

Dissonance: Transgressed Boundaries between Desire and Fear

There is no unity to be expected in invoking the "human race". The sheer diversity of interests and situations, the vertiginous differences in wealth and power, the multiplicity of cultures and ways of relating to the soil, all forbid that any appeal to a "universal human interest" will trigger any ascent.¹

Now, I am going to ask you the toughest question of all, the really divisive one: do you consider that those who are on the opposite sides of the ecological issues in which you are engaged directly or indirectly are irrational beings that should be resisted, disciplined, maybe punished, or at least enlightened and re-educated? That is, do you believe that your commitment is to carry out a police- or a peace-making operation of some sort in the name of a higher authority? Or do you consider that they are your enemies that have to be won over through a trial the outcome of which is unknown as long as you have not succeeded? That is, that neither you nor them can delegate to some superior and prior instance the task of refereeing the dispute?²

Getting involved or not getting involved with collective acts of other humans – During these moments in our subjective decision-making processes our behaviours and attitudes have a momentary clash, due to the conflicting sensitivities that we are experiencing. Introduced by Leon Festinger in the field of social psychology back in the 1950s, the term *cognitive dissonance*³ denotes these moments of discomfort, where two inputs conflict with each other due to contradicting moral, cultural, social, or economic values.

As the individuals of contemporary societies, the circumference of our freedom in daily decisions is gradually narrowed down under the influence of contradictory pieces of information. Every choice that is eventually related to what and how we consume, as well as what and how we produce, is under permanent pressure exerted by marketing technologies and information overflow. At the same time, the individuals are often left alone with their decisions, because it takes decades, if not generations, until it is proven that a particular action, or the use of a particular product is harmful to the environment: *I need a computer with a decent processor, but learnt that it is produced and assembled in China under outrageous conditions. I would like to have hygienic conditions at home, but heard that most of the available products at the supermarket are terribly harmful to the ecology. I refuse to participate in the mass killings of the meat industry, and chose to be vegan, but read some articles related to over-agriculturalization of the globe that is endangering the ecology just as much, by excessively using fertilizers, and food poisons. I decided to buy organic products only, as far as I could afford; on the other hand I could actually buy cheaper products and share them with the child begging by the door of the supermarket. I also have read online articles on how to differentiate non-GMO products from organic ones, and how the labels delude consumers. Even organic farming endangers the ecology, when it comes to productivity growth, by excessive agriculturalization of the soil, which goes hand-in-hand with large scale commercial harvesting of trees. I avoid buying coats and shoes that are produced from leather or fur, only to find out that my purely chemical coat and boots were harmful to my health, and that they never will be recycled, not to mention the chemical waste generated during their production. I routinely separate plastic bottles, coloured and colourless glass bottles, metal and paper, even if I hear about nuclear waste being dumped underground.*

When Festinger was occupied with the theory of *cognitive dissonance*, his main focus was to see how an individual's behaviour

changes when her/his moral values conflict with an alternating choice that is likely to yield a profit: In his experiments, he saw that people's very subjective opinions could change when there is profit involved in the process. Since then not only the might of capital has increased tremendously, but also the conceptions of religious, moral, social, cultural, national, ecological, bio-ethical, scientific, artistic, technological values have been transformed globally into such formidable forms that in the presence of that overwhelming and permanent flow of information, our internal monologue consists of nothing but conflicting cognitions.

How do we position ourselves when we are faced with bio-ethical questions? To what extent do we decide to support humanity's desire to manipulate genes? How do we handle the ecology as the only 'owners' of the planet? How do we treat animals and other species that are mainly our 'food' or 'entertainment'? How do we process our waste, which is the result of our excessive production and consumption? Most of these questions are dealt with using collective acts, social institutions, that allows 'us' to use the pronoun 'we' as human beings, although 'we' altogether constitute an extreme diversity.

This twisted diversity however has lost its authenticity. It has been abused aggressively, and mostly reduced to an immense economical gap. With the evident support of the politics produced in the landscape of post-Fordism and post-colonialism, as well as the neo-liberal economic policies of the global hegemony, the human beings' desperate attempts at forging 'global' values, equality, and peace have been manoeuvred into a gridlock.

Technology and science have been accelerating progress with enormously high force throughout the past sixty years, particularly since World War II. As a consequence, the contemporary global human is facing an ecological crisis and is often paralyzed by devastating pessimism. Thanks to the information technologies, it is also virtually impossible not to be informed about all the dilemmas and disasters that are caused by our supposedly great achievements. This fluidity of information and the extreme pace of developments result in a permanent shower of sparking cognitive dissonances in our brains – as if our decision-making circuitry would have been shorted.

Is it sufficient to free myself from the animal politics of the global civilization by becoming a vegan? Is it enough to withdraw my participation from the unequal distribution of wealth and the abuse of human labour, by consuming fair-trade products only? Will I not be responsible anymore for the violent acts of my fellow-humans, if I refuse to take part in the army? If I do not purchase the cosmetic products that were tested on animals, will I save at least one creature? How large an impact can my actions actually have on political ecology? To what extent can I silence my mental stress in singular decision-making processes in the age of the so-called 'anthropocene'?

