

The exhibitions *Fantasie, Gebärden und Ausdruck* and *Authentizität. Das Authentisch Unauthentische* belongs to a three-part series which has taken place at Halle für Kunst Lüneburg in 2016 and 2017. All three are grasped as interconnected aspects of thinking about artistic practice and are based on the attempt to find concepts for those moments that interest one in works of art – i.e., to positively designate aspects that are met with interest and response, and not only to use a negation to formulate the fact that quite a bit of contemporary art exhausts itself to a high degree in running through references, in evoking a critical impetus, in a vocabulary schooled in discourse, or in glossy superficiality. Surprisingly, this attempt has brought notions to the fore that are regarded as rather obsolete and reactionary (*imagination, authenticity, expression*). Which is in turn interesting, too, because it seems to reveal a desire to utilize these concepts for contemporary art as well, since they can apparently name something that has to do with the surplus value and essence of art, meaning not just knowledge and experience, but also the ability to generate intensities. The exhibition series therefore seeks to approach these notions with the awareness of how they are charged and how questionable they are, beyond a clichéd understanding, in order to find out how far and in which direction they can take us. However, the situation has become more complicated in recent years. Against the background of an increasingly stronger criticism of emptied critical or politicized art practices, evoking these moments may not be generally suspected of contributing to a hopelessly antiquated concept of art anymore; but in the wake of the critique of the "political as style" (James Meyer), one must now be careful not to allow a "new sensibility", an "intensity as style", to creep in, based on the reactivation of a notion of the autonomy of art restricted to the formal.

### *Fantasie"('Imagination)'*

*Imagination* is first of all the foundation of all cognition, for according to Aristoteles, the soul does not think without images. Although it is a moment that constructs reality, there is a difference between images of mathematical or philosophical deliberations, for example, that ultimately remain *imaginary*, and those of artistic production during which one's *imagination* transfers *imaginary* images to real images. Even if – or precisely because – this is basically true of all artistic practices, the interest guiding the exhibition goes beyond merely ascertaining this fact and aims at artistic works that quite explicitly address *imagination* as desire, as the driving force of artistic production, without seeking to control it; works that do not shy away from the *imagination* on which they are based and thus integrate voids, incalculability, affects, and desire. Alongside such basic considerations, the focus is also on an art fueled by *imagination* that seeks what is possible as

opposed to what exists. At issue is the development and invention of worlds, languages, and spheres that situate themselves next to or beyond reality (toward fantasy and fiction). Appropriating the world by inventing the world. This immediately gives rise to the question of whether *imagination* is a possibility to create alternatives to and descriptions of what exists, or whether it is to be regarded more as an escapist withdrawal into private universes and thus "worldless", to use Hannah Arendt's words. And does such an art immediately make itself vulnerable, because the accusation of Marxist art critique applies to it, namely, that revolving around sentiments, inwardness, affects, and one's own artist's position follows late-capitalist logics? What would a regressive concept of *imagination* be, and where does the border to a progressive one lie? If a proximity to Harald Szeemann's individual mythologies arises here, then the constitutive (and constructive) function of *imagination* for the sphere of the political must also be marked. The latter has been increasingly discussed in recent years, most intensively in the series "Phantasm and Politics" organized by Helmut Draxler and Christoph Gurk at HAU (Hebbel am Ufer) in Berlin. Freud, and later Lacan, already stressed the constitutive role of the *imaginary* (Lacan used the term phantasm), albeit for the human psyche and the resulting construction of reality (or what are regarded as such). This aspect of constituting, which is characteristic of *imagination*, already makes it clear that the exhibition is not about (and cannot be about) establishing a dubious opposition between *imagination* and concept, and thus contributing to a naturalization, for the reason that thought and *imagination* always have the same origin, since one cannot be had without the other. Hence, *imagination* as such is never essentialist, even if it is at times essentialized. Yet, like with the "fantasia" as a form of musical composition, it is accompanied by associations of emotionality and expressivity, creating an opening that leads away from the here and now. So if, according to Christina von Braun, *imaginary* spaces are zones of inaccessibility and incalculability, and *imagination* is thus the retaining of spheres "that needn't correspond with the world, that make no claim to reality, meaning that they do not lay claim to the possibility of becoming material or visible", what does this tell us about art? Is artistic practice a taming of *imagination*? Just like psychoanalysis that seeks to grasp the spaces of invisible images and translate them into a language?

