to leave it in place. The monumental 26-by-39-foot painting was divided into two halves by a vertical down the center. In a style somewhere between street art and church convention aesthetics, the left half depicted a realm of warmongers, child killers, and profiteers captioned "expansion of multicultural state hegemony" – contrasted, on the right, by figures innocently playing guitar by a campfire rendered in luminous colors: the merry hippie community of the "resistance culture movement." Enthroned above on a cloud in the top center was the titular wrathful *People's Justice* (2002), beneath whom a few villains with rat heads and pig faces were stewing behind bars.

The painting was meant to expose the "complex power relationships" of the erstwhile Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia, the artist collective Taring Padi explained in a statement after covering it with black fabric to turn it into a "monument of mourning for the impossibility of dialogue."³⁰ The depiction of an Orthodox Jew with vampire fangs and SS runes

on his bowler hat had been misinterpreted in the "context of Germany." All the more reason, they said, to be "shocked and saddened by the media furor that has labelled us as anti-semitic" – after all, they condemned "racism in all its forms."³¹ Three years earlier, in their glossary of sadism, Stakemeier and Pinto had been quite clear that statements like "It's not racist because I don't mean it that way!" were an expression of an attitude that sought to appropriate the world for its purposes and was – what else? – akin to a "settler colonial psychology." But they were thinking of white male artists in heartless cis bodies, not art collectives from the Global South who felt "shocked and saddened" and whose named membership of twelve included no fewer than, uh, two women. Racists and sexists, exploiters and antisemites were the others, as a matter of principle, and the criticism that the documenta met with was therefore also a conspiracy by the German mainstream media, which, for their part, had suddenly turned right-wing and racist. The inversion of accuser into defendant was the plot twist in educational art's final act and once again revealed its apolitical core.

That plot twist first played out on a small scale, as with the gallery owner who took pride in the special attention he paid to women artists until he was accused of sexual harassment. Or with the model curator who so compellingly championed inclusion until staff publicly protested her abrasive management style. For individuals, the established response format was the brief ruminative statement. In the case of documenta, an attempt was made to craft a counternarrative and invoke the once-scorned "freedom of art" in defense against an alleged elite. Now even the exponents of educational art lamented that the political debate surrounding the notorious antisemitism of "ruangrupa's impressive *Gesamtkunstwerk*" (*Monopol*) was making it impossible to look at it with open eyes. The problem was that, at this documenta, education had left virtually no art standing. A propagandistic series of pictures like Mohammed al-Hawajri's *Guernica Gaza* (2022) – photocollages printed on canvas in which the heroic iconography of Palestinian resistance fused with postcard motifs from Western art history – made Banksy look like a sensitive deep thinker. It was not also but above all in terms of art that this documenta was an admission of intellectual bankruptcy, and its pretextual intention to finally give *the* Global South a voice was, one, insulting in its phoniness and hubris and, two, nonsense: the colorful antimodern funfair in Kassel was hosted not by the Global South but by homegrown educational-art professionals.

The documenta also made it impossible not to realize that educational art's allure had begun to falter. A symposium that ruangrupa held in Amsterdam of all places just one day before

the exhibition ended put the art world's saturated stagnation on display. One panel featured a current documenta curator, a museum director, a longtime professor and museum director, another museum director with a professorship, and the program director of a Dutch foundation that was listed as both a sponsor and an artistic participant in the exhibition:³² representatives, across the board, of the Western art establishment at what was presumably the peak of their careers. But if you'd watched the panelists sitting there, worrying their attire and assuring one another of the special "solidarity" of their "lumbung community," you'd have thought you were looking at members of a disintegrating sacrificial cult. And you would've done absolutely anything not to live in the world they had backed themselves into. It must never be forgotten, they declared, how many "wounds" they had sustained, how much they had been "abused" during the exhibition, how much they had "suffered" from all the "assaults," the "attacks" that were so "violent." They left no doubt that they were survivors of maltreatment by "German critics," with the very worst attacks coming from the "conservative left," which was exemplified, she came up by name, by the artist Hito Steyerl. Those critics' arguments were proof, as it were, that they – speaking of self-demolition – were not true leftists.

documenta fifteen, by contrast, was truly and genuinely left-wing because its badass anti-capitalist stratagem was to delegate more decision-making authority from those tasked with primary responsibility to subordinate groups of curators and artists. Never mind that management seminars have been preaching that stuff for over twenty years; it's called "agile working" or "dynamic shared ownership." For this purpose, the much-lauded practice of "lumbung" (Indonesian for rice barn) provided for the allocation, alongside the separate budgets for individual artists, of an additional communal budget, with decisions on its use made collectively in assemblies. How is that different from the less illustrious practice of the common kitty known from shared living arrangements? Beats me, but then perhaps I'm thinking too much like a German. Germans, according to the panel participant Charles Esche, were in any case incapable of understanding lumbung's playful aspect; lumbung was explicitly designed to embrace the loss of control. Once again, the game of transgression shifted into the political register while the art itself came across as unfailingly well-behaved and, at the documenta, not infrequently like a harmless school project. Considered from the perspective of a tenured European museum rebel like Esche (which is to say, keeping in mind the monthly salaries that arrive in his private account in a thoroughly unplayful and bureaucratic manner), this sort of shift may well be entertaining. Lumbung must have seemed like a ray of hope to him simply because the rest of

his world was so dark – and to make matters worse, everything within that darkness was interconnected: climate change, patriarchy, and the Holocaust, for example. All three, Esche argued, were part of a "dictatorship being related to the whole modern colonial world system," of which we are unfortunately not permitted to speak openly. Who has imposed this alleged ban on us? On that point, his mystifying murmurings stayed mum.

I believe it was Henry Flynt who once described art as an enlightened myth. It offered a way, he argued, to not reject the myth outright but instead construct it for oneself while, in this very act of construction, seeing through it. That was a modern way of thinking. A contemporary art conceived on these terms maintains a distance from itself and hence also from questions of authenticity, of identity and politics. In the antimodern ideologies of late educational art, by contrast, it was not art but authenticity, identity, and politics that puffed themselves up as myths. And so even the most bourgeois museum directors fell for their own tales of heroism. Ironically, the very critiques of documenta fifteen supplied them with the cue for their final grand narrative of resistance. In a study of the entanglements between ruangrupa and Dutch foreign policy, Galit Eilat quotes a comparison made by Gertrude Flentge during the same panel discussion: "If we're talking about Israel and Palestine [...] Israel represents the institution, and the institution represents capitalism; Palestine represents the Lumbung, and the Lumbung represents resistance out of friendship and solidarity."³³ It was that simple: one does not represent power even if one holds it, nor the institution even if one leads it, nor capitalism even if one profits from it more than the average person.