Dissonance: Transgressed Boundaries between Desire and Fear, was an exhibition that took place in Mumbai, opened on 6th February at Percept Art, focused on artistic behaviours that are provoked by such moments of conflict, caused by contradictory subjective values and social impositions: The moments of conflict that are experienced by individuals living under the frustrating apprehension of the ecological crisis; which is accelerated by exces-



Nezaket Ekici, *Screaming Feathers*, Performance/Installation, 2006
photo by Ylva Magnusson

sive production and consumption of goods, as well as the confusion fostered by an overflow of conflicting information.⁴

*To what extent Prajacta Palav, with her collected pieces of plastic waste from the streets of Mumbai, can create a space to twist the religious custom of garland making into processing waste from within? How do we position ourselves when we are confronted with the imagination of the capacities of the human beings' will to alter human biology, as well as the world around them, when we see the attractively designed mutated babies of Pinar Yoldas? Would it ever be possible to erase digital traces that are constantly left behind under today's landscape of surveillance and control, -one would ask, encountering the desperate attempt of Nita Tandon's performative erasure of the artist's signature? How would Nezaket Ekici create the devastating environment, of the animal mass killing, without using the millions of feathers she used in her performance *Screaming Feathers*?*

The exhibition aimed at engaging with singular reactions to, as well as refusals of, particular collective acts and social instituti-

ons that are produced by human beings, but at the same time constitute the forces that dominate us. It suggested problematizing the subjective resolutions that the individuals find in their endeavour to living a healthy, moral, peaceful, harmless life, despite the aggressive regimes of the hegemonic powers.

Isin Önoel, curator and writer, Vienna.

1 Bruno Latour, "War And Peace In An Age Of Ecological Conflicts", p.62, in *Revue Juridique de l'Environnement*, Vol. 1, 2014, pp. 51-63 (Written originally as a lecture at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, Vancouver 23rd of September, 2013.).

2 Bruno Latour, "War And Peace In An Age Of Ecological Conflicts", p.61, in *Revue Juridique de l'Environnement*, Vol. 1, 2014, pp. 51-63 (Written originally as a lecture at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, Vancouver 23rd of September, 2013.).

3 The use of the term in this context was inspired by Pinar Yoldas, in the process of our collective thinking practice throughout the preparations for the exhibition.

4 Dissonance: Transgressed Boundaries between Desire and Fear (6 - 27 February, 2015), PERCEPT ART Mumbai (India); Artists: Prajacta Palav Aher, Nezaket Ekici, Nita Tandon, Pinar Yoldas, Curators: Isin Önoel & Jesal Thacker.

MITTEILUNGEN DES VORSTANDS

Wir freuen uns sehr, Julia Rüdiger seit 9. Dezember 2014 als Nachfolgerin in der Kurie Universitäten und Forschungseinrichtungen zum Vorstand zählen zu dürfen. Auf Ihre Initiative hin haben wir uns für das Thema „Newest Art History. Wohin geht die jüngste Kunstgeschichte?“ für die kommenden Tagung entschieden, die wir vom 6. - 8. November 2015 veranstalten (den offiziellen Call for Papers finden Sie auf Seite 6). Der Vorstand hat sich v.a. aus finanziellen Gründen dazu entschieden, die Tagung entgegen dem üblichen Rhythmus dieses Jahr erneut in Wien abzuhalten. Um trotzdem die Bundesländer verstärkt in die Verbandstätigkeit zu integrieren, sind derzeit Veranstaltungen für Graz und Innsbruck in Planung.

Der vom VÖKK veranstaltete Bücherflohmarkt am 30. Jänner war nicht nur in finanzieller Hinsicht ein großer Erfolg! Der Spendenerlös ermöglicht uns, interne Schulden aus dem Jahr 2014 zu begleichen und die Vereinsarbeit für das Jahr 2015 gut weiterführen zu können (inklusive 4 Ausgaben des *Kunstgeschichte aktuell*). Der Vorstand bedankt sich hiermit ganz herzlich bei allen privaten und institutionellen Spender_innen, die uns großzügig Bücher und Zeitschriften überlassen haben und bei allen Besucher_innen, die mit neuer, bereichernder Fachliteratur nach Hause gegangen sind! Die Veranstaltung, die unter der Leitung von Manuel Kreiner organisiert wurde, hat viele Mitglieder und weitere Interessierte zum regen Austausch zusammengebracht und trug somit wesentlich zu einem lebendigen Verbandsleben bei. Wir würden uns freuen, in diesem Jahr einen weiteren Flohmarkt

veranstalten zu können. Spontanen Helfer_innen sei hiermit ein besonderes Dankeschön ausgesprochen.

Die Vorbereitungen für das zweite Kunstgeschichte Festival der Studierenden laufen auf Hochtouren. Es findet vom 28. - 31. Mai 2015 statt; nähere Informationen finden Sie auf www.kunstgeschichte-festival.at.

Unser Vorstandsmitglied der Studierendenkurie, Anna Sauer, wird im SS 2015 von Lisa-Maria Gerstenbauer vertreten, die als korrespondierendes Vorstandsmitglied fungiert.

Wir bedanken uns ganz herzlich bei Raphael Rosenberg und Markus Ritter, für die großzügige Unterstützung, das Institut für Kunstgeschichte der Universität Wien für Veranstaltungen des Verbandes zur Verfügung zu stellen!

Es freut uns, Ihnen mitteilen zu können, dass der Tagungsband zur 17. Verbandstagung „Räume der Kunstgeschichte“ noch im Frühjahr 2015 als Online-Publikation veröffentlicht wird. Sie können den Band demnächst auf unserer Website downloaden. Wir danken herzlich allen Autor_innen und Beteiligten!

Wir möchten darauf hinweisen, dass kurzfristig organisierte Veranstaltungen nur per Mail und auf der Website angekündigt werden können. Wenn Sie in unseren Mail-Verteiler aufgenommen werden möchten, schreiben Sie bitte an: members@kunsthistoriker-in.at.

Der Vorstand