### *Gebärden und Ausdruck* ("Gestures and Expression")

While *imagination* forms the basis of all cognition – according to Aristoteles, the soul does not think without images – and can remain purely imaginary, it belongs to the essence of *expression* to manifest itself to the senses. As opposed to the sign that refers to something else and signifies according to defined conventions, *expression*, or to express something or express oneself, cannot be

reduced to a simple signifying relation or model of representation. Instead, *expression* reveals a latent and not explicit meaning that is produced not via the detour of a meaningful context, but directly, and that tends to be indeterminate, incomplete, and infinite. The exhibition *Gebärden und Ausdruck*'s primarily interested in this moment of immediacy and unsaturation, the approach to which, quite in the sense of understanding *expression*, is not a matter of decoding. While *imagination* forms the basis of all artistic practice in that imaginary images are transferred to real ones through the power of imagination, this generality cannot be applied to *expression*, as it seems, since a large portion of contemporary art can be regarded as a pure transformation achievement, as a pure sign that appears to merge with a simple model of reference. Therefore, the exhibition explicitly aims at artworks that are not preconditioned by representation. Yet even if moments of immediacy and incompleteness are at the fore, it is not about artistic practices that exhaust themselves in purely acting out immediacy. Although the focus is on immediacy, it should not be excluded that there are layers in the addressed works that imply something specific or refer to something concrete. So if *expression* means becoming experienceable without being based on a relation of reference, the question arises as to what *expression* actually is, or what or who actually expresses, when something is expressed. A self is commonly associated with *expression* in a very essentialist way, but something can also express itself through something else (e.g., a medium). In this case, that through which something is expressed serves as an instrument and thus marks the reverse side of what Benjamin termed the "magic of language", with "language" being understood as all kinds of utterances, thus detaching them from their connection to words. Hence, expressing "something through something" must be distinguished from expressing "something in something". While the former implies an instrumental use, through which information and contents are communicated, the latter refers to the level of enunciating through which a meaning independent of sense is produced. Even if it mustn't correspond with the content of what is said, or can even go beyond it, it is inherent to language all the same and directly conveyed in it. This notion of the magic of language, which can also be called the "magic of expression", appears interesting in the context of the exhibition precisely for the reason that with it the attempt is made to conceive the efficacy of *expression* with respect to something other than that which is represented manifesting itself in what is expressed. But *expression* can also be staged (e.g., in theater). This form of *expression* differs from what was just described in that the emotions shown by the actors, for example, are not necessarily their own, but are merely staged and therefore owe to a translation following certain rules. A similar exemplification not identical with itself can also apply to artworks. For example, they can express sadness, without being sad themselves (or even being able to be sad), just like the artists don't necessarily have to feel sad to create the works. This means that for an object to express a quality, it needn't necessarily possess it. It can possess it only metaphorically, not literally. Hence, expression can also be an effect. But this does not mean that it