"Long live the creativity of resistance," the text in an Instagram story read exactly fourteen days after the symposium, on October 7, 2022, above a photograph of motorized paragliders who had landed in Israel to massacre the attendees of a techno festival. She had seen videos of young Palestinians riding on horseback across the border into the land of their ancestors, Jumana Manna, a Berlin-based artist who had shared the story at the time, later explained. She had hoped that this "moment of fugitivity might restore the potential for life, liberation, and dignity for all in this wretched land."³⁴ And she had deleted this and other posts once she had realized the dimensions of the violence. Edwin Nasr, then a curator at the Berlin Centre for Contemporary Art, also expressed regret "if I hurt people with the posts."³⁵ He was referring to material he had released on Instagram on October 8, 2022, including a picture of a hanged soldier, to which he had added the comment: "To hell with whoever at this point isn't able to recognize or indulge in the beauty of revolutionary violence, even (if not

especially) as it comes to produce scenes of ‘intolerable’ brutality.” He had also published a screenshot of festivalgoers trying to escape captioned with the slogan “POETIC JUSTICE.” Subsequently, the Lebanese curator himself had gone to party at Berghain, where “cell phone use is known to be restricted,” as he had his lawyer explain. That is why, he argued, he was unaware of the subsequent media coverage of the massacre.

One might have overlooked the self-righteousness of a politster’s fluffy slogan T-shirt as an expression of their youthful ambition (or naïveté). But in the framework of educational art, self-righteousness and double standards became an obligatory habit across all age groups, so there was no outgrowing them. Idealistic young people generally learn, as they wrestle with their own contradictions and deepening entanglements, to put their excessive political self-images into perspective. Such growing realism, of course, can also shade into cynicism, which jettisons the desire for a better world along with yesteryear’s idealism. Yet the narcissistic cynicism into which these people’s ironclad conviction of their own political superiority escalated revealed a whole new quality and ideological rigidity. When it came down to it, they cared just as little about massacred festivalgoers as they did, months later, about the people in war-ravaged Gaza, even as they deftly yoked their advocacy for the Gazan cause to their own culture war. Even better when they were able to style themselves as victims of “bad-faith journalism” (Manna) or a “racially motivated media spectacle” (Nasr).³⁶ Similarly, the homegrown so-called pro-Palestinian activism to which educational art tried to wed its fate in the dramatic final act failed to discuss or present any real-world political approaches to resolving the conflict – what it had were plenty of rad images, great symbols (watermelons!), and catchy narratives in moral black-and-white.

One last time, educational art felt truly relevant, or at least alive, yet its protagonists’ self-perception looked increasingly bizarre to outsiders. When the New York photographer Nan Goldin opened her solo exhibition at Berlin’s Neue Nationalgalerie in November 2024, she started with an address to the nation: “Why am I talking to you, Germany?” – That’s exactly what one wondered given that, a few art enthusiasts and political activists aside, Germany wasn’t there. Her concern about the war in the Middle East, which was entirely believable, looked as if she’d lost her way. A little later, Candice Breitz showed up for a talk at the same venue dressed as an Orthodox Jewish man with sidelocks, supposedly to express her outrage over an action that the late theater artist Christopher Schlingensiefel had staged in New York a full twenty-five years earlier. That was no longer enough to provoke a scandal; more and more art-world denizens were looking for an exit from the

culture war arena. In the glaring light of mounting political regression, social polarization, and deadly serious armed conflicts, the sordidness of such narcissistic show fights was hard to overlook.

In late 2024, Frieda Toranzo Jaeger, a painter living between Mexico City and Berlin, was set to receive an award with a cash purse of €18.000 from a small town in Germany. Then a German critic noticed that the artist had earlier publicly signed on to the initiative Strike Germany, which was calling for an end to all cooperation with German cultural institutions because of its determination that “[Germany’s] entire state apparatus is committed to the destruction of the Palestinian people.”³⁷ The art critic in question, a freelance writer for *Frieze* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, asked the museum handing out the award what it made of the conditions that, according to Strike Germany, must be met before its members would consider working with a German institution. The museum was neither familiar with these demands nor willing to submit to them, and so the decision was made, “by mutual agreement” with the artist, to cancel the award ceremony. That did not stop Jaeger from hitting the online triad a few days later, when she took to Instagram to accuse “this unemployed loser” (she was referring to the critic) of “intimidating, surveilling, and harassing” innocent artists.³⁸ Five years earlier, half the art world would have reflexively rallied to her side, but other than a few online activists, people now seemed rather embarrassed by this self-exposure laced with professional snobbery.

The initiative, meanwhile, wants it to be known that it is not to be trifled with: “Strike Germany commits to building a militant cultural front,” reads one of its more recent statements. A growing number of its erstwhile supporters are probably pondering right now how to romanticize their endorsements as a “radical phase” – after all, if “naïve” sympathizers of Mao Zedong or Ho Chi Minh could pull off that trick, so can they. The die-hards, on the other hand, will dig in even deeper and form scattered cadre organizations, which will go on to accuse one another of complicity with Western imperialism or the “People’s Front of Judea.” Any ideology is bound to show some wear and tear sooner or later – and as long as it doesn’t manage to take a state under its wing, authoritarian tendencies are more likely signs of desperate rearguard actions.

