

- Zusammenspiel und Konflikte zwischen ethischen und ästhetischen Ansätzen in der Kunst und
Kunstkritik
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Introduction

I

This lecture will concentrate on an unexpected aspect of populism. Could identity politics already be identified with populism, and stranger, populism with avant-garde? Of course, in the past we have seen it, but in my art-critical praxis I do now also experience some unexpected parallels. It feels as if there are two poles of the artistic spectrum, two extreme wings of what today we call the democratic middle. It feels strange for me to compare the idea of identity politics - for me till now part of the renewed avant-garde - share one aspect with populism: a resistance for an open and transparent discussion. In my lecture I will concentrate on my own art-critical experiences the last few years in Amsterdam, NL. Especially, my shocking experiences within a world famous avant-garde institute: the Amsterdam Appel - performance - gallery. An institute founded in 1972 by Wies Smalls, then directed by Saskia Bos and others, till recently by Niels van Tomme. In the past it adapted the actual, contemporaneous version of different avant-garde performances. In the recent years, artists as Ben Russel and Hiwa K. showed here their work.

II

The last years, de Appel moved from a decent exhibition building to an improvised, temporary housing. It declares it self as a wandering institute, and organises events in different Amsterdam local cultural institutes. Without what they think is a representative headquarter, they travel all over Amsterdam in other institutional, academic and unexpected places to do exhibitions, performances. This existence

as a nomadic avant-garde institute, gives the institute many opportunities. That is, as a successful writing art critic, national and international, I just recently adapted the film camera as my favourite tool. A camera is as exciting as the pen, you can be sure! So, with this instrument I tried to report on the migrating Appel institute. The prospective was good, till I realised that every time I visited an event, I met this "forbidden to film and photograph" posters. In general, I didn't care, I ignored these warnings and did my reports. The indecent warnings didn't not scare me, but it irritated me more and more. Till then, when, in an afternoon session in a building of my old Amsterdam university, my "Alma Mater", the posters were reinforced by verbal warnings. I was invited for a documentary I made of Mieke Bal, not only world famous Rembrandt academic but also universal film maker. In this specific symposium, in an academic circle, dedicated to a filming author, I could no longer deal with the warning not to film. It really felt as a personal attack.

III

Interesting events are shown in the Appel - context, but, as for me, they are anathema and forbidden to report with my camera. I now realise how strange it is, when in the sphere of a avant-garde tradition, this verdict: not to film, reigns. Now that the traditional Appel culture is transported to different locations, a censoring regime dominated. Of course the recent internet culture seems responsible for this new censoring élan in

the art world. Perhaps, the new internet generation understands this form of censoring, but my attitude to this new scene is triggered by my traditional journalistic approach. In my vision, the differences in instruments and content of our traditional critical methods do not justify this brutal, censoring method.

My background is as a writing art critic, but I also work now in the tradition of the video-essays of Jean-Luc Godard. The question is, does this internet driven art world, understand me? Both with my pen and my camera I am a news getter, my normal practice. But since the iPhone conquered the world, a gap between the generation before - and after internet is evident. Sorry again, but indecent warnings do not impress me, so I have to find subways to report about what I think is important. With a reputation as a writing critic, for newspapers and art magazine, I am not impressed by the reservations my old, cinematic technique meets. Contrary, this sceptical attitude for my work only strengthens me in my ethical and aesthetic enthusiasm for finding the truth in all kinds of artistic impulses.

V

When my art critical practice today, not only in the Appel, is hindered by a strange mix of populisms and avant-garde, I have the right to say so. The Appel represents a cultural avant-garde - bubble that disrespects and attacks my work. Of course, also at other places I meet strange blinks when I introduce my performance practice as a filming conceptual artist-critic. Even my own national AICA board was - and is - not prepared for my work. And also in other cultural spheres, there are enough obstacles.

My normal practice is that, next to my written art critical work, I have always worked in cinematographic avant-gardism. That is, in my TV work, I am a camera man-director-sound engineer in a local station, Rabotnik. A critical artistic job, kind of performance job, that in a sense, can be felt as a competitor for other local activities. Perhaps for Appel activities?

Since Trump's presidency we characterise Appel's anti-critical policy as a "bubble". Close your world, react only to the own impulses, and see the outside world as an enemy state.

In the cultural sphere this doppelganger of populism is called "identity politics".

It is a strange issue, this parallelism between identity politics and populisms. The absence of a middle way means that the cultural space where different tastes of politics and cultural issues can be discussed, has disappeared.

