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Artistic Internationalism and Institutional Critique

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I.

It was in 1970 as a group called "Guerilla Art Collective Project" placed military uniforms filled with meat in the main square in front of the university in San Diego, which were labeled "ship to ...", to protest against the war in Viet Nam on the one hand and on the other to make art (cf. Breitwieser 2003: 16). One of the group members and initiator of the action, which was carried out on the borderline between the installative and the sculptural as well as between art and politics, was the Marcuse pupil Allan Sekula.

The social philosopher Herbert Marcuse was one of the most important advocates of the sixties movements. With his philosophical, contemporary critical work *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) he influenced many students at that time in western Europe and North America and saw in the protest movements new possibilities for the realization of alternative, non-alienated ways of living, an approach that later became conventional in research dealing with social movements. However, it was not only these possibilities that united the various upheavals since the mid-1960s

and partly enabled the conjoining of very different concerns – feminist, anti-colonialist, anti-racist, anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialistic, anti-militaristic concerns. Similar in some ways to Dada fifty years earlier, in terms of what the actors had in common, 1968 as an international or transnational upheaval, as "a world revolution" (il manifesto), in which widespread artistic mobilization was also involved, was based primarily on negative internationalistic motivation: the war against Viet Nam conducted by the USA was the outstanding negatively uniting element. "The military intervention of the USA in the Viet Nam conflict gave the protests of the various national student avant-garde groups an international dimension, an idea that united them, and a common strategy" (Gilcher-Holtey 2003: 49). Just as social criticism was linked at the political level in the urban centers through this negative bracket with liberation movements in developing countries, at the cultural level the agitation endeavors of politicized students joined forces with artists expanding their methods. Countless artistic actions took place in the most diverse countries in the course of the protest movements, linking anti-war ideas with local social, cultural and political concerns, and especially joined them with the actions of the social movements. In his history of conceptual art Tony Godfrey (2005: 190) wonders about "how little the political situation was directly addressed by art" in light of the vehement student unrest, but he considers the importance of the Viet Nam war in the development of art in the late 1960s and early 1970s so great that he begins every chapter of his book by elaborating on it.

The internationalist orientation functions here, which is the thesis of this article, as the link between artistic and social movements and as a possibility for overcoming the structural obstacles between both. This conjunction is by no means to be taken for granted, nor

is it generally the case. It is blocked, according to Pierre Bourdieu, by the complete differentness and incompatibility of the respective fields. Although there exists a "structural affinity between literary and political avant-garde" (Bourdieu 2001:398), the reconciliation of the two "through a kind of social, sexual and artistic global revolution" (Bourdieu 2001: 399) repeatedly runs into the rifts or hurdles that exist between the two areas. It was not unusual for these hurdles to appear even in the context of 1968. They were evident, for example, in the repeatedly occurring, mutual vituperation between political activists and activist artists. In 1971 Henryk M. Broder, for instance, contended that the Actionist artist Otto Muehl was "no leftist, but an anal-fascist", whereas Muehl criticized the bourgeois mentality of all revolutionaries, who "put on their slippers" again when they are finished revolting (quoted from Raunig 2005: 174). The controversies surrounding Muehl and the other actors from "Viennese Actionism" were ultimately so heated because the art scene in Austria had a certain dominance within the situation in 1968, which was generally marked, according to Robert Foltin (2004: 74) by "a lack of theory and by a low degree of militancy".[i]

II.

The thesis that social and artistic movements come together and/or mutually permeate one another in artistic internationalism also contradicts two narrow readings of Bourdieu, which have been formulated in discussions about institutional critique. Andrea Fraser's reading (2005), for example, which picks up from Bourdieu, regards the art field as being so closed that everything done outside it can have no effects at all towards the inside – and vice versa. Gerald Raunig (2006) rightly criticizes positions like Fraser's as "closure phantasms". Stefan Nowotny (2006) criticizes a

similar position on the part of Isabelle Graw (2005). Nowotny maintains that in her essay "Beyond Institutional Critique", there is a "flagrant example of fixing institutional critique art practices to art". However, Graw's position also stands for a second curtailment of Bourdieu's art field theory. In light of the sales-oriented clientele of a New Yorker art fair, completely uninterested in content, she wrote in a *taz* article in 2004 that "under these circumstances ... the notion of art as an autonomous special sphere ... can no longer be maintained." However, since the autonomization of the art field, the economy of symbolic goods, which Bourdieu speaks of, does not take place between the poles of total commercialization and "pure production".[ii] Hence the existence and expansion of influential art fairs does not at all contradict the autonomy of the field.[iii] Objections must therefore be raised against both of these constrictions: talking about the autonomy of the art field means neither asserting a social area incapable of achieving effects towards the outside, nor that a terrain exists here, which is untouched by economic, social and other influences. Instead, it is a matter of pointing out specific functionalities that differ from those in other social fields.[iv]