is therefore "untrue". In view of the conditionality and constructedness of subjects, the question arises of whether all *expressions* are subject to constituting conditions, meaning that there can be no "true" (but also no "untrue") *expression*. This in turn implies that any notion of substance or essence misses the point. *Expression*, then, is not tied to a substance, even though it is relational and can be traced back to something. So if talk is of the self (e.g., the self of the artist or the self of the work), it does not refer to an authentic, unbroken, unconstructed self that is one with itself. To do justice to this ambivalence, but also to not have to dispense with *expression* as something that goes beyond the intended meaning and that can be indeterminate, both *expression* and construction must be conceived together. This attempt reveals a closeness to the rites of possession, for according to Michel Leiris, they also reveal an ambivalent state in which the behavior of the possessed person is characterized by both real participation and forms of *expression* schooled according to conventions (e.g., the way the possessed person must embody the spirit which possesses him). Although possession ultimately turns out to be a controlled endeavor, the regulation and formalization of being possessed does not mean that it is artificially fabricated in all instances. For the interesting and decisive aspect lies precisely in the possessed persons playing a role, but with the belief that they are under the influence of a real power. Being something and performing something is not a contradiction here. Instead, deception and *expression* are one, so that being possessed must be grasped as a lived and precisely not as a played theater. For if it were pure theater, it would be without consequences. It is, however, supported by a moment of magic in which the effect transcends the register of the action causing it. In this context, it appears interesting that Expressionism – the name obliging it to *expression* – is also characterized by a merging of construction and *expression* and thus by the dissolution of their apparent opposition. Expressive art can be extremely constructed, even if it does not adhere to given, canonical rules, but to rules originating it itself and not borrowed from elsewhere. Here, *expression* is tied to a relative autonomy. A further aspect of Expressionism is that *expression* reveals itself in the works as a whole, i.e., in certain features that show them to be realized constellations, and not in individual signs that can be connected back to what is to be expressed. Since that which is triggered and not that which is expressed is relevant for Expressionism, it is liberated both from the coercion to narrate and from prefabricated signs. Therefore, its premises could provide answers to questions of whether and how enunciation could take place beyond reference and beyond codifications and attributions. Regardless of all these considerations, *expression* consists foremost in setting oneself in relation and reveals moments of encounter and communication. For as Benjamin wrote, humans express themselves in "language", they communicate with the other. Hence, access to the other lies in *expression*. One can even say that the other comes into existence for us through *expression*, because expressing oneself cannot be delegated. Humans can be represented, but not expressed by others. And what presumably also lies in this referencing, in this addressing of and orientation

toward the other is the kind of intensity that *expression* can generate beyond communicating information and making assertions.

*'Authentizität. Das Authentisch Unauthentische' (Authenticity. The Authentic Inauthentic)*

Even if the exhibition *'Authentizität. Das Authentisch Unauthentische'* engages with the concept of *authenticity* it is by no means intent on prompting the (artist-)subject to be *authentic*. It is not about defensive identity politics. It neither seeks to put the case for the late-capitalistic imperative of self-expression and self-fulfillment that, by biopolitically exploiting and marketing one's own liveliness, most obnoxiously converges with the system's imperative of post-Fordist labor; nor does it open the way for a neo-romantic longing for the genuine, for truth and what is deemed one's own, which can quickly touch upon reactionary, identitarian ideas and is usually read as a symptom of moments of alienation inherent in postmodern, heterogeneous, and globalized societies. *Authenticity*, then, is quite an ambivalent issue, for it raises the question of whether an artistic enunciation that moves both the recipient and the artist, meaning that it makes the offer of becoming involved, is at all conceivable without being tied back to the one who expresses it— to his or her affects, emotions, and intellect. How can artistic production be interesting and relevant without involvement (which is not to be mistaken for narcissism and self-presentation)? What is meant here is expressing oneself, not the exchange of signs based on communication, because things can, of course, be communicated that the one who communicates doesn't mean, think, or feel. However, this involvement implies knowing that the 'self' is present in what one expresses, thus representing a closeness to *authenticity*. If the concept of *authenticity* appears to have been disposed of in the theoretical discourses with postmodernism, it is for the reason that the notion of a stable, autonomous, ahistorical self has also proven to be a fiction of modernity. Precisely that to which *authenticity* would make reference has been lost. For who or what is this 'self' supposed to be that expresses itself authentically and is congruent with itself? Today, one merely speaks of *authenticity* effects, since one cannot feel at home with the fragments of one's incongruence with oneself. Such a notion would still refer to a substance, connected with the idea of a novel of inner development and thus with that of becoming, of learning and unfolding, of moving from fragment to fragment: Today, I am a different person than tomorrow, and in the best case I will ultimately arrive somewhere by making full use of my potentials.

Although the moment of *authenticity* is being massively attacked and called into question in theoretical discourses, it is still alive and kicking in other areas, so that in the light of facebook,

twitter, and innumerable reality and casting shows, one can speak of downright »*authenticity* terror« (the title of a symposium at the Deutsches Theater on the occasion of the Autorentheatertage 2012). *Authenticity*, whether negatively or positively referenced, is therefore highly present, it simply refuses to go away, despite having been the object of permanent critique going back to 1960s structuralism. There seems to be no way around it: For example, when describing a certain photographic expression that doesn't strategically aim at creating an effect by terming the difference »authentic.« The question therefore arises as to what the concept can achieve, if anything, and on what the surplus value of this difference claimed by descriptions of *authenticity* is based on.

