



# TEXTE ZUR KUNST

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Art criticism has been said to be in crisis for decades, and that crisis has inevitably also affected one of the practice's mainstays: the review. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggest that the genre is in trouble. The number of art reviews published by legacy media has been in continuous decline. An archival survey of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's* arts and culture section, for example, reveals that the paper ran an average of over 600 exhibition reviews per year in the 1990s; in the years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, that number had gone down to just below 400. And in qualitative terms, we find that discussions of works of art – unlike, say, theater reviews – often eschew contentious or controversial judgments, a development that is no doubt in partly due to the increasingly precarious circumstances in which freelance art critics live and work. They don't want to get on the wrong side of potential clients; future dinner invitations are on the line, and perhaps also lucrative commissions to write catalogue essays.

In art magazines and other periodicals for which reviews are part of their core business, the volume of criticism hasn't declined as it has on the pages of newspapers. Yet the structural changes of the past 30 years are palpable here, too: carefully argued critical objections have increasingly yielded to affirmative descriptions. *TEXTE ZUR KUNST* examined this shift previously in its issue dedicated to the "Verriss" or hatchet job, which came out two decades ago, and more recently by shedding light on debates over art-critical methodology in which the questionable nature of universal value judgments has been a point of contention. The observation of critical timidity, of overcaution in judgment, has only become more pronounced since then, at least with

regard to the criticism of art exhibitions: in their apologetic-descriptive style, many reviews more closely resemble the exhibition booklets or press releases available by the gallery door. The genre distinctions between review, catalogue essay, and artist's portrait are rapidly being blurred.

Yet a purely functionalist perspective on the role of art criticism cannot fully explain this insight: it disregards both the instruments of art criticism and the variable and changing maneuvering room within which the review as a journalistic format operates. The transformation of the media landscape in recent years is yet another factor that must be taken into account. With the move from offline to online media, reviews are now more widely and easily accessible, and so professional critics have additional reason to exercise caution before rendering negative or controversial verdicts – not only because they work under economic constraints but also because they fear being cancelled, triggering a shitstorm, or losing their reputation. In the comment sections of social media and on blogs, meanwhile, we observe that rapid-fire evaluation threatens to supersede informed criticism. Polarizing professions of opinion not tempered by theoretical ambitions of any kind thus stand in contrast with a methodologically well-founded criticism that appears to have lost its capacity to initiate and engage in debate.

In light of the review's precarious situation, the present issue is intended to make the case for this historically specific genre and take a closer look at the various parameters that define it. What are the characteristics of a review? What can and should it accomplish, and which methods and language games does it rely on? Most basically speaking, reviews are articulations of critical

contemplation that introduce, examine, appraise, and contextualize a publicly accessible cultural object.

How their value-generating potential has shifted, in no small part due to the rise of new digital media, is the question of a roundtable conversation between Claire Bishop, Jarrett Earnest, Eva Hayward, Christian Liclair, and Eric Otieno Sumba. Acknowledging the current threats to the form as well as its entanglements in the art market, the participants nonetheless underscore the productive influence that less fast-paced publishing processes, the demand for certain word limits, and the presence of a (paid) editorial team can have on reviewers' critical thinking. Moreover, by keeping its distance from clickbait and polarizing thumbs-up/thumbs-down rhetoric, (professional) reviewing provides a space in which prevailing standards of value, questionable aesthetic conventions, and dated art-theoretical paradigms can be subjected to scrutiny. Last but not least, criticism can establish a lasting archive of those creative practices that the conventional historiography of art tends to overlook or marginalize.

Peter Geimer's contribution likewise underscores how writing reviews for publications can be productive for a writer's critical thinking. Each art magazine, he argues, implicitly comes with its own specific audience – which may compel writers to chart an unfamiliar approach to a familiar object. Assumptions about readership can also be an incentive to rethink methods or basic premises that are thought of as generally accepted. For example, Geimer claims that a reader of *TEXTE ZUR KUNST* expects reviews to proffer a theoretically informed discourse that zooms out from the works to inquire into the institutional, ideological, or economic frameworks in which

they're embedded. Yet the review itself, as the contributions to this issue demonstrate, is also entangled in the actions of the art market, and not only because economic considerations often preexist the object under discussion and allow it to become visible in the public sphere in the first place. More saliently, the review helps propel the generation of value: it creates a symbolic worth that, in the right circumstances, can be converted into market value.