The artist, photographer and art theoretician Allan Sekula also formulated the protest against the Viet Nam war in another action, which was photographically documented as well. In this six-part photo series an activist, barefooted and equipped with a Vietnamese peasant's straw hat and plastic machine gun, crawls through the wealthy suburbs of a large US American city. The title of the 1972 action, "Two, three, many ... (terrorism)", directly refers to Ernesto Che Guevara's anti-imperialist focus theory. In this context Guevara called for the creation of "two, three, many" Viet Nams to thus expand the so-called people's war against imperialism by creating multiple revolutionary hot spots. Sekula thus puts Che

Guevara's internationalist appeal into an artistic form, indicating the justification for the appeal on the one hand, but on the other also representing a symbolic alternative to the non-artistic implementation of guerilla concepts in the major urban centers. The focus theory was not only one of the foundations for the development of the "urban guerilla concept" by the Red Army Fraction (RAF) in 1971. Following a first wave of guerilla foundations limited to Latin America, a "second wave" (cf. Kaller-Dietrich/Mayer, undated) arose in western cities based on the practices of the Tuparmaros, the leftist urban guerillas in Uruguay. The Weather Underground in the USA and other radical leftist groups in various western countries also referred directly or indirectly to this dictum from Che Guevara as they went underground.[v]

The collage series "Bringing the War Home" (1967 – 1972) by the US American artist and art theoretician Martha Rosler[vi] is also to be seen in the context of focus theory. The collages show various motifs from the Viet Nam war mounted in pictures from contemporary US American brochures for furnishings. By calling everyday furnishings into question as the furnishings of everyday life, Rosler builds here on an effect similar to that of the Berliner Commune 1 with their flyer about a fire in a Brussels department store in 1967. In this flyer the Commune 1 satirically called the fire an advertising gag for the USA, invoking the "crackling Viet Nam feeling (of being there and burning too)", that everyone should be able to share (cf. Enzensberger 2004). This satire strategy also serves the idea of making injustice in developing countries directly comprehensible to people in major cities, making it palpable, in fact "bringing the war home".

III.

If institutional critique is taken not merely as a label for works by the four or five protagonists that are always named (Asher, Broodthaers, Buren, Haacke, Knight), but rather, as Hito Steyerl (2006) sees it, as "a new social movement within the art field", then this would certainly include Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula. Questioning one's own role within the art system, linking this with concrete socio-political themes such as the criticism of US foreign policy and the criticism of the ideology of the idyllic private sphere of the family, indicates a version of institutional critique at the same time, which not only goes beyond the limitation to art institutions like galleries and museums. It also covers more than Isabelle Graw (2005: 50) includes with the differentiated, expanded concept of institution, of corporate culture and celebrity culture. It is more to be understood as a criticism of the institutions of capitalist society altogether, in the sense of Herbert Marcuse's utopian idea that the aim is to work towards a society, in which people are no longer enslaved by institutions. To this extent, Steyerl's analysis also needs to be expanded: institutional critique should not only be understood as a movement within the art field, but also as one that would hardly be imaginable without the social movements outside the art field.

Artistic internationalism, in other words a certain orientation of the subject matter of artistic work, which nevertheless first develops in the confrontation with the viewers, proves to be the link between the art movement and the social movement. In this function as a link, works like those described above are to be defended against both their proponents and their opponents.

One of these opponents, for example, is Jacques Rancière (2006),

who lists Rosler's aforementioned work as an example of art that too strongly disambiguates the relation between illusion and reality. In works like "Bringing the War Home", according to Rancière, "the sense of fiction is lost" (Rancière 2006: 91), which should, however, be central to the real politics of art. Rancière (2006: 87) argues for a "politics of art that is proper to the aesthetic regime of art" and which precedes the political action of the artist.[vii] He maintains that the confrontation between two heterogeneous elements, as demonstrated in Rosler's collages, is characteristic of critical art. However, it tends to turn itself into a mere inventory of things. In turn, this taking inventory leads to the exact opposite of what was intended: the politics of art is reduced to "welfare and ethical imprecision" (Rancière 2006: 96), or it dissolves into "the indeterminacy [...] that is called ethics today" (Rancière 2006: 99). According to Rancière, art is political neither because of its message nor in the way that it represents social structures, ethnic and sexual identity or political struggles. "Art is primarily political in creating a space-time sensorium, in certain modes of being together or apart, of defining being inside or outside, opposite to or in the middle of" (Rancière 2006: 77).