On the other hand, no one should expect the art world to reform itself. It knows only too well how to defend the accumulated cultural capital of its political self-image. To that end, the Berlin-based professor emeritus at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna Diedrich Diederichsen, writing in *Artforum*, recently even pulled the classic Parisian bohème out of his hat. After striking up one more time the good old tune about the threats to

artistic freedom in Germany, he tugs the reader's heartstrings with the story of a new artistic bohemianism that, like he himself, had moved to Berlin in the 1990s to escape capitalism. The gentrification of the city "was not our goal," he insists; rather, they sought a "situation of protection" and found refuge in "radical biennials" and "universities." The cultural wonderland that sprang up there was the fruit of a historic compromise "between, on the one hand, an avant-garde bent on (systemic) critique and bohemians rejecting labor in nine-to-five jobs, and, on the other, governments that harnessed and buttressed the arts as soft power as well as a capitalist economy that found a different way to make these labor refuseniks profitable."³⁹ Like Esche, that is to say, Diederichsen is an avant-gardist who sought shelter and was furnished with privileges against his will, whereas others who are equipped with the same privileges have always been intent on exploitation ... In the present tense, the art world's Manichean fairy tales seem to have exhausted their potential, but its self-righteousness will find new safe havens. It will keep hanging around in the costumes of superannuated narratives for quite a while. And it would probably even be a good sign if educational art were to continue dominating government calls for proposals and raking in scholarships and grants. That would mean that at least the right-wing populist culture warriors have not yet succeeded in writing their own educational ideas into the terms of participation. Politically speaking, after all, the present is far from over. On the contrary, the age of populism has only just begun, and there's little interest on either side of its ideological spectrum in moving away from demagogic rhetoric and authoritarian impulses. It merely looks like, for the time being, the art world for one has lost interest in letting its object be crushed by them.

So how's this for a compromise: Educational art's aged culture warriors (setting aside those who've drunk too much of their own Kool-Aid) could shift their political passion to spheres unrelated to their cultural careers. They might, just for example, draw up concrete proposals for how to make the rents in the Berlin they moved to years ago affordable again. Campaigning to build majority support for their ideas, they would need to resist their wonted impulse to grandstand as Berlin's endangered natives or desperate refugees who escaped the tonier neighborhoods of Cologne or a villa in Mexico City with nothing but their shirts on their backs. Alternatively, they might simply move to the sort of peripheral neighborhood where they would actually encounter those natives and refugees they identify with. It would give them an opportunity to get serious about "fresh perspectives" and "inclusiveness." Plus their real-world political activities might even extend to those not-far-off areas where the

problem of rising rents merely elicits weary smiles. And I don't mean the obligatory weekend home on a lake in Brandenburg: there are the challenges of those "others" who live out there permanently and, when you think about it, needn't be abandoned to the demagogues without a fight.

In the art field, this kind of "real-politicization" would in turn free up resources. People would no longer need to parade their political morality quite so zealously and engage in quite so many ideological contortions; apparatchiks would no longer need to cosplay resistance fighters, let alone have the gall to claim that the historic avant-garde lives on in a symbolic struggle for social inclusion that transformed first "into 'political correctness,' then 'identity politics,' and finally, 'wokeness.'"⁴⁰ That sounded different in, say, Marcel Duchamp: "That's the trouble with artists now. In my day, we wanted to be outcasts, pariahs. Now they're all integrated into society."⁴¹ Before Nan Goldin reinvented herself as an educational artist, she didn't want to be integrated either. "We didn't care what straight people thought of us," she recalled how the members of the queer clique she memorialized in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1985) thought of themselves: "We were never marginalized, because we *were* the world."⁴² There must have been a time when the art world consisted of an entire galaxy of such pariah planets. Maybe the end of the present is an opportunity to form new celestial bodies and launch them into orbit. ■

Endnotes

1) Anton Jäger, *Hyperpolitics: Extreme Politicization without Political Consequences* (London and New York: Verso, 2026), 1–20.

2) Ibid., 20.

3) I mean the twenty-first-century hipster, defined by Mark Greif as someone who aligns his gestures of rebellion with the dominant class, not the original hipster of the U.S. bebop generation. See Mark Greif, Kathleen Ross, and Dayna Tortorici, *What Was the Hipster? A Sociological Investigation* (New York: N+1 Foundation, 2010).

4) Eli Elliott and Gerry Fialka, “105 Minutes with Mike,” youtube.com/watch?v=D6D6lmlMyyc/.

5) “Premium mediocre” is Venkatesh Rao’s term for the trend of marketing mid-quality products in the style of premium goods (as in Starbucks coffee or, in Germany, Rewe’s “Feine Welt” line); see Venkatesh Rao, “The Premium Mediocre Life of Maya Millennial,” August 17, 2017, ribbonfarm.com/2017/08/17/the-premium-mediocre-life-of-maya-millennial/.

6) Which, by the way, is what sets the hipster apart from the dandy, for whom he was in the habit of mistaking himself.

7) *Speculations On Anonymous Materials*, Friedericianum Kassel, September 29, 2013–January 26, 2014.

8) “If this sort of misunderstanding of artistic practice has the makings of an avant-garde, then only as a pool of visual ideas for the creative in-

dustries,” Annika Bender (Dominic Osterried’s and my pseudonym) grumbled on our weblog *Donnerstag* on March 6, 2014, donnerstag-blog.com/artikel/neuland/.

9) Sean Tatol, “Cornering the Critics,” 19933.biz/cornering.html.

10) Eva Illouz, *Der 8. Oktober* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2025), 46.

11) See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

12) Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, trans. Daniel Hendrickson (Berlin: Sternberg, 2012), 262.

13) Documented, e.g., by Alex Greenberger, “‘The Painting Must Go’: Hannah Black Pens Open Letter to the Whitney About Controversial Biennial Work,” *ARTnews*, March 21, 2017, artnews.com/artnews/news/the-painting-must-go-hannah-black-pens-open-letter-to-the-whitney-about-controversial-biennial-work-7992/.

14) Eva Illouz, *Der 8. Oktober*, 39.

15) Ad Reinhardt, “The Artist in Search of a Code of Ethics,” in *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose, Documents of Twentieth-Century Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 163.

16) See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice,” *Wedge* 7/8 (Winter/Spring 1985): 120–30.

17) Robert Kuttner, “Steve Bannon, Unrepentant,” August 16, 2017, <https://prospect.org/2017/08/16/steve-bannon-unrepentant/>.

18) Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* [1852], in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 11: *Marx and Engels 1851–53* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 103.

19) Ibid., 104.

20) Gayatri Spivak in an interview with Deutschlandfunk, May 21, 2023, deutschlandfunkkultur.de/hundred-years-of-frankfurt-school-how-to-think-progress-to-day-english-dlf-kultur-8883a1e7-100.html.

21) Ana Teixeira Pinto and María Berríos, “Francisco Huichaqueo,” 11.berlinbiennale.de/participants/francisco-huichaqueo.

22) The letter’s entire moral gravitas derived from historical atrocities and their repercussions in the present, which it lamented at length. Yet Black refrained from raising concrete political demands. Nor does the removal of a painting amount to any sort of real-world political strategy against the structural “white violence” or the “anti-Black legal systems” denounced in the letter, any more than the implication that works about “Black suffering” should henceforth be created only by people with Black identities.

