

On the 19th of December 2001 the artist in residence Maja Bajevic had *carte blanche* to prepare and head a session in Helga Nowotny's seminar «Science Meets Localized Problems. Die Widerspenstigkeit sozialer Realität».

On the following six pages you find Maja Bajevic's introductory paper about her understanding of the position of the artist in today's society, informal texts written by three participants upon request after the seminar and a short text by Michael Guggenheim regarding a video called «Kunst kaufen» which was shown in the seminar after the discussion.

Events with Maja Bajevic:

Freitag, 5.4.2002, 17h

... and Other Stories

Vortrag von Bojana Pejic, Berlin und Buchvernissage von Maja Bajevic

9.3.2002, 18h

It ain't much but it's home

Vernissage

9.3.-9.4.2002

Exhibition of the artists Maja Bajevic, Emanuel Licha and Adrian Paci

At BINZ 39, Sihlquai 133, 8005 Zurich, Opening hours: Thursday-Saturday 14h-18h

The artist's stay at the Collegium Helveticum is supported by a grant from the «Zuger Kulturstiftung Landis & Gyr».

Seminar 19th December 2001

Dear all,

I would appreciate it very much if you would understand this seminar as an exchange of thoughts, a «putting our brains together». I just think the following is an important question to raise.

I have been thinking about the point of view that has installed itself in our discussions: that art and science are very far away from each other. If we take things from that point of view we will necessarily find all the differences, the separations, the misunderstandings.

I do not think it has to be like that. We could also take things the other way around and look for the similarities, the problems we have in common.

Following this stream of thoughts what struck me are points upon which we will easily agree, I think, and one point to discuss:

1. What is it that makes society go forward? What are the two «motors» of society?

Science and art.

2. What makes the economical growth of a society? What is the intellectual capital of a society?

Science and art.

3. What are the fields or rather the professions that society invests the least in?

Science and art.

Let's say that science and art work on questions that are not yet proved, resolved. Otherwise they would not call themselves science and art anymore. Since these questions, themes (call them what you want) are not resolved yet they cannot be approved by society. They will be approved or not through the historical lens. There is obviously a time-gap that separates the time of research (in both fields) from the acceptance in society because science and art are and should be ahead of their times. They are the forces that bring the society forward.

At the same time society shows great respect for art and science from the past – the art and science that has passed that historical test. And enriches itself through it (let's just think of Vincent van Gogh). Their work is the capital (economically speaking as well) of the society of today. Meanwhile society has put the artist and the scientist of the present (the intellectual researchers and questioners) in a position where he accepts to work for free since exhibiting or publishing a work furthers his career. He should be satisfied with the «fame» and that is the only reward he gets. The problem is that we have started to consider that as normal, but is it? (In this context I consider money only as a confirmation of the society of its needs for art and science. The acceptance and the recognition of the role of the artist and the scientist in the society.)

We will all agree that the research of scientists and artists that are not famous, that worked in the background, made it possible for big discoveries or changes to happen. That would mean that all the work in science and art is important to open the doors for big discoveries. Why is that work not being recognized? Why are the scientist and artist working for free? And most of all, why do we think that is normal?

Maja Bajevic

Celina Ramjoué

Art and science can indeed be interpreted as two important «motors» of society, and, in a certain sense, they both contribute to economic growth. It seems important, however, to ask who perceives them as such. While most of society as a whole probably views science (and specifically the natural sciences) as leading to progress and growth, only certain types of people (the «art world», academics, intellectuals) would label art as a motor for progress.

In contrast, the common view of art is that it is something luxurious, something «extra» which is not needed to survive and which does not «produce» anything in economic terms. The perception of social sciences and humanities lies somewhere between these two extremes, depending on the actual discipline and on how applicable its area of study is to everyday societal issues.

What most people would certainly agree on, however, is that art and science both contribute to the intellectual capital of society.

I would question the statement that society (which, in this case, I interpret as including both the public and private sectors) invests little in science as a profession. It seems to me that societies, and in particular wealthy societies, invest a great deal in future scientists (again: in particular in natural scientists), most probably more so than in artists.

These points help me turn to Maja's questions: why is scientists' and artists' work not adequately recognized? Why do scientists and artists work «for free»? Why do we think that this state of affairs is normal? Referring to the considerations I lay out above, I do not think that scientists' work is inadequately recognized, but agree that artists' work often is. I would also contest that most scientists work «for free», whereas artists frequently do. I therefore suggest remodeling the question: why is artists' work less recognized than that of scientists? Why do artists often work for free whereas scientists are usually paid? Why do we consider it normal that the artist's profession is, in these and other ways, «different»?