Yet Rosler and Sekula's works are by no means situated exclusively in the tradition of explicitly political agitation art like that of John Heartfield or Diego Rivera. However, even their works denigrated by Rancière as "directly" political art could prove to be suitable for creating a sensorium, if, for example, the indeterminate specification of being together and apart, etc. is interpreted as a relationship, as it exists and is thematized in the relationship between work and viewer. For only very few "political" works are limited solely to conveying messages and representing social/ political conflicts. Michelangelo Pistoletto, for instance, in his mirror painting ("Vietnam", 1962/1965) linked the art historical

issue of the work-viewer relationship with political explicitness. Two persons, painted on tissue paper and cut out along their contours, are glued to a reflecting metal panel, a woman in a red trench coat and a man in a black suit with a tie, each of them holding a stick with a demo banner attached to the upper ends, on which the letters "...NAM" can be read. Looking at this life-sized picture, viewers are immediately drawn into the depiction of the scene, obviously an anti-Viet Nam demonstration. Here Pistoletto positions the viewers both opposite the picture as such and also in front of a political statement, directly involving them in both. According to Tony Godfrey (2005: 114), this artistic stance, which places the viewer in a direct relationship to the image, is "a crucial characteristic of Conceptual Art."

In the case of Sekula's "Two, three, many ... (terrorism)" and Rosler's "Bringing the War Home", this kind of context is established through the internationalism of 1968. This internationalism involves more of a political stance than a (for example, Trotskyist) program, an awareness of the mutual conditionedness of social battles in different regions of the world. Due not least of all to the anti-colonial liberation movements, with the student movements of the 1960s an anti-authoritarian internationalism – in contrast to the proletarian internationalism of the early 20th century – gained "more significance theoretically as well [...] In fact, this was one of its central components. Internationalism and '68' formed a unit and must therefore also be treated as such" (Hierlmeier 2002: 23). This internationalist perspective was realized in the social movements in this way perhaps even more than in the art field, within which it was criticized as obscuring western hegemony.[viii]

The artistic internationalism is all the more to be emphasized also

in response to proponents of Rosler's "Bringing the War Home", such as Beatrice von Bismarck (2006). Martha Rosler continued her series in 2004 under the same title, but instead of motifs from the Viet Nam war she used motifs from the US invasion of Iraq. Although it cannot to be dismissed that the Iraq series is a "self-quotation", as Beatrice von Bismarck (2006: 239) states, a comparable point of reference in terms of subject matter is certainly the rhetoric of freedom used by the US government both then and now. Nor is the observation false that the more garish choice of colors in comparison with the original series enhances the impression of uncanniness, understood in Freud's sense as a return of the repressed. "Especially in Rosler's photographic collages, in which the images of war break into the familiar homeyness, the home sweet home, as what is only seemingly alien, this return of the repressed finds a striking visual form" (Bismarck 2006: 240).

Yet one crucial criterion still remains unmentioned in this view, specifically the integration of artistic work in the strategies and practices of the social movements. Although the US invasion of Iraq was accompanied by worldwide protests, in its majority this movement has long since ceased to operate in the context of a Guevara-like anti-imperialism. The tactic of "bringing the war home" in any way was completely omitted. And there is a reason for this: filling this slogan with emancipatory significance seems to be entirely unthinkable at least for the social movements at a time when Islamic terror like that of Al Qaida has multiply affected western capitals on the one hand and on the other is installed as a scenario of general threat. The war, or a war, has long since "come home", has arrived in the western urban centers, into which it first had to be brought in the 1960s and 1970s, although its effects are not those intended by the actors of the sixties movements. On the contrary, instead of enlightenment, awareness, empathy,

emancipatory radicalization, an institutional and psychological insulation is taking place. The boom in security technologies and policies had already signaled the end of the urban guerillas in the 1970s. Not reflecting on this end and seamlessly picking up from where it stopped thirty years earlier must give rise to perplexity with an artist like Rosler. For she herself had emphasized how relatively "the measures of aesthetic coherence are applied to photographic practice" (Rosler 1999: 122), and lamented a contemporary tendency to detach art works from their context. Although a link is made in the continuation of the series to an ethical issue, and the standpoint of the viewer to and in the depicted situation is questioned, the political context of the emancipatory social movement and its strategies remains omitted – both in the work and in the criticism formulated by von Bismarck.

