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Art is... as funny as money. Artistic reflections on economy.

Abstract

Art is as heavy as sorrow, as light as a breeze, as bright as an idea ... On that note the complexity and diversity of contemporary art has the ability to show, visualize and transform the constructions as well as the boundaries of a system: Especially if a society doesn't trust their systems anymore, it's important to keep such possibilities at hand (Luhmann 1990). Art in its specific way operates on a fictional level – with an ambiguous connection to reality (Koller 2007): It allows observing the world (being observed), thus becoming aware of processes and differences, confronting reality with possibilities of fictional reality via different perceptions (Luhmann 1990). Oscillating between the two spheres, art offers an interesting viewpoint – observing society with wonderment and admiration (Luhmann 2008); as well as showing more possibilities and combinations as assumed before. In this sense, artists act as irritation-indicators of society, which may, can and must react more sensitive and unfounded to social developments (Baecker 2008). By doing so, artistic observations and interventions initiate self-observation of other systems. In other words – rules of cultural communication will become obvious to the culture: Rules of the game are brought into focus, paradoxically by belying expectations, interlinking contexts, loose associations and alienations. The offense against the rules initiates their ideational realization (Simon 2007). Especially the economical social system shows that the actual social organization needs a critical as well as a benevolent check-up (Baecker 2007): Focal point of artistic works dealing with economy is critique of capitalism (in any shade of color) as well as work, especially workers and their working conditions (see: MoMa PS 1 2014; Limbeck-Lilienau / Muttenthaler / Zuna-Krath 2012; Eiblmayr / Gfader / Kotyk 2005;) Furthermore money as an economic symbol (see: Buchhart / Nestler 2010; Raap 2000;) and shopping malls are interesting issues for artists to deal with. Especially shopping malls as a system of their own showing offer & demand, consumption and the usage of money in its smallest, complex and attracting entity, seem to be an anchor point for artistic examinations. Or to quote

Barbara Kruger once again: “I shop therefore I am”. The methodical basis is made up of two different case studies (Scholz / Tietje 2003; Eisenhardt 1989;), dealing with social structures & rules of economy: A profound analysis of the artworks (texts and work materials) as well as qualitative interviews with the artists are carried out. The case studies are presented as narratives to enable multidimensional insight. (Küpers 2005) Starting point is the artwork “Bag Lady” (2006, 2008) by Pilvi Takala (FIN): An intervention in a shopping mall in Berlin, where the artist went shopping carrying a lot of cash in a transparent plastic bag. This slight intervention of Pilvi Takala challenges the pleasant shopping atmosphere of the mall, and sheds controversial light on the fragility of the social order, where private property (money) is such a holy cow, that is under constant intuitive public control. (Takala 2014; Takala 2007; Opitz 2012;)

In contrast the artist group LIGNA (GER) presents the shopping mall as a utopian place, as an entire city in its ideal-typical form below a glass roof under which time would appear to be frozen: The products displayed patiently await their future owners to make them happy. In the performance “Ciudades Parallelas” (2010-2012) LIGNA provides the collective of consumers with a choreography of gestures that challenge the regulation of a controlled space: In this case, a shopping mall in Berlin - irritating this specific space for a short time, questioning its regulations as well as addressing the allures of the displayed products (LIGNA 2014; König / Feigelfeld 2011;)

What is the impact of such artistic work dealing with economy? What is the specific quality of these artworks? Which thoughts & suggestions do they cause? How did people in the shopping mall react? Art is ... as pretty as a picture, as funny as money, as fugitive as fraud.

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