To point up the potentials of the review as a literary form, this issue of *TEXTE ZUR KUNST* mostly consists of examples of the genre. But we encouraged authors to use the opportunity to reflect on the status of the review, the methods they employ, and their own role as critics. On the one hand, this brings out the rich stylistic diversity of the review. On the other hand, several writers explicitly note the specific qualities that make the form so vital to (art) criticism.

Ultimately, this issue is intended as a tribute to criticism. Reviews do not only contribute significantly to the formation of the cultural and monetary value of works of art. They also set intellectual standards for conversations within the art world and provide a platform for experimentation with theoretical perspectives, writing practices, and methodological approaches.

SABETH BUCHMANN, ISABELLE GRAW, ANTONIA KÖLBL,  
CHRISTIAN LICLAIR, ANNA SINOFZIK, AND BEATE SÖNTGEN

Translation: Gerrit Jackson

Die seit Jahrzehnten diagnostizierte Krise der Kunstkritik betrifft zwangsläufig auch einen ihrer Grundpfeiler, die Rezension. Dass die Rezension in Schwierigkeiten steckt, lässt sich sowohl quantitativ als auch qualitativ beschreiben: So nimmt die Anzahl von Kunstrezensionen auf den Seiten überregionaler Tageszeitungen kontinuierlich ab. Ein Blick ins Archiv des Feuilletons der *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung* zeigt beispielsweise, dass in den 1990er Jahren im Schnitt jährlich über 600 Ausstellungskritiken erschienen, in den Jahren vor der Pandemie waren es nur noch knapp unter 400. Auch lässt sich auf der qualitativen Ebene konstatieren, dass Besprechungen bildender Kunst, anders als beispielsweise Theaterkritiken, häufig streitbare Werturteile scheuen – was sicherlich auch mit der zunehmenden Prekarisierung des freiberuflichen Kunstkritiker\*innenstands im Zusammenhang steht. Man will es sich nicht mit potenziellen Auftraggeber\*innen verscherzen, möchte auch weiterhin zu Essen eingeladen werden und möglicherweise Aufträge für lukrativere Katalogbeiträge erhalten.

Als Kerngeschäft der meisten Kunstzeitschriften und Periodika haben sich Rezensionen dort, anders als im Feuilleton, nicht reduziert. Doch die strukturellen Veränderungen der letzten 30 Jahre machen sich auch hier bemerkbar: Gut begründete kritische Einwände treten hinter zunehmend affirmative Beschreibungen zurück. Diese Verschiebung thematisierte *TEXTE ZUR KUNST* bereits vor zwei Jahrzehnten mit einer als „Verriss“ betitelten Ausgabe oder zuletzt mit dem Blick auf kunstkritische Methodendebatten, in denen die Fragwürdigkeit eines universellen Werturteils diskutiert wurde. Seither hat sich der Befund einer gehemmten Urteilslust, zumindest was die Besprechung von Kunstausstellungen

betrifft, konsolidiert: Viele Reviews gleichen in ihrem apologetisch-beschreibenden Duktus eher den in Galerien ausgelegten Ausstellungs- oder Preetexten. Die Gattungsgrenzen zwischen Rezension, Katalogtext oder Künstler\*innenporträt verschwimmen zusehends.

Um diesen Befund zu erklären, greift eine rein funktionalistische Perspektive auf die Rolle der Kunstkritik jedoch zu kurz. Denn eine solche Betrachtung lässt sowohl die Instrumente der Kunstkritik als auch die jeweils unterschiedlichen publizistischen Möglichkeitsspielräume der Rezension außer Acht. Auch die geänderte Medienlandschaft der letzten Jahre muss zur Erklärung herangezogen werden. So führt die Verlagerung von Reviews ins Internet und die damit einhergehende Verfügbarkeit dazu, dass professionelle Kritiker\*innen vorsichtiger werden, negativ oder kontrovers zu urteilen – und zwar nicht mehr nur aus ökonomischen Zwängen heraus, sondern auch aus Angst vor möglichen Shitstorms und dem Verlust ihrer Reputation. Gleichzeitig lässt sich in den Kommentarspalten Sozialer Medien oder auf Blogs jedoch beobachten, dass schnelle Evaluierungen informierte Kritiken zu ersetzen drohen. Diese polarisierenden Meinungsbekundungen ohne theoretische Ambition stehen also einer methodisch fundierten Kritik gegenüber, die ihr Debattenpotenzial verloren zu haben scheint.