23) *Im Zweifel für den Zweifel – die große Weltverschwörung*, NRW-Forum, Düsseldorf, September 21–November 18, 2018; *Im Zweifel zweifeln – offener Brief*, im-zweifelzweifeln.wordpress.com.

24) I don’t have reliable

statistics on contemporary artists and suspect that the gender imbalance in favor of male artists persists in exhibitions, but it is surely no longer so lopsided. Even back then, 46% of German museums were led by women (today the figure is around 55%); monopol-magazin.de/immer-mehr-frauen-chefposition; smb.museum/fileadmin/website/Institute/Institut_fuer_Museumsforschung/Publikationen/Materialien/Sonderhefte/Institut_fuer-Museumsforschung-2023-Ausgerechnet-Museen.pdf.

25) The reason for my own withdrawal, on the other hand, was crushingly banal and probably the same one that led to the strange selection of artists: it appears that the two curators had gotten into such a heated argument over the exhibition concept that they were communicating less and less – a situation that seems to have persisted even after the public criticism. Those were not conditions conducive to either an exhibition or a persuasive response to a shitstorm.

26) instagram.com/p/BqrxftFSbt. All other quotes from the Facebook debate documented in screenshots.

27) Ana Teixeira Pinto and Kerstin Stakemeier, “A Brief Glossary of Social Sadism,” *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 116 (December 2019), <https://www.textezurkunst.de/en/116/brief-glossary-social-sadism/>. They quote Dean Kissick’s “The Art We Deserve,” *Spi-*

ke Art Magazine, no. 60 (Summer 2019): 48.

28) Art in Ruins's website includes a press review section, with articles representing not only the positions of the opposing camps in the culture war of the time over what was called "political correctness," but also various other, less clear-cut and more interesting takes. See artinruins.net/debt-trap-kunst-praxis/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/06/pressLR.pdf.

29) In its current form, as an online campaign whose comment function was closed but that you could still sign, the open letter offered the warm and fuzzy feeling of being politically in line with big names.

30) "Press Information on the Concealment of a Work by Taring Padi at documenta fifteen," June 20, 2022, documenta-fifteen.de/en/press-releases/press-information-on-the-concealment-of-a-work-by-taring-padi-at-documenta-fifteen/.

31) Taring Padi, "Statement by Taring Padi on Dismantling 'People's Justice,'" June 24, 2022, documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/statement-by-taring-padi-on-dismantling-peoples-justice/.

32) *(Un)Common Grounds: Other Ways of documenta-ing*, panel with Wayne Modest, Lara Khaldi, Gertrude Flentge, Charles Esche, and Ade Darmawan, vimeo.com/showcase/9917537?video=787545703.

33) Ibid. and Galit Eilat, "Ruangrupa, Contemporary Art or Friendship In-

dustry?," &&&, March 24, 2024, tripleampersand.org/ruangrupa-contemporary-art-or-friendship-industry.

34) Jumana Manna, "The Embargo on Empathy," *Hyperallergic*, November 1, 2023, hyperallergic.com/854193/the-embargo-on-empathy.

35) Erica Zingher, "Berliner Kurator verurteilt," *Die Tageszeitung*, November 12, 2024, <https://taz.de/Berliner-Kurator-verurteilt/!6045585/>.

36) See Manna, "The Embargo on Empathy"; Rhea Nayyar, "Berlin Court Convicts Curator over Instagram Posts about Hamas Attack," *Hyperallergic*, November 19, 2024, hyperallergic.com/967647/berlin-court-convicts-curator-over-instagram-posts-about-hamas-attack.

37) Statements by Strike Germany, web.archive.org/web/20260115000000*/https://strikegermany.org/.

38) Documented in screenshots. See Alex Greenberger, "Artist Frieda Toranzo Jaeger Says Her Views on Palestine Caused Her to Lose Funding and a Show in Germany," *Art News*, December 2, 2024, artnews.com/artnews/news/frieda-toranzo-jaeger-strike-germany-loses-exhibition-funding-1234725180.

39) Diedrich Diederichsen, "The War On Bohemia," *Artforum*, 12/2025, artforum.com/features/year-in-review-2025-diedrich-diederichsen-war-on-bohemia-1234738079.

40) Ibid.

41) Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Grace Glueck, "Duchamp Opens Display Today of 'Not Seen and/or Less Seen,'" *The New York Times*, January 14, 1965, p. 45.

42) Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2012), 6.

Während die Duchamps in Sizilien urlaubten, erreichte ein Brief die Zeitschrift *Internationale Situationniste* in Paris. In ihm warf der Postkartenhersteller Louis Bouffier der Redaktion vor, ohne Genehmigung eines seiner Motive abgedruckt zu haben. Die Fotografie zeigt eine Hauswand, auf welche die Parole *Ne travaillez jamais* gekratzt worden war. Der Redakteur antwortete postwendend: Ich habe die Worte „arbeitet nie“ an die Wand des Hauses in der Rue de Seine geschrieben und bin somit als Urheber zu betrachten. Die Angelegenheit hatte sich damit für ihn erledigt. Es war nicht der letzte Vorwurf gegen Guy Debords lockeres Verhältnis zum geistigen Eigentum. Er eignete sich oft die Texte anderer an, statt selber zu schreiben, und spielte mit dem, was da war. Auf seine Art war der Ehrgeizige faul und kein Tun wirkte der Arbeit ferner als das Spiel. Jedoch was ist ein Spiel? In der Theorie wird es als abgerückter Raum definiert, in dem sich die Spielenden nach eigenen Regeln bewegen und eine Welt neben der Welt entstehen lassen. Die parallele Wirklichkeit erlaubt es, das Tatsächliche im Unernst zu betrachten und für eine Weile ein anderer zu werden. Eine Freiheit auf Zeit, da den Spielenden bewusst ist, dass sie sich wieder auflösen wird. Durch die Endlichkeit der Situation eröffnet sich ein Rahmen, in dem jene Person, die man glaubt zu sein, für den Verlauf einer Partie gegen eine andere ausgetauscht werden kann. Debord sah in diesem temporären „Ich ist ein anderer“ Möglichkeiten für eine revolutionäre Politik. Auch darum spielte er nicht nur die vorhandenen Spiele, er dachte sich bisher unbekannte aus. Mitte der 1950er-Jahre erfand er mit dem *Jeu de la guerre* ein Brettspiel, das die militärischen Verhältnisse von Gelände, Kräften und Geschwindigkeiten in ein Gedankenmodell im Tischformat übersetzte. Im Unterschied zu anderen Strategiespielen geht es beim Kriegsspiel nicht darum, Gebiete zu umzingeln oder den König des Gegners matt zu stellen. Das Ziel liegt darin, den Feind zu vernichten. Das *Jeu de la guerre* meinte damit die Gesellschaft des Spektakels. Bei der abstrakten Übung des kommenden Aufstands mussten die Spielenden die Kommunikationslinien, durch die der Gegner seine Kräfte steuerte, durchtrennen. Geling es, eine der Verbindungen des Feindes zu kapfen, bedeutete das für die Armee meist den Anfang vom Ende. Ein General, der mit seinem Fußvolk nicht mehr kommunizieren und ihm keine Befehle erteilen kann, verliert die Kontrolle über dessen Schlagkraft.