I can only give tentative and spontaneous answers to these questions, which would require thorough study to be answered fully. Also, I can only speak for the present and for what is often termed «Western» societies, i.e. for what I am able to observe (I am aware that art and artists have had very different roles and positions throughout history and in different societies, but I know too little to specify).

It seems to me that artists' work is not recognized adequately for the reason I stated above: most people do not see art as being a major motor of society, whereas science is. The art world has a harder time explaining exactly what it does that makes it a motor in its own right.

Artists work for free because art is not recognized as a profession that society needs. Governments often allot substantial funding to the arts through fellowships, awards and prizes, but they do not employ artists who have specific tasks related to the functioning of a nation, a region or a city. Similarly, private businesses often give money to the arts or individual artists through foundations but they do not hire artists as an essential part of the workforce they view as being necessary to achieve economic productivity.

Is it difficult to say why we think that this state of affairs is normal. For one thing, that is what we are used to. Many of us have grown up with the implicit idea surrounding us that art as a profession is insecure and that art as a product is not essential for the day-to-day functioning of society. It is probably not clear to many of us what society would actually be without art and artists. Perhaps an «artless» utopian world would make society wake up to the important role of art and artists. In such a world, art might be in high demand and considered vital for human survival. Perhaps state bureaucracies would recruit artists as they do accountants, technicians or economic analysts. Perhaps artists would develop national professional orders and open offices like lawyers or doctors do today. But then a new question arises: would artists want their profession to take this form? Is there something about the artist's profession that precludes this type of development regardless of how it is perceived by society?

Michael Guggenheim

For me it doesn't make sense to say society does not value artists and scientists: since, if we look at the overall picture, it is just not true. Some artists and scientists are valued very much and some are not. But it is important to see how exactly they are valued. And here we find important differences:

Artists are valued via the success of their products on an international art market. This market has two interesting structural conditions: first of all, the valuing inside the market depends on the common valuing of a relatively small amount of people who are not artists themselves: curators, gallery owners, journalists, art theorists. The buyers of art are not specialists but depend to a large extent on the judgments of the former group.

Second, the value of a certain artist on the market is more or less directly linked to his or her income: If the prices for your pictures or videos raise, you earn more and vice versa. Since there exists no clear standard for valuing art (which holds true at least since modernism) the prices are very volatile and there hardly exists the impression that the prices on the market are «just» (i.e. it does not depend on how much you work or how accurate you paint to get a certain price for a certain work of art). Thus, the differences in income in the arts are enormous and there exists no agreement that these differences are justified. Furthermore, the art system largely failed to invent anything to secure the incomes (or other social security) for artists. I would claim that this is largely due to the concept that art requires «autonomy» and the very individualistic idea behind the production of art (single individuals that cannot be «forced» to produce anything but will produce something at their own will).

In science structures are different. The larger the working groups that are involved in sciences are the more science is accepted as «work» (though this does not interfere with the idea that there exist individual genius scientists). The security of work is maintained and what is most important, reputation (the valuing of the scientist on the market) cannot be seen in different incomes. Rather reputation is only symbolically traded at scientific events (you are asked to give lectures which are named after famous people, you are given a prize, and most notably: you are quoted). But your income will not rise very much, whether you are famous or not. Rather your income is dependent on your qualifications, i.e. the question whether you own a certain title that allows you to hold a certain position. What is notable here is that in science there exists a major jump in income when you become a professor. Before you earn very little (and people put up with that, hoping that they will finally get a professorship) and when you get a professorship you usually get an income that will stay the same for the rest of your life.

What is interesting in science is that although science is thought to be at the frontier of societal development its career structure is actually very patronizing. Contrary to the arts and as opposed to the art market, science is organized so that a lot of control can be exerted from within the system.

Doris Agotai

There is something I would quickly like to add:

When bankers are talking to each other after work they will speak about art.
When artists are talking in their leisure time they will speak about money.

The points I mentioned yesterday were the following:

· considering the salary of an artist one should make the distinction between symbolical and material salary – unfortunately the symbolical does not pay the flat.

· one question was whether society is considering art as a profession.
This raises the general question what «work» means, what the definition of a profession is. In our society we make the distinction between work and hobby.
In the case of a profession, the work to be done will be paid. In the other case, when someone is doing his or her hobby, it is not paid.
Referring to the work of an artist there is the example of the «Kunststipendium der Stadt Zürich» the one year stipend of the city of Zurich amounts to CHF 40.000.–. This is of course not little money, but it is never enough for a family to live on and also cover the costs of an atelier or material and so on. It shows that our society (using this too general term) forces an artist to restrict his life in a way which would never be the case in any other field. Let's see the problem the other way round: nobody would expect someone to be satisfied with such a salary in any other qualified profession.