Angesichts der prekären Lage der Rezension ist es das Anliegen dieser Ausgabe, sich für diese historisch-spezifische Gattung starkzumachen und ihre Rahmenbedingungen genauer zu beleuchten. Was sind die Charakteristiken einer Review? Was kann oder soll sie leisten und welcher Methoden und Sprachspiele bedient sie sich? Grundsätzlich handelt es sich bei Rezensionen

um versprachlichte Formen der kritischen Betrachtung, die einen kulturellen, öffentlich zugänglichen Gegenstand vorstellen, wertend behandeln und einordnen.

Wie sich ihr Wert generierendes Potenzial nicht zuletzt aufgrund neuer, digitaler Medien verschoben hat, ist Gegenstand eines Round Table zwischen Claire Bishop, Jarrett Earnest, Eva Hayward, Christian Lclair und Eric Otieno Sumba. Obgleich die Teilnehmenden auf die aktuellen Bedrohungen dieser Publikationsform sowie ihre Verstrickungen in den Kunstmarkt verweisen, betonen sie den produktiven Einfluss, den Entschleunigung, Zeichenvorgaben und die Anwesenheit eines (bezahlten) Redaktionsteams auf das kritische Denken der Rezensent\*innen haben können. Abseits von Clickbait und polarisierender Thumps-Up/Thumps-Down-Rhetorik bietet das (professionelle) Rezensionswesen zudem einen Raum, in dem vorherrschende Wertmaßstäbe sowie fragwürdige ästhetische Konventionen und überholte kunsttheoretische Paradigmen auf den Prüfstand gestellt werden können. Zudem kann durch Rezensionen ein nachhaltiges Archiv jener künstlerischen Praktiken geschaffen werden, die von der klassischen Kunstgeschichtsschreibung mitunter übersehen oder marginalisiert werden.

Auch Peter Geimer stellt in seinem Beitrag die Produktivität heraus, die das Rezensieren für Publikationsorgane auf das kritische Denken der Schreibenden haben kann. Unterschiedliche Kunstmagazine implizieren ihm zufolge eine jeweils spezifische Leser\*innenschaft – was es den Autor\*innen möglicherweise abverlangt, den vertrauten Gegenstand anders zugänglich zu machen. Auch kann die vorausgesetzte Leser\*innenschaft dazu anhalten, allgemein angenommene Methoden oder Grundannahmen neu

aufzurollen. Wer etwa, so Geimer, *TEXTE ZUR KUNST* liest, erwartet von der Rezension einen theoretisch informierten Diskurs, der neben den Werken auch ihre institutionelle, ideologische oder ökonomische Einbindung thematisiert. Doch auch die Review selbst ist, so machen es die Beiträge in diesem Heft deutlich, in das Geschehen auf dem Kunstmarkt eingebunden; nicht nur, weil dem zu besprechenden Gegenstand oft ökonomische Überlegungen vorrausgingen, die ihn im öffentlichen Raum erst sichtbar werden ließen. Mehr noch wohnt auch der Rezension ein Wert generierendes Moment inne: Sie schafft einen Symbolwert, der sich unter Umständen in Marktwert transformieren lässt.

Um die Potenziale von Rezensionen als Textgattung aufzuzeigen, setzt sich diese Ausgabe von *TEXTE ZUR KUNST* fast ausschließlich aus Rezensionen zusammen. Wir haben die Autor\*innen jedoch angeregt, im Rahmen ihrer Review deren Status, die verwendeten Methoden sowie ihre eigene Rolle als Rezensent\*innen zu reflektieren. Auf diese Weise tritt zum einen die stilistische Mannigfaltigkeit der Rezensionen deutlicher hervor. Zum anderen weisen einige Autor\*innen selbst auf die Spezifik dieser Textform für die (Kunst-)Kritik hin.

Letztlich wollen wir diese Ausgabe auch als eine Hommage an die Review verstanden wissen. Denn Rezensionen tragen nicht nur maßgeblich zur kulturellen und monetären Wertbildung von Kunstwerken bei. Sie bestimmen auch das Niveau der Diskurse innerhalb der Kunstwelt und bieten zudem ein Experimentierfeld, in dem theoretische, sprachliche oder methodische Verfahren erprobt werden können.

**SABETH BUCHMANN, ISABELLE GRAW, ANTONIA KÖLBL, CHRISTIAN LICLAIR, ANNA SINOFZIK UND BEATE SÖNTGEN**

“WHO DOESN'T WANT TO BE FREE?”