Sein militantes Baby, das rechteckige Spiel auf 25 × 20 Feldern, sollte Debord ein halbes Jahrhundert beschäftigen. 1965 ließ er es patentieren. Es vergingen weitere zwölf Jahre, bis er gemeinsam

mit seinem Freund, dem Filmproduzenten Gérard Lebovici, eine Firma gründete, die eine 45,4 × 36,5 cm große Luxausgabe des Kriegsspiels in einer Vierer-Auflage aus versilbertem Kupfer anfertigen ließ.¹ Ein Exemplar bildet eine zentrale Requisite in *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978). Durch die Rolle in dem Film, dessen Titel sich mit „Wir irren des Nachts im Kreis umher und werden vom Feuer verzehrt“ übersetzen lässt, wurde das Spiel nun noch stärker Teil von Debords Vision und ein Werkzeug für den großen Umsturz. Damit hörte es auf, ein Spiel zu sein, das sich gerade dadurch definiert, über seinen eigenen Rahmen hinaus ziellos zu sein.

Nachdem Debord zwei Jahre wie besessen an dem Film geschnitten hatte, mietete Lebovici, der immer bereit war, die Vorhaben seines Freundes zu finanzieren, das Studio Cujas, ein kleines Kino im Quartier Latin, um darin ein halbes Jahr lang ausschließlich diesen einen Film zu zeigen. Debord sprach zu den Bildern aus dem Off. Zuerst verteuflte er mit ungerührter Stimme die Symptome der Dekadenz, doch bald beschimpfte er das Publikum als eine Versammlung von Ignoranten, das nicht die geringsten Zugeständnisse erwarten könnte. Und dann legte er richtig los, um am Ende zu verlangen: „Alles nochmal von vorn!“

Im Cujas wurde offensichtlich: Debord hatte den Kontakt zu seinem inneren Dandy verloren. Er bewegte sich nicht mehr verblüffend. Verbissen in seine Ziele, wurde er berechenbarer, war nicht mehr jener, der durch sein überraschendes Verhalten in Erstaunen versetzte. Als Spieler schien er jetzt verloren und als Revolutionär hatte er seinen Moment, den Mai '68, schon hinter sich.

Als er noch Dandy war, dachte er sich nicht nur Spiele aus und drehte Filme, er sah sich auch als Regisseur von Skandalen und begriff das Kriegsspiel als einen Manöverplatz für die Generalprobe dieser Störungen. Das Eindringen in das feindliche Kommunikationssystem verstand er als eine Form des *détournements*. Bei der Umleitung der kommunizierenden Zeichen des Gegners handelte es sich um eine der zentralen Strategien der S.I. im Kampf gegen die Gesellschaft des Spektakels. Zeichen werden von ihrer zugeordneten Bedeutung gelöst, ihre Bedeutung negiert und umgedeutet. Beim Skandal, dem *détournement* als öffentlichem Theater, geht es darum, einen Fallstrick zu spannen und durch diesen eine Situation zu schaffen, in der jemand stolpernd die Bodenhaftung verliert und ein Eklat in der bestehenden Ordnung in Gang gesetzt wird. Damit ein Skandal möglich wird, muss – in der Sprache des Kriegsspiels – eine Kommunikationslinie, auf der die moralischen Werte einer Gesellschaft sich übertragen, angegriffen werden. Gelingt es, diesen Übertragungsweg zu erobern, kann der Skandal sein Drama entfalten. Wie im Theater gibt 20

es ein Ensemble: die Ankläger, die Angeklagten, die Opfer und die Empörten. Bei manchen Darstellern bleibt zunächst unklar, auf welcher Seite sie stehen. Entscheidend ist nicht zuletzt, wann und wo alles stattfindet. Die explosive Kraft des Skandals hängt davon ab, den richtigen Moment für den Angriff zu wählen. Wie in der Mode muss das Skandalisierte etwas treffen, das in der Luft liegt, damit ein Sog der Empörung entsteht. Der Ablauf eines Skandals vollzieht sich wie ein antikes Drama: Im ersten Akt werden die Akteure und ihre Umstände eingeführt. Langsam beginnen sich die Umrisse des Skandalösen auf der Bühne abzuzeichnen. Verdächtigungen durchqueren die Kommunikationslinien der unterschiedlichen Parteien. Wie bei dem Kinderspiel Stille Post werden die Gerüchte immer anstößiger. Noch bleibt unklar, ob es überhaupt für einen Skandal reicht und wer am Ende den schwarzen Peter bekommt. Der Chor, als Resonanzkörper der Empörung, wirkt noch wankelmütig.

Im zweiten Akt verengt sich der Verdacht. Komplexe Vorgänge werden auf Eindeutigkeiten heruntergebrochen. Der Chor muss sich entscheiden. Sein Gesang wird lauter. Was anschwillt, ist die Lust des Publikums am Fall einer gerade noch ruhmreichen Person. Mancher Dandy liebte genau diesen Neid, um als Skandalisierter für einen Moment alle Blicke auf sich zu ziehen. Denn auch darin ist die Figur ein wenig schizophren, will sie doch, dass sich niemand nach ihr umdreht, ist aber auch aufmerksamkeits-süchtig. Im dritten Akt kommt es zu einem Schlüsselereignis, bei dem mindestens eine der beschuldigten Personen stürzt. Sie wird entlarvt, gesteht, tritt zurück oder bringt sich um. Eine Autorität, die von der Mehrheit anerkannt wird, kann jetzt das Urteil fällen, in das der Chor der Empörten einstimmt. Der Aufschrei dient ihm zur Selbstversicherung und der Abwehr dessen, was das eigene System bedrohen könnte.