Even if the postmodern narrative of construction and non-substantiality can be regarded as forming the background of the exhibition and the attendant engagement with *authenticity*, it is not to be the subject of debate. The issue is not to proclaim a pre-postmodern becoming-one- with-oneself. The question is rather: In which way and in which direction can one think from that point onward? How productive is this discursive status quo of ongoing, inescapable self-alienation? How beneficial is it to permanently regard *authenticity* only as a phantasm, a »heroic, bourgeois narrative of liberation« (Diedrich Diederichsen)? Doesn't this merely conceal the next phantasm? And be it that of having recognized the enemy and therefore being in the know? Moreover, what does this theoretical construction imply in practice? Doesn't the question still remain as to who or what actually expresses when something is expressed, when something like art emerges? What are the sources? What are the points of withdrawal and reference? Isn't something always referenced, even in a negation? And doesn't one want to become involved despite the awareness of the construction? Isn't art-making an extremely ambivalent process in the first place? How much sense does it make when—as Rainald Goetz remarked—discursivity has almost entirely replaced the real? For even if the 'self' is a construction, it is still there.

In postcolonial theory, for example, one can find the idea of »strategic essentialism« (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), meaning that in order to be able to act in the sphere of practice, in the street, where theory ends, subjects and categories should be determined for strategic reasons, for specific purposes. Something similar could be interesting for artistic practice as well, even if political necessities can't really be given as grounds: In order to be able to speak, to become or remain capable of acting, one would posit oneself as autonomous, despite the knowledge of one's conditionality and constructedness. In the wake of such a strategic essentialization, one would then no longer speak of *authenticity*, but of »*strategic authenticity*.«

Even if the exhibition starts from an interest in aspects of *authenticity*, involvement, and being present, it is not concerned with artistic practices that are exhausted in purely acting out immediacy.

Here, *authenticity* is not to be equated with or mistaken for sentimentality, originality, inwardness, or a »tyranny of intimacy« (Richard Sennett), quite to the contrary. The artworks called upon in the show can also be characterized by extreme artificiality and staging, as well as by the rejection of any kind of unmediated artistic enunciation or any gesture that is all TOO artistic. This is occasionally performed with such vehemence and involvement, however, that one can again speak of an *authentic* impulse. What is also meant here, then, are narratives aimed at stylization, such as the dandy, the gesture, or the pose, since one can also identify with and authentically embody a role. For this reason, a special focus of the exhibition is on an art that reveals a symbiotic relationship between authentic and anti-authentic moments, while at the same time revealing the attendant border conflicts or bringing them into play in the first place. Even if the artists play with being *authentic*, with being themselves, they are never fully so. It is never only the self, but it is also never only a role. This attitude of »*authentic anti-authenticity*« corresponds exactly with what was briefly outlined above as »*strategic authenticity*.«

These considerations describe but one orientation of artistic practice. They also address a virulent problem of the non-artistic field. The striking feature of our present times is that not only has the call to »Be yourself!« voiced by rock'n'roll and the hippie movement become normative, but also the punk attitude of »Reinvent yourself!« or »Get rid of yourself!«. According to Diederichsen, both are »no longer artistically mediated strategies that show how one can live, how one can assert one's rights, and how one can respond to the system's imperatives. They have become imperatives themselves.« Even if there is no right life in the wrong one, if one cannot escape from exploitation, perhaps the play with, or the switching and vacillating between the two positions would be currently the most interesting approach.

All these considerations on *imagination*, *expression* and *authenticity* which are based on an interest in an art that cannot be arrested or frozen, but reveals moments that are not intent on being understood or creating evident contexts (of meaning) informed by factual reality, form the exhibition's frame of reference, whereby the works on display stand for themselves and merely mark a starting point for the ideas, concepts, deliberations, and notions formulated above.

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