That is, my art critical camera, is for the Appel - avant-garde an enemy: so forbid my camera and exclude opinions that can be different from your own ideas. Can this dictatorial attitude also infect other cultural hot spots? With the Appel the last few years as a travelling institute, the question is, shows their censoring attitude also up in the different places, where the travelling Appel temporarily stays? I am not sure if these temporary restrictions are lifted after Appel leaves!

VI

So, this is the conflict I experience between aesthetic and ethical impulses, between arts and the art critical attitude.

The ornamental extra of the cinematographic attitude, this artistic impulse in my critical

work, clearly influences the critical ethical and aesthetic positions.

This all came to a highpoint begin March when the Appel invited the Mumbai Based CAMP groups for a exhibition in Amsterdam.

The idea is to let three strategic placed surveillance camera's explore the city and show the results in the gallery.

Under the title "In cameras res" the group promises a new episode of long-time critical engagement with the simultaneous advances in visual surveillance technology and cinema.

The entrée of the exhibition promises what I expected here: there is camera - surveillance in the exhibition spaces, some posters warn

me for this. This time, for once in my video work in the Appel, no signs that warn me "Forbidden to film". But now a warning -

"Here is camera surveillance" - that, as I do read it well,

encourages me to use my camera. As a professional, art critical,

subjective answer against this objective surveillance. It is as an

ironical statement to me, as if it encourages me to use my camera as a answer to this worldwide phenomenon. It is the week that

everywhere the China - G5 - Xi censoring measures are discussed, so I feel secure about using my camera, as if this how was made for me.

Before I made my You Tube art-critical video-essays, I worked in the 80's with the "oldskool Rabotnik TV" - group where we also concentrated on the then ever growing "SURVEILLANCE" video technology. So my video essay on this Camp - announced combination of surveillance technology and cinema seems in perfect balance with my past.

The CAMP sites on Internet are all about a world that only seem to exist as camera - generated images. The real world transformed in a mixture of subjective and objective patrol camera's. Or, as I say it: Cinema & Surveillance.

At first sight, the show looks like a critical response to the surveillance strategies of Facebook and Google. But during my visit, the gallery atmosphere is heavy and aggressive. The poster

warned- camera surveillance inside - but then, during my interview, the use of your own camera, as a kind of weapon, is not allowed. A strange exclusion from this artistic sectarian avant-garde

institute, because this camera surveillance program, with all the professional patrol camera's announced, aggressively attacks, at least metaphorically, my innocent hand camera.

I start interviewing Ashok Sukumaran, artist from CAMP, and then

this whole surveillance system immediately warns us that no filming is allowed here. While we start a video interview about dealing our experiences - Rabotnik & CAMP - we talk about the

role of camera work, and how to interpret our different strategies.

I feel kind of estranged: that is, in an artistic environment, in an event dedicated to the patrol camera, in a critical conversation with the responsible artist, the Appel curator intervenes.

In my lecture in Berlin, with a video essay illustration, I will show how my critical position is obstructed.

First it feels like a ironical remark, this voice: "No filming here". But then I wake up out of my dream, this is a serious request that ends as kind of military command.

Luckily, I do my own camera work. In that sense I am not only a professional interviewer with a good record in newspapers and TV,

but the last few years also an artistic camera man. That is, inspired by the great Hollywood camera men, and the European nouvelle vague film makers, I consider my camera work professional! So while these Appel collaborators do everything behind my back to let Ashok stop our conversation, I continue filming. In the reflection of his eyes, and in the gestures and comments he makes, I can observe their interventions. Ashok feels irritated, then slowly he realises that his Appel friends forbid his further engagement in his conversation.

I do not know what these people inspire to their desperate action, to break up our exchange of opinions; but it is clear that they had not any idea of how shameful their action is behind me back. Such

a personal shameful attack, you do not expect in a normal art house.

Surveillance has always been a point in my critical practice, not in the secret-surveillance sense, but of course as a art-critical eye that examines the art-world.

See the situation: at one point a collective of surveillance camera's in a strong structure that directs a flood of images that are streamed out over the walls of the exhibition rooms. Then, in a professional

conversation between the artist and the art critic, a strange turn of the facts, with a total bizarre development. In the gallery, in a montage of visuals, a total surveillance of a whole city is suggested.

But at the same time, in the same artistic space, a personal report of a civilised, professional meeting is forbidden.

What happens here is a frustrating realisation that there is a parallel

between populism and avant-garde, That is here, they show a common disdain for the investigating journalism and for the critical art investigation. There is, here in the Appel avant-garde bubble, no respect for a critical eye. And, as in populist strategy, an objective journalistic approach is actively hindered.

And I am sure, it is not only my own artistic freedom that is at stake in this dictatorial gesticulating, anti - free opinion and anti-art critical sphere.

Thank you.