

Anyway!

A country's culture is rated according to the dignity of its artists, according to the respect that is paid to them. If interest in art gets lost, society stops radiating, whether from the minds or from the hearts. A warning.

Peter Noever

In summer we usually ask ourselves: What's new in art? This year's conclusion is: Nothing. Whether in Kassel, Venice, Münster or Basel: with regard to positions, curatorships and trends the art barometer tends to point towards conservatism. Any trendsetting perspectives? Negative. Kassel's twelfth *Documenta*, global epicenter of contemporary art, neither accounts for art as a field of force nor for the potential of individual artists that is particularly promising at such events. Especially the new Aue-pavilion, an industrially prefabricated greenhouse cluster designed as the heart of the exhibition, is an embodiment of the dispassionate, disenchanting and anything but convincing dealings with the production of art or the artists respectively. At the same time, commercial motivation sends art to the desert like a traveling circus, i.e. the Louvre and the Guggenheim go to Abu Dhabi. Whoever gets to see the *Biennale* showrooms resembling showcases for museum merchandise – a few pleasantly unsparring presentations excluded – will get a bitter foretaste of this. Unfortunately good, i.e. not fully commercialized art has become rare – the *Art Basel* being no exception. Last, but not least, Damien Hirst's exhibition at the London *White Cube Gallery*, an evident manifestation of our system of art; a "congenial" concept – with just one flaw: This spectacle, suitable for the masses, originates from the logic of management consultants. Is art under guardianship of profit-maximizing calculations not prone to become a case for nursing care?

It would be shortsighted to commercialize art any further, except the intention were the promotion of its banalization and domestication. There is a boom in borrowing models from economics, yet they cannot be transferred one-to-one into the field of art. Nothing ages as quickly as a manager's concept. Furthermore, it is – to put it mildly – a problematic practice to lump together entirely different art institutions and expose them at more or less regular intervals to neo-liberal "evaluating processes". The latter usually completely negate the differential conditions that contemporary art is subject to in this country. The trivial crisis of a trivialized and flat art market that is overindulging in itself is more than evident. More and more frequently art is replaced by advanced crafts. Has art been reduced to the continuation of business transactions with different means, limited to the range that economics allows for it? Having fallen victim to the pleasing and marketable, art is tearing out its own wings.

Fatally, commercialization and conservatism come hand in hand. Art ought to consistently refuse consumerism. When throwing itself at the mercy of the dictate of the markets, art commits suicide in fear of death.

A contemporary art institution – as a refuge of urban pleasure – caters to art, and goes to where art is happening at the very moment. It does not wish to passively put art on display, but instead it intends to actively produce, to set into action. The large museums with all their art treasures of past times have become exemplary in marketing themselves by now, but they cannot generate contemporary art. Most often than not these institutions pay a high price for the glamour of public appeal – the results: arbitrariness devoid of meaning and orientation; where art is bunkered, capitalism prevails. The museums could not benefit from the recent art boom, yet it has not passed them without traces: Which of the renovated museums does not create the impression of a bank or a car dealer? It is outrageous to see how our cities, our villages, well even our ideas have become a mockery of any veritable form of aesthetics. If interest in art that is deserving of its name gets lost completely – factual knowledge of art is dramatically decreasing – society stops radiating, whether from the minds or from the hearts.

You have to live art, it cannot be decreed from a desktop. What is truly needed is not – only – money nor institutional restructurings, but a revolutionary saturation of the polity with the life techniques of contemporary art, a climate of openness for the new, the foreign, the unknown, the unexpected. New forms of aestheticism as re- or counter-readings of the world's text are needed, and art institutions all around are summoned to do their utmost to encourage these. Not least it is the aesthetic sense that shapes our relationship with the world and with ourselves, and perhaps today's aesthetics is tomorrow's ethics. Particularly in times of total mercantilization, when ideas from conservative to reactionary are rampant, dismissing contemporary art from one's thoughts is punished with a gradual human impoverishment. Artistic interventions are essential for reasons of democratic hygiene, socio-critical, emancipatory-progressive, humanitarian and countless other reasons.

A country's culture is rated according to the dignity of its artists; an art policy that meets reality stands its ground with the respect that is paid to the artists. Contemporary art does not need charity but an accelerated, profound support. The art market, conventional art institutions and galleries are incapable of providing it; no-one except some few die-hard believers in the market truly supposes that art –

beyond the taste of the masses – could ever finance itself. Help to self-help is what is called for: It is conceivably hard to live off the "invisible hand"-in-mouth. More cold concepts will not cure the malaise, too many have already landed in the waste paper basket. It is high time for a strategy of long-sighted investment into the future. Instead of centralization from above, the complex plurality of art needs an adequate, decentralized network of multiple platforms and some kind of "docking facilities" (the diversity of the museum and art scenes has to be guaranteed). The present potentials in art, literature, architecture, music, design etc. are to be bundled, strengthened and developed. The goal: a "master plan" with sensitivity in order to let the Other flourish next to the commercial (e.g. as customary in other countries, by means of various private and/or fiscal means. Thus the University of Applied Arts together with the MAK vehemently demands the establishment of an Austrian National Foundation for Contemporary Art.)

There is no reparation for a lost chance. And now – granted a feeling of responsibility for art politics – Austria finally has the chance to arrive in the presence, to leave behind the safekeeping and preserving of the traditional, the provincial, operetta-like fair weather festivals, the highly subsidized prestige art, the touristy mega-events etc.. Dwelling on nostalgia flees every risk and thus withstands art. The time of excuses and empty promises has to come to an end. The readiness to assume the risk of the experiment is in demand – to lead the way in this regard would certainly present our country in a favorable light. Unthinkable, if contemporary art were to disappear in the summer slump. Austria, proud cultural nation ("Kulturnation") by its own definition, should look ahead on time so that some things to be proud of will also be there in the future. Hiding behind traditions means biting the hand that feeds you. He who forgets the present will be punished by the future. The art of the here and now is tomorrow's heritage; it's daily postponement has to be put to an end. In general, my not quite dispassionate plea for contemporary art, calls forth the inherently necessary killer argument of "money is tight". Here we have to reply: Whoever believes my plea to be "unrealistic" has to put up with the question why this is the case in one of the richest countries in the world, where according to the Secretary of Defense three Eurofighters less saved 370 million Euros.

The situation (in variation of an Austrianism by Karl Kraus) is serious, but not hopeless. In the domestic cultural scene the new federal government has raised high hopes for a wind of change, for a long overdue campaign in favor of contemporary

artists – wrongly? Hope dies last – in defiance of the figures imparted by the ministry. Anyway, support of contemporary art that is stronger than what is to be expected at the moment would be desirable. Even if these first details that leaked through created the impression that once again a deteriorative improvement of the current art policy of administration and preservation is in store for us, I still or now more than ever entertain the – perhaps unsubstantiated – conviction that the urgent concerns of contemporary art will be more than just heard this time, for instance the MAK-Strategy CAT (*Contemporary Art Tower*) – powerstation for the art of today and tomorrow.

A non-conformist will to free life from every confinement – that's what art means. Art is experimental and vanguard, it is radical, resisting and counterfactual criticism of all establishments going the whole hog without compromise. It is a permanent revolution of all discourse, constrictive as well as deconstructive. In relation to reality art always demonstrates an: Anyway! Affirming the mainstream deprives us of our freedom. As a realm of autonomy outside the everyday, art is not tributary to any ends besides art and in this sense it is devoid of use and function. Critical artists contrast the World with worlds, they make the invisible visible, the unspeakable speakable. In the middle of the recent blindness towards opportunities art discloses what we lack the most: visions and utopia.