IV.

With respect to the first phase of institutional critique, Sabeth Buchmann (2006) states that in terms of the call for cultural and social relevance she differs from the historical avant-garde in that a different way of dealing with these issues has been cultivated: the "radius of action was and is no longer society," according to Buchmann (2006: 22), "but rather specific public, institutional and/or media fields."

Neither the depreciation of the aesthetic value of artistic works like "Two, three, many ... (terrorism)" or "Bringing Home the War" nor their decontextualization in a political respect does justice to their specific criticism. The works discussed here do indeed thematize central issues that are immanent to the art field, which are linked to the questions and concerns of social movements –

with the normative turn, so to speak, of being embroiled in the production of the social world: if I am part of the historical process, then – according to one of the central ideas of focus theory, which has been criticized as being voluntaristic – it ultimately only depends on my determination (and that of a few others) to reverse the conditions. Both Rancière and von Bismarck are building on a false focus: Rancière with his criticism of the unambiguousness that he claims exists in the confrontation with social conditions and destroys or does not enable the alleged "politics of aesthetics"; and von Bismarck (and even Rosler herself with her continuation) by overlooking this tie with the social context. It would be better to build instead on the hinge function between artistic issues and political forms of social movements. Tying into the art historical question of the relationship between artist, work and viewer would make it possible to draw from what Bourdieu called the "space of possibilities", which "defines and delimits the universe of both what is thinkable and what is unthinkable" (Bourdieu 2001: 373). In this sense, the development of artistic internationalism that is based on and rooted in the battles of the social movements and their practices of solidarity represents a potential expansion of this space.

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[i]On the connection between "Viennese Actionism" and the student movement, cf. especially Foltin 2004: 58 ff. and Raunig 2005: 169ff.

[ii]Nina Tessa Zahner (2005) has analyzed the emergence of a third field, a "sub-field of expanded production" in the context of the Pop Art of the 1960s. This conjoins elements from both poles in the figure of the artist as entrepreneur. The lasting transformations of the field that go back to these developments would have to be discussed separately.

[iii]The "autonomy of the art field" that Bourdieu speaks of is thus not to be confused with the "autonomy of the art work" that is asserted by modernist art theory. Bourdieu's whole theory ultimately aims to unmask the "autonomy of the art work" as an ideology. Both Graw's slightly disgusted statement about the dominance of money on the one hand and Zahner's (2005: 290) recognition of Pop Art on the other, which credits Warhol for, among other things, "having pointed out the ideological content of the art that claims to be autonomous", are based on this misunderstanding.

[iv]Bourdieu (2003: 141) speaks of a "space with two dimensions and two forms of struggle and history": between the "pure" and the "commercial" pole there is the question of the legitimacy and the

status of art; at another level the recognition of the works and the conflicts between young/new and old/established artists is at stake.

[v]On the history of the Weather Underground, cf. Jacobs 1997.

[vi]The first pictures of the series were published about 1970 as contributions to a magazine called "Goodbuy to all that" (No. 10), placed next to an article by the "Angela Davis committee in Defense of Women Prisoners".

[vii]Rancière also decisively rejects the social conditions of judgments of taste and their integration in the symbolic struggles of a society that Bourdieu developed in *Distinction* (1982). He describes Bourdieu's demystification of the pure aesthetic gaze as a "cheap alliance between scientific and political progressive thinking" (Rancière 2006: 79), yet he has nothing to counter this with but the assertion of a singular "form of freedom and indifference [...], which joined aesthetics with the identification of what art is at all" (ibid.). It would be interesting to discuss whether that is the reason why Rancière, as Christian Höller (2006: 180) stresses, is to be regarded "currently in the context of left-wing cultural circles as 'most wanted'".

[viii]For example, Rasheed Araeen's (1997: 100) criticism in 1978: "The myth of the internationalism of western art must be destroyed now. [...] Western art expresses exclusively the characteristics of the west [...]. Western art is not international. It is only a transatlantic art. It only reflects the culture of Europe and North America. The current 'internationalism' of western art is no more than a function of the political and economic power of the west, which imposes its values on other people. In an international context it would therefore be more appropriate to speak of an imperialistic art."