

NO Rhetoric(s) (Bern / Zurich, 13-14 Sep 19)

Bern, Universität Bern; Zürich, Universität Zürich, Sep 13-14, 2019

Deadline: May 1, 2019

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NO Rhetoric(s): Versions and Subversions of Resistance in Contemporary Global Art

The event seeks to focus attention and problematize a neuralgic concept of contemporary thought highly discussed and addressed in recent decades, but which has rarely become the subject of its own resistance. There is talk of an unprecedented culture of protest emerging on a global scale, of new forms of disobedience and indignation. This new culture of protest frequently resorts to strategies coming from the field of art (performance, happenings, etc.), which has resulted in a growing interest of political theory in contemporary artistic strategies. At the same time, a surprising re-politicization of debates in art discourses can be observed, especially as more and more explicitly political functions are assigned to current artistic practice.

Beyond a politicization of art and an aesthetization of politics, it is necessary today to think which are the intersections between the artistic and the political, but also their points of resistance. Especially in terms of a discourse of resistance so fashionable today, it is necessary to ask: To what extent are political or artistic practices really resistant? How is the discourse divided between rhetoric of 'no' and one of 'no' to rhetoric?

Resistance is first and foremost a term that comes from physics, by designating a property of disposition. To its original meaning, a moral category has always been added: what actively resists opposes a natural course of things and develops an opposing force that is normatively occupied. Therefore, its Latin root, *resistentia*, not only refers to something that remains constant (*sistere*), but increases this consistency in perseverance (the prefix *re-* means the intensification of action). Already in modern times we experience the assimilation and instrumentalization of the concept of resistance through the various revolutions in the eighteenth century, the successive struggles for the emancipation of the colonial world in the nineteenth century, as well as in the discussion of a "right to resistance".

This oscillation between an objective quality and a normative intention shapes the whole history of the concept of resistance. Already Henry David Thoreau's 1849 essay, known as *Civil Disobedience*, but originally entitled *Resistance to Civil Government*, fluctuates between these two poles. In a symptomatic decline of physical meaning, Thoreau uses the metaphor of government as a machine against which citizens must generate a 'counter-friction' to stop the machine (Thoreau [1849] 2008). Political resistance represents a moment of 'interruption', dislocation and disarticulation (Laclau 1990), and shows that the field of politics is broader than the field of (explicit) politics (Marchart 2010). But what happens when this discourse of 'counter-friction' is institutionalized –as was observed in many Latin American countries, and in the rest of the world, in the second half of the 20th century? How does the critical potential to say 'no' manage on its transfer

to an official discourse of resistance in which art is also responsible? Because the anti-hegemonic moment of counterculture can, as Raymond Williams (2000) explained, be easily transferred to a hegemonic order in the sense of a rhetoric of “resistance”, which consolidates conditions rather than questioning them, and ultimately disorients emancipatory concerns.

At the same time, however, there was skepticism on the part of the artists. If art itself gains its resistance because of its ambiguity and polysemy, can its critical function be equivalent to a political meaning? Does ‘Activism’ represent a form of intensification of art, or rather the dissolution of its uniqueness? Against an overly forceful approach of art to politics, the question arises of whether art can be resilient and, if so, how (Rancière 2008). The questioning of consensus leads to other paths, through the revelation of the contingency of the respective norms of the visible and the said, and of the divisions of the sensitive (Rancière 2000). In the context of authoritarian regimes, such as the Soviet and also dictatorships in Latin America, performance and body art played an eminently critical role in pointing out other possibilities within society (Taylor 2003). What remains to be discussed, however, is the extent to which the public generated by the works of art can really be equated with the political Assembly (Butler 2015).

If both the artistic and the political fields are equally spaces for debate, it is necessary to specify more precisely what their respective dispute and agonality consists of.

The event aims to contribute to a better understanding of the different logics of resistance and to a critical look at the complex relationship between aesthetics and politics.

Focusing on interdisciplinary and empirical research, we seek to unite early-career scholars who would like to engage in this critical study during the two-day workshop that will take place on September 13th and 14th, 2019 in Bern and Zürich. Three distinguished keynote speakers, Olivier Marchart (Universität Wien), Jaime Vindel (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) and Nadia Radwan (Universität Bern) will present their current research and address methodological debates on the topic. Additionally, two artists will present their work, Cristina Lucas (España) and Nancy Garín (Chile), intertwining the non-academic space (Reitschule in Bern and la_cápsula in Zurich) and the scientific discourses about art practices.

Proposals are to be sent in English, including title, abstract and bio note of the author, to isabel.piniella@cgs.unibe.ch until May 1st, 2019. Accepted participants will be notified within the following two weeks and the program will be announced by May 31st, 2019. Accommodation as well as a small travel allowance will be provided by the host institution.

Reference:

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