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# Fragmentation and Cooptation

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When it is said today - in general and in the concept of the discussion under the title *hybrid?resistance* in Linz - that "unproductive dichotomies" between culture and politics, art and resistance, artistic practice and political activism have been overcome, then the question arises as to the scope of theses like this. In the context of visual and conceptual art, their limitations become clear relatively quickly.

In the past decade, contradictory developments in this area have been evident, for which a common denominator may still be found if they are considered in a more abstract way, specifically the dedifferentiation between artistic and other social fields. This dedifferentiation - a term that the cultural theorist Scott Lash [1] developed contrary to the view, widespread particularly among sociological authors, that presumes an increasing differentiation of society into autonomous social subsystems - has not only been propelled by actors in the field of art. It is also the result of processes of the colonization of artistic fields from the outside. In this context, the economization of the social and the cultural could be called to mind, for instance, the logic of which has been discussed by theorists of governmentality studies [2] following the

later writings of Foucault. A partial aspect of this economization is the invasion of corporative power into the European fields of art (following the US American model), which has resulted in a new type of "business artists". What distinguishes this type of artist is that he relatively willingly places his cultural and symbolic capital at the disposal of actors in the economic field for their image politics, among other things, for the symbolic affirmation of internal hierarchies, for motivating employees, or for developing "innovative" ideas.

In extreme cases, the power of actors from the field of economics is meanwhile even sufficient to launch entire art movements and to inscribe them in the history of art, as was evident in Britain with Charles Saatchi and the "Young British Artists" (YBA). Angela McRobbie has described the aversion to theory and the anti-intellectualism of this younger generation of artists, who were trained, in fact, at a center of cultural studies and feminist theory (Goldsmiths College, London), how they crossed the borders of "art and life" in the form of a post-ironic plundering of popular and youth culture, and also their "culturepreneur" strategies that made them appear as "Thatcher's children" in the field of art. Although the cynicism of these artists sponsored and pushed by Charles Saatchi may appear apolitical at first glance, their integration in the hegemonial entrepreneur culture and in the "Cool Britannia" discourse of identity politics does have political connotations that are not to be overlooked.

Although processes of the dedifferentiation of art, business, and politics could be observed in Britain in the past decade, this is far from having overcome "unproductive dichotomies" in the sense of the thesis outlined in this context at the start. On the contrary, according to McRobbie, political and activist art that was still present in the 80s was marginalized through the YBAs. [3]

During the 90s, the "privatization of culture" following the Anglo-Saxon model [4] was also promoted in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Unlike in Britain, however, trends of oppositional "political art" also developed in these countries at the same time. Holger Kube Ventura, who has developed a survey of this critical art, sees the main reason for the politicization of art in the slump in the art market in the early 90s. [5] This reductionist explanation, however, appears to be anything but convincing. The slump in the art market affected the fields of art in all the western countries. A comparable politicization of art and art discourse was not to be found, though, in Britain, France, Italy, or Spain.

To grasp the politicization of art in these countries as the "hybridization" of art and politics or to speak of a "hybrid resistance", however, is not unproblematic. For before the concept of "hybridity" rose via the reception of Bachtin to become one of the key concepts of cultural theory in recent years, there was a long history of the racist use of this concept, of the race theories of the 19th century all the way to the anti-Semitic and National-Socialist writings of the 20th century. The appropriation and redefinition of the hybridity concept on the part of cultural theory authors such as Stuart Hall or Homi K. Bhabha was not only linked with a rejection of the essentialist or coerced assimilation ideas originally connected to this concept, but also to the idea of mutual penetration - in the interaction of center and periphery, for instance, of the oppressed and the oppressor, of hegemonial and subversive forces. [6] Especially this aspect of the redefined concept of hybridity seems to me to be heuristically and theoretically interesting, because it draws attention to the important question of the extent, to which "resistance" still adheres to the logic of the system that it opposes. The term "hybrid resistance" used in this

sense would thus refer to a form of oppositional practice that is linked to the side effect of reproducing basic system structures.

This kind of "hybridity" of oppositional art may be recognized, in my opinion, primarily in two respects. A large part of artistic production that has emerged in conjunction with the protests against the Austrian government, but also within the framework of the anti-globalization movement, follows an "actor-oriented" perspective in a fairly obvious way. [7] It prefers to devote itself to the representation of collective political rituals, those of founding solidarity as well as those of applying violence, and it draws attentions to "good" or "bad" actors, whether these are individuals, groups or organizations. By fixing on concrete entities (such as individuals and groups) and their intentions, by concentrating on discontinuous acts and events - especially direct violence - and by privileging symbolic political events, which essentially take place on the front stage of politics, this type of artistic production is in danger of repeating the structural blindness of the hegemonial media discourse and its basic idea that the world is essentially to be understood through recourse to actors.

The structural features of hierarchical social systems include the tendency to reproduce themselves through hindering horizontal interaction at the basis and through processes of the separation and cooptation of anti-systemic opposition movements. Considerable resources and energy are required, in any case, to resist this fragmentation and incorporation pressure. If Kube Ventura's diagnosis of a "desolidarization" in the field of political art is right, then fragmentation and cooptation once again threaten to become the fate of oppositional art. This is the second aspect of its hybridity, of which it may not be sufficiently aware, in order to develop adequate counterstrategies in time.

[1] Scott Lash (1992): Sociology of Postmodernism. London.

[2] Cf. Nikolas Rose, Peter Miller 1992): Political power beyond the State: problematics of government. In: British Journal of Sociology, vol 43, pp. 173-205; Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, Thomas Lemke (Ed.) (2000): Gouvernementalität. Studien zur Ökonomisierung des Sozialen. Frankfurt/Main.

[3] Angela McRobbie (1999): In the Culture Society. Art, Fashion and Popular Music. London, p. 6ff. On the role of Saatchi in British art of the 90s, see especially: Rita Hatton / John A. Walker (2000): Supercollector. A Critique of Charles Saatchi. London.

[4] Chin-tao Wu (2002): Privatising Culture. Corporate Art Intervention since the 80ies. London.

[5] Holger Kube Ventura (2002): Politische Kunst Begriffe in den 1990er Jahren im deutschsprachigen Raum. Wien, p. 88ff.

[6] cf. Bhabha, Homi K. (1993): The Location of Culture. London-New York; and for a critical discussion of the hybridity concept: Robert Young (1995): Colonial Desire. Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race. London.

[7] On the distinction between an actor-oriented and structure-oriented perspective of the world, cf. Johan Galtung (1994): Human Rights in another Key. Cambridge-Oxford, pp. 27ff.