Unerwartet schwillt im vierten Akt der Chor noch einmal an. An diesem Punkt entscheidet sich die Frage: Dient die Empörung dazu, sich der vertrauten Werte zu versichern? Oder führt die Störung zu einem Bruch in der bisherigen Ordnung? Skandale, die mehr bewirken als eine Erfrischung der moralischen Balance, sind selten. Meist wird einfach nur eine Charaktermaske ausgewechselt und alles ist im fünften Akt wieder in Butter.

Mag im Skandal als politischem Werkzeug zu Debords Zeit noch ein Versprechen gelegen haben, scheint seine subversive Kraft mittlerweile recht zweifelhaft. Als virtuoser Post-Situationist zeigte sich zuletzt Donald Trump. Mit seinen schnellen Abfolgen gezielter Verblüffungen gelang es ihm, den Chor der Empörten in ein Regiment erstarrter Zuschauer mit offenen Mündern zu verwandeln, das gar nicht mehr aus dem Empörtsein herauskam. Trump blieb ein Pseudo-Dandy, da er zwar beanspruchte, ihm wäre alles gleichgültig, dem die

eigene Macht aber eng am Herzen lag. Spätestens mit Trump stellte sich überdeutlich die Frage: Wie sollte ein Skandal noch wirksam werden in einem Dauerrauschen des Skandalösen?

Der Skandal scheint heute kaum mehr als eine von vielen Strategien in der Werkzeugkiste des Regierens durch Krisen, jenem Disruptions-Management, das mittlerweile ersetzt, was einmal Politik genannt wurde. Nichts gegen eine Optimierung der Welt, aber Skandale auf dem Weg dahin sind ein zweischneidiges Schwert, da die Empörung zwangsläufig die bekannte Moral wiederholt. Mit einer bisher unbekannten Einsicht, mit der das Publikum nicht vertraut ist, lässt sich kein Sog erzeugen. Der Chor muss mit der Pointe vertraut sein, damit er seinen Einsatz findet. Darum gibt es kaum eine verblüffende Überraschung, außer vielleicht die Besetzung des Skandals.

Aus dem Blickwinkel der Kunst ist mit Skandal kaum noch etwas zu holen, handelt es sich doch um keinen Prozess mit offenem Ende, sondern eine Dynamik, die ihre Argumente auswendig kennt. Aus politischer Perspektive mag es manchmal richtig sein zu wissen, was am Ende herauskommt, um ein Ziel durchzusetzen. Doch eine Kunst, die allein ihre stehenden Werte wiederholt, hat sich vom Leben verabschiedet und ist nur eine risikofreie Versicherung bekannten Wissens. Eine derartige Skandalisierung, wie sie von der *cancel culture* gepflegt wird, versichert sich dem als richtig Angenommenen, sucht nach keinem Erkenntnisgewinn, belehrt und ist darin reaktionär. ■

Endnoten

1) Gérard Lebovici's Interesse am Kriegspiel dürfte sich daraus erklären, dass er das Überleben in einer feindlichen Umgebung früh erlernen musste. Bereits als Kind wurde er zur Halbwaise, da Deutsche seine Mutter in einem KZ ermordet hatten. Nach dem Krieg wollte Lebovici Schauspieler werden. Der Tod des Vaters zwang ihn aber, die Ausbildung an den Nagel zu hängen. Erst auf Umwegen kehrte er zum Film zurück, nun nicht als Schauspieler, sondern als Agent von Catherine Deneuve oder Jean-Paul Belmondo. Der Erfolg seiner Entdeckungen eröffnete Lebovici die Möglichkeit eines Doppellebens. Als Größe der Filmbranche tanzte er auf den Partys der Pariser Hautevolee – und finanzierte gleichzeitig die Internationale situationniste und die offene Militanz von anarchistischen Gruppen wie der Action directe. Neben diesen klandestinen Aktivitäten betrieb Lebovici ohne jede Maske die Editions Champ Libre, in der die einschlägigen Schriften der radikalen Linken erschienen. Außerhalb des Kanons publizierte der Verlag Titel wie die von Jacques Mesrine im Gefängnis verfassten Memoiren *Der Todestrieb. Lebensbericht eines Staatsfeindes* (*L'instinct du mort*, 1984). Der Gangster mit den vielen Gesichtern hatte Bertolt Brechts Bemerkung „Was ist schon der Einbruch in eine Bank gegen die Gründung einer Bank?“

zum Motto für seinen persönlichen Krieg gegen die falsche Gesellschaft erklärt. Lebovici motivierte den Dandy-Gangster, der die Polizei, wenn sie ihn festnehmen wollte, mit Champagner empfang, sein Leben aufzuschreiben. Die Autobiografie des „Staatsfeindes Nr. 1 von Frankreich und Kanada“ wurde ein großer Erfolg. Im Winter 1979 knallten die Korken aber einmal nicht schnell genug und die Polizisten erschossen den Autor des Bestsellers. Lebovici adoptierte die zur Halbwaise gewordene Tochter seines Autors. Dem Adoptivvater blieb wenig Zeit. Am 7. Januar 1984 wurde die Leiche des 51-Jährigen in seinem Wagen im Parkhaus an der Avenue Foch gefunden, getötet durch Schüsse aus nächster Nähe. Für die französische Presse gab es keine Fragezeichen. Die Spur führte zu Guy Debord. Das Nachrichtenmagazin *Le Nouvel Observateur* fabulierte, Debord hätte Lebovici wie eine Marionette dirigiert. Und als seine Puppe drohte, ihm den Geldhahn abzdrehen, hätte der Puppenspieler sie getötet. Selbst der Polizist, der das Verhör protokollierte, hatte das Gefühl, ein Gedicht zu schreiben, für das er aber leider zu müde war. Nachdem Debord die trostlose Aufgabe erledigt hatte, aus den taumelnden Sätzen des Beamten die größten Unzulänglichkeiten zu entfernen, verfasste er die umfassende Darstellung seiner Sicht der Dinge: *Considérations sur*

l'assassinat de Gérard Lebovici (1985). Was in dem Parkhaus geschehen war, sollte nie aufgeklärt werden.

