

Public Art Policies

26.-28.2.2004

Vienna, Kunsthalle Exnergasse / WUK

Context

The Public Art Policies conference in Vienna is the first in a series of discursive events that will take place throughout 2004 in Vienna, Linz, Ljubljana, London, Lüneburg and Riga in conjunction with the transnational research project [republicart](#). Together with a second conference in Ljubljana, Public Art Policies will address the culture-political aspects of the overall project republicart. Both conferences are intended to discuss the respective social function of the institutions of the art field. At the same time, though, the different focuses of the two events will be primarily based on the differing geopolitical situations. Whereas the conference in Vienna is to reflect on the increasingly difficult situation of state-subsidized institutions of contemporary art in central and northern Europe, in Ljubljana the very different institutional framework of the art field in southern and central Europe will be elucidated.

Content

"The final word of power is that resistance is primary." (Gilles Deleuze)

There is hardly another statement that as aptly expresses the indistinguishability, the interweaving of power and resistance in the postmodern setting as Gilles Deleuze' enigmatic assertion. Yet there is also hardly another statement that better describes the contradictory situation, the opportunities and the traps, in which progressive art institutions increasingly find themselves in European welfare states in a process of transformation: although resistance and criticism are primary, it is power that has the final word.

On the one hand this statement from Deleuze and the associated theorem from Foucault illustrate the functions of the institutions of the art field in the pacification, assimilation and instrumentalization of political practices, themes and phenomena. As the Empire is nourished, according to Hardt/Negri, from the productive force of the multitude, the art institution as an out-sourced organizational form of the state apparatus seems to be dependent on constantly new portions of critical art, which keep both the mediating institution and the apparatus alive.

On the other hand, in the neo-liberal process of transforming the welfare state into a particle of a globalizing network of transnational corporations, supra-state institutions and powerful nation-states, the art institutions themselves seem increasingly to be losing their basis for being able to deal with critical, anti-state phenomena: along with the financial constraints of the art institutions, the financing institutions exert an increasingly direct influence on the programs.

In this twofold dilemma it is a matter of discussing the status quo of what is regarded as the primary self-definition of the contemporary in art: criticism, resistance against what is established, minority concerns. At the same time, though, it is also a matter of the elementary survival of progressive art institutions in a field that is dominated more and more by conservative colossuses of culture and the neo-liberal business of spectacle culture.

Objectives

I. The conference is not intended to recapitulate the pathos of the subversive role of the art producer with regard to the state and institutions, but rather to explore the strategies of the actors *in* the art institutions themselves for at least temporarily emancipating themselves from the grasp of the state apparatus. This involves both self-criticism and precarious attempts to break out of the logic described above, and it involves utopias: what are the responses of the art institution that regards itself as progressive to the hypostatizing of the concept of the audience, the political demand for ever "new

audiences", to a populist tendency to simplification, to the recollection of the old masters whose aura can also be exploited for spectacles? How could the function of the art institution as a medium between state apparatus and production be read/turned in an emancipatory way?

II. On the other hand, the role of the financing counterpart, in other words cultural administration and cultural policies, should also be analyzed again with an explicit focus on culture-political programs in the field of contemporary art. Are there even any culture-political programs that promote the point of departure described above? If there are, what are they and can they be generalized? If there are not, how could a useful relationship between cultural policies and art institutions be imagined beyond the programs?

Across the two main strands of the conference, as in the entire republicart project, the relevant concept of public sphere(s) is also to be reflected, particularly the question of the extent to which art institutions play a role in establishing public sphere(s) and how far culture-political programs can promote these kinds of strategies.