... but since art seems to be a hobby, it doesn't matter ...

· and the crucial question: why is the situation like that? I want to refer to this gap between society and contemporary art. As art is opening new questions, discovering and developing a new perception of the world most people will not be open-minded enough or able to understand at that moment what is going on in the arts.

And the case of science is very different: nobody would dare to judge the quality of any specialized scientific work, because it requires a large background. But in art, everybody has an opinion – and that is very nice of course – but at the same time many people believe that their opinion is also a valid evaluation of the quality.
In my opinion the quality of art can be judged very well – and it requires the same large background as in any field of science – but criteria of quality should strictly be separated from personal preferences.

Christine Abbt

Tiefgreifende Veränderung ist das Produkt unzähliger vorausgegangener Reflexionen und Versuche, die je für sich betrachtet erfolglos oder unwichtig waren. In der ökonomisierten Gesellschaft aber wird kurzfristig investiert und nur in Projekte, die direkt Erfolg versprechen. Wertvolle Arbeit ist Arbeit, die sich vermarkten lässt, die Erfolge vorweisen kann. Scheitern wird nicht als Teil eines produktiven Prozesses anerkannt, sondern als verlorenes Geld verrechnet.

«Kunst kaufen»

Bilder aus einem Video von Florian Japp, Michael Guggenheim, Martina Owsiany

Kunstkäufer reden nicht über Geld. Sie haben Geld. Kunstkäufer reden nicht über Kunst, sie besitzen Kunst.

Die öffentlich sichtbare Seite des Kunstbetriebs besteht aus Reden über Ästhetik. Hast du diese Ausstellung gesehen, wie findest du jene Installation? Zuständig ist das Feuilleton. Sogar Galerieausstellungen werden ohne Preisangaben besprochen. Der Wert der Kunst wird nicht diskutiert, er wird nur als Habitus zur Schau gestellt, der die Käufer mit den für sie erschwinglichen Werken verbindet. Die Kleidung spielt hier eine Mittlerrolle: Sie vereindeutigt die Verbindung zwischen Habitus und den zu Hause aufgehängten Bildern.

Unsere Arbeit bestand darin, potentiellen Kunstkäufern an der Art Preview drei einfache Fragen zu stellen. Die Preview ist die Voreröffnung, zu der nur eingeladene Gäste, vornehmlich GaleriekundInnen Zutritt haben. Man ist unter sich. Die drei Fragen waren: Kaufen Sie Kunst? Was gefällt Ihnen an der Kunst, die Sie kaufen? Was bezahlen Sie dafür?

Einfache Fragen, man ersetze «Kunst» durch «Eier» oder meinetwegen: «Hosen». Die Antworten zeigen, wie schwierig einfache Fragen zu beantworten sind.

Natürlich sind die Resultate einer solchen Arbeit eindeutiger als man sie sich vorzustellen getraut. In aufsteigender Preisreihenfolge geschnitten, bemerkt die BetrachterIn:

Je teurer die gekaufte Kunst, desto älter die Käufer, desto zweireihiger die Kleidung der Männer und desto grösser die Sonnenbrille der Frauen. Ebenfalls nimmt die Auskunftsfreudigkeit der Befragten mit steigendem Preis ab. Eine persönliche Geschichte erzählen nur diejenigen, die gar kein Geld haben; sie befinden sich selbst als Produzenten im Kunstsystem. Diejenigen, die ausserhalb des Kunstsystems leben, dort aber genügend Geld verdient haben, kaufen sich die persönliche Geschichte, indem sie Kraft ihres Status als solvente Kunden erst nachdem sie zum Künstler «eine persönliche Beziehung» aufgebaut haben ein Bild kaufen.

Über Kunst reden kann niemand. Dabei geht es nicht einmal darum, qualifiziert darüber zu reden (was auch immer das sei). Die Befragten ziehen sich auch nicht darauf zurück, dass dies eine zu persönliche Angelegenheit oder das Verhältnis zu Kunst zu gefühlsbestimmt sei. Eher ist es so, dass die Befragten zwar gerne etwas sagen würden, aber nicht wissen wie. Ein Vokabular fehlt, ganz im Gegensatz zum Vokabular, mit dem man das Schweigen über Preise wortreich begründet.

Amerikaner wollten uns aus Prinzip nicht antworten, wir hätten die Zahlen ohnehin nicht verstanden.