Soziale Lügen – Sozial lügen heißt lügen, ohne dass der andere es bemerkt, oder so, dass der andere so tun kann, als würde er es nicht bemerken. Verständnis für die vermuteten Empfindlichkeiten des anderen haben – entweder um ihn zu schonen (Taktgefühl) oder um ihn zu verwöhnen (kalkulierte Schleimerei) – ist ein Schmiermittel für Konversation, seit Menschen sprechen können. In den sozialen Medien nimmt das (soziale) Lügen eine neue Dimension an, weil alle Beteiligten eine Art digitale Kappe tragen, in Analogie zum Ku-Klux-Klan. Es ist keine Körpersprache mehr im Spiel. Wenn man in der digitalen Öffentlichkeit eine Grenze überschreitet, zeigt kein missbilligender Blick an, dass Zurückstecken noch eine Option ist, sondern es wird sofort abgerechnet. So kann man Opfer eines digitalen Lynchens werden, das in der Realität des Arbeits- und Privatlebens schwerwiegende Folgen haben kann. Canceling ist die moderne Form der Verbannung, mit dem Unterschied, dass es sich um ein Volksgericht handelt, d. h. je mehr jemand in der Öffentlichkeit steht, desto schneller fällt das Beil. Aber es kann im Prinzip jeden treffen, deshalb ist jeder auf der Hut und hält sich zurück. Nicht aus Höflichkeit oder Bescheidenheit, sondern aus Angst.

Es stimmt, dass die moderne Kunst sich noch nie der Aufmerksamkeit des Volkes erfreuen konnte – was sich heute als Vorteil erweist; aber es ist durchaus vorgekommen, dass Kunstwerke aus Ausstellungen entfernt wurden – und wie alle anderen üben sich auch die Kuratoren in Selbstzensur, um Ärger zu vermeiden. Die Grenzen (dessen, was zulässig ist) sind fluid. Was in einem Moment grenzüberschreitend ist (ein Akt des Heldentums, etwas Neues), wird einen Moment später zum Mainstream und noch einen Moment später unangemessen. Rauchen in der Öffentlichkeit war zum Beispiel für Frauen tabu, bis Edward Bernays 1929 seinen fantastischen Trick durchführte (Cigarettes are feminist Torches of Freedom); seitdem paffte jede, aber jetzt ist Rauchen in der Öffentlichkeit wieder tabu (und zwar für alle).

Bei den Aufnahmeprüfungen fällt heutzutage auf, dass fast alle Kandidaten ihr Vorhaben wie einen Weihnachtsbaum mit politisch korrekten Schlagworten schmücken: Nachhaltigkeit, Diversität, Engagement, Pluriformität, Care, Intervention, Prozess, Forschung, postkoloniale Kritik usw.

Das verdeckte Problem besteht darin, dass Studierende im Allgemeinen – und Kunststudenten im Besonderen –, die das Privileg genießen, auf Kosten anderer zu studieren, in den Augen derjenigen, die dieses Privileg nicht haben, traditionell als Schmarotzer und Versager angesehen werden. Die harte Trennung zwischen den verschiedenen Klassen, die anfangs gelegentlich (beim Militärdienst und bei der Aufnahme ins Krankenhaus) aufgehoben wurde, ist

auf dem Dorfplatz des Internets weggefallen. Heute muss sich jeder für komplexe und globale Probleme faktischer und moralischer Art wie den Klimawandel, die zunehmende soziale Ungleichheit und die Polarisierung innerhalb der Gesellschaft verantworten. Der Künstler, als Ziervogel unter den Hühnern, kann sich nicht mehr mit einem arroganten Achselzucken begnügen (vor allem, solange er noch kein Ei gelegt hat) und ist gezwungen, seine gesellschaftliche Relevanz zu demonstrieren. Der ständig wachsende Zwang zur politischen Korrektheit hat die soziale Lüge – ein harmloses Gesellschaftsspiel für Umstände, in denen man sich lieber nicht befinden möchte – zu einer höllischen Notwendigkeit gemacht, vergleichbar mit dem Zahlen von Steuern. Intuition – Intuition ist ein weicher Reflex, der nicht auf direkter Bedrohung beruht, eine Form der Empathie oder (intellektuellen) Sympathie. Da die Welt immer komplexer wird und sich immer schneller verändert, wird das Intuitive immer mehr zu einem Leitfaden für das Handeln.

Sich vorwärts tastend zurechtzufinden (denn das ist es in der Praxis) ist in der Tat ein natürlicher Weg, um an einer Kunsthochschule voranzukommen, wo es traditionell um die Suche nach der eigenen künstlerischen Identität geht. Ein mühsamer Prozess von Versuch und Irrtum, der auf Diskussionen mit Kommilitonen, Lehrern und der vorherrschenden Auffassung von Kunst (ihren Möglichkeiten) beruht. Ein intuitiver Ansatz vermeidet die Frage nach dem Warum. Ich tue dies oder jenes, weil es sich „richtig anfühlt“. Vor allem bei Meinungsverschiedenheiten über letzteres wird eine Diskussion schwierig, weil es keine Argumente gibt, auf die man eingehen kann. Es gibt kein Spiel mehr, der Ball ist weg, man kann nur noch den Mann/die Frau spielen oder schweigen. Ein intuitiver Ansatz geht oft mit der Suche nach einer persönlichen Ausdrucksform oder dem Ausdruck des Persönlichen einher. Tagebucheinträge und parolenartige Herzensschreie in Bezug auf das eigene Leiden und das der Welt kommen ebenso in Betracht wie halbbewusste Kritzeleien und Zeichnungen, die nichts als Sensibilität ausdrücken und damit kokettieren, nicht zeichnen zu können. Das Problem bei diesem formlosen Einsatz des Persönlichen, wenn es als Kunst präsentiert wird, ist, dass sich der Betrachter fragt, warum dies für irgendjemanden außerhalb des Herstellers und/oder seines Therapeuten von Interesse sein könnte. Die Betonung des Persönlichen ist notwendigerweise mit der Persönlichkeit selbst verbunden, und wenn diese sich nicht oder kaum von anderen unterscheidet, kann man an der Daseinsberechtigung des Werkes als Kunstwerk zweifeln.

In einem Postkartenkarussell im Centre Pompidou sah ich eine Karte auf der stand: Mr. Duchamp told us we could play here. Dies betrifft also die ahnungslosen Studierenden im Nebel, die mit

der von früheren Generationen gewonnenen Freiheit sitzen gelassen werden. Meiner Erfahrung nach wird an einer Kunsthochschule erstaunlich wenig über die Form gesprochen.

Was die Studierenden in der Blase des Akademiegebäudes lernen, ist, wie man eine Haltung einnimmt: Attitude. Das Beispiel der legendären Künstler des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts (z.B. Duchamp, Warhol oder Beuys) spielt dabei eine wichtige Rolle. Sie haben zwar bemerkenswerte Werke geschaffen, aber sie haben sich noch viel mehr Mühe gegeben, ihre Gestalt als Künstler zu entwickeln.

Ein weiterer Schritt war die legendäre Ausstellung von Harald Szeemann *When Attitude Becomes Form* im Jahr 1969, die einen Überblick über die damals aktuelle konzeptuelle Kunst gab. Diese Ausstellung markiert den Beginn des Aufstiegs des Kurators: Der Ausstellungsmacher tritt aus den Kulissen als Autor des Ganzen nach vorne. Die einzelnen Künstler werden quasi zu Mitgliedern eines Orchesters und der Dirigent erntet die Lorbeeren. Nur wenige Künstler können als Solisten auftreten, die übrigen versuchen ihre verlorene Autonomie zurückzugewinnen, indem sie den kuratorischen Aspekt in ihre eigene künstlerische Praxis einbeziehen. Immer mehr Künstler sind vom Machen zum Sammeln übergegangen und das Kunstwerk ist eine Installation, ein Arrangement ihrer Fundstücke. Es sollte daher nicht überraschen, dass nach einem halben Jahrhundert Attitude die kuratorische Praxis – explizit oder nicht – im Curriculum der Kunsthochschulen auftaucht.

Konzept – Der Begriff Konzept bezieht sich auf ein historisches Phänomen in der bildenden Kunst: eine Bewegung aus den 1960er Jahren, in der die Idee des Werkes als wichtiger angesehen wurde als seine Ausführung. Dieser Wunsch nach einer Dematerialisierung des Kunstwerks – ursprünglich ein spielerischer Versuch Werke zu schaffen, die sich nicht verkaufen lassen – führte eine neue Ästhetik ein, die auf Beschreibung, Dokumentation und Instruktion basiert (und sich schon ganz bestimmt als verkaufbar erwies).

Camiel van Winkel schreibt in *Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium 1965 – 1975* (2003) „Es ist vielleicht kein Zufall, dass Konzeptkünstler oft als starke Lehrer auftraten: Sie waren in gewisser Weise bereits auf die distanzierte Analyse ihres eigenen Handelns und die Problematisierung des Künstlerhandwerks spezialisiert. Wenn die Entkopplung von Denken und Machen und das in den Mittelpunkt stellen der Instruktion irgendwo zu Ergebnissen führen sollten, dann bei der Ausbildung junger Künstler. Die Überführung der Konzeptkunst in einen akademischen Lehrplan hat dazu beigetragen, dass die Bezeichnung eines zeitgenössischen Kunstwerks als „konzeptuell“ – abgesehen von einem vagen Unterscheidungssignal – keine wirkliche Bedeutung mehr hat. Während ihrer

Ausbildung lernen die Künstler ihr Werk korrekt zu präsentieren, d. h. in Termini von Selbstreflexion und kontextueller Analyse.“

Der Begriff konzeptionell mag im kunsthistorischen Sinne an Bedeutung verloren haben, er ist aber noch voll in Gebrauch und hat alle angewandten Künste durchdrungen, wenn auch inzwischen stark mit dem älteren Begriff des Konzepts aus der Werbung verschnitten. Dabei handelt es sich um eine Strategie zur Verführung der Verbraucher, damit das gleiche Waschmittel in einer anderen Verpackung in den Supermarktregalen neben den bereits bekannten Waschmitteln positioniert wird. Das Marketingkonzept lässt sich erschließen vom militärischen Angriffsplan: Das Ziel ist die Eroberung. Neben der häufigen und inhaltsleeren Verwendung des Wortes Konzept – das mittlerweile zu einem Synonym für die Idee oder Absicht des Vorhabens verwässert wurde – ist die Verwendung des Konzepts als Marketingtool sichtbar in der Art und Weise, wie (angehende) Künstler soziale Medien wie Instagram nutzen. Bei ihnen gibt es keine arglosen Fotos oder Videos vom Alltag mit Freunden im Urlaub, in der Kneipe oder auf irgendeinem Event, sondern gewieft

Bilder, die neben einer permanenten Portfolio-Aktualisierung den künstlerischen Anspruch ausdrücken. Soziale Medien werden im Vorgriff auf die Professionalität der eigenen künstlerischen Praxis genutzt – es ist ein Auftritt. Nur wenige Imker, auch wenn sie gelegentlich ein Glas Honig verkaufen, präsentieren sich als Profis. Ganz anders bei bildenden Künstlern, für die „Hobby“ das Schlimmste ist, was sie sich vorstellen können. Es ist ein anderes Wort für Misserfolg. Die große Mehrheit der Künstler sind jedoch Hobbyisten und müssen ihren Lebensunterhalt mit Arbeit außerhalb der Kunst bestreiten. (Das meinte Werner Büttner 2018 mit seiner provokanten These *Überlebensrate 4%*).

Die wenigen, die über diesen Status hinauskommen, tun dies nicht so sehr, indem sie beispiellose Kunstwerke schaffen, sondern die Professionalität des Künstlers drückt sich in der Art und Weise aus, wie er seine Kunst organisiert und verwaltet, genau wie im Geschäftsleben. Auch in dieser Hinsicht war Andy Warhol wegweisend, als er seine Vorliebe für Art Business und Business Art deutlich machte und seinen Atelierkomplex The Factory (sukzessive an verschiedenen Orten) gegen einen Büroraum tauschte, den er The Office nannte.

In gewisser Weise ist der Künstler wieder dort, wo er war, ehe der Sturm von Ismen heulte: damals neben dem Tischler, dem Stuckateur und anderen Handwerkern, jetzt neben dem Import-Export-Kaufmann, dem Börsenmakler und anderen freien Unternehmern. Das Märchen vom romantischen Genie ist endgültig vorbei. Während man sich in der Zeit der Zünfte zunächst mit einer Meisterprüfung 24

qualifizieren musste, um von seinen älteren Kollegen ernst genommen zu werden, muss der Künstler heutzutage sozusagen einen überzeugenden Kontoauszug vorlegen. Was bleibt, ist natürlich die soldateske Kameraderie von Einzelkämpfern, die alle im gleichen Schiffchen sitzen. ■