Thomas Love on Counterpublic 2023, St. Louis, Missouri



New Red Order, “Give it Back: Stage Theory,” 2023

Classic questions that reviewers regularly ask themselves are, *What audience is associated with this particular publication? What can be expected of the reader, and what does the reader expect from this review?* While visiting the second iteration of the Counterpublic triennial in St. Louis, Thomas Love wondered about a different audience relationship: *What if the reviewer might have to acknowledge that the art they are reviewing may not be “for” them – and it might not even be for an imagined art-world public but, concretely, for the denizens of a particular place?* One of the provocations of Counterpublic, Love explains, is its proposition that public art need not be any different from urban development or community organizing, and yet this utilitarian approach is haunted by an aesthetic excess that demands its own criteria of judgment.

This summer saw the second iteration of the Counterpublic triennial, which took place across the city of St. Louis, Missouri, from April 15 to July 15. Like so many -ennial exhibitions these days, Counterpublic claims to be different, an exhibition that reflects the urgencies of the contemporary moment and commits to practices of repair, healing, and restorative justice. Its very name aligns Counterpublic with progressive social and political theory, especially through the writings of feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser.<sup>1</sup> While aiming to provide a model for a more ethical and equitable art exhibition, Counterpublic’s biggest success may have been its failure to cohere, because this failure put certain

contradictions endemic to the contemporary art world on display.

Counterpublic revealed a schism between artistic practices oriented toward liberation and freedom versus those oriented toward obligation and ethics. Jackson Polys of New Red Order (an Indigenous-led artists’ collective invited to contribute to the exhibition as both curators and participants) encapsulated this tension during the curatorial roundtable on the opening weekend: “It’s tempting to give in to fantasies of artistic freedom – Who doesn’t want to be free? – but we have to think about how our freedoms impinge on those of others.” Liberation and obligation cannot be discussed without a thorny array of prepositions: liberation from or for whom, obligation for or to whom? Art struggles with prepositional specificity, which is why art and politics make for such strange bedfellows.

Nevertheless, Counterpublic’s organizers and curators seem to have taken their political commitments unusually seriously. They began with a year-long community engagement process resulting in a report (included in the catalogue) that shaped the rest of the process. Rather than plop down a bunch of temporary installations and then leave, they invested in projects that already exist and may take many more years to bear fruit. Over 50 percent of the 4.5-million-dollar budget will reportedly “go to existing small-scale, community-oriented partners.”<sup>2</sup> For example, Counterpublic partnered with the Griot Museum of Black History, which was founded in 1997, and worked to raise its profile with a public art commission from starchitect David Adjaye.<sup>3</sup> Participating artist Jordan Weber used Counterpublic’s budget and profile to support and endorse the community-led Peace Park, contributing

sculptures and a rainwater capture system. And Damon Davis’s *Pillars of the Valley*, a public art commission that will eventually stretch over a mile along Jefferson Avenue, was folded into the Counterpublic program despite starting as an official city project. It consists of an array of hourglass-shaped monuments commemorating the former residents of Mill Creek Valley, a majority-Black neighborhood that was demolished in the 1950s in the name of urban renewal.

This attention to the racial geography of St. Louis was at the core of Counterpublic. The former Mill Creek Valley served as the exhibition’s axis, linking the St. Louis Place neighborhood in the north – an area once known as “Millionaire’s Row” during the height of St. Louis’s prosperity but long afflicted by racist neglect and property blighting – to the Sugarloaf Mound in the south – the last remaining Indigenous mound structure in St. Louis. This axis also emblemizes the exhibition’s attempt to bring together artists working toward Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty, political programs that are extraordinarily difficult to synthesize. Historical accountability for slaveholding tribes and anti-Blackness in Native citizenship laws, as well as Black participation in Indigenous expulsion and models of racial self-determination premised on settlement and reoccupation, continue to compromise Black and Native relations in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Analyzing how these historical and political tensions surface in the exhibition requires considering representation and address, concerns particularly suited to artistic inquiry.

Formally, the exhibition includes a wide array of propositions about what public art should or could look like, from familiar modes like murals and monumental sculpture to infrastructural

enhancements, such as parks, gardens, and funding for local institutions, to ephemeral interventions including workshops, broadsides, walking tours with audio guides, and seed bombs. One of the provocations of Counterpublic is its suggestion that public art need not be any different from urban development or community organizing, and yet this utilitarian approach is haunted by an aesthetic excess that demands its own criteria of judgment. Contrast, for example, Damon Davis's grandiose memorialization of Mill Creek Valley with Steffani Jemison's more oblique and melancholic approach to the theme. Davis's sculptures look as blithely corporate as the stadium they decorate, whereas Jemison's use of decommissioned theater backdrops and a touristy penny press, as well as her decision to install her audio piece inside the gondolas of the St. Louis Wheel, indicates more self-awareness about the nature and pitfalls of artistic spectacle. Too often, the art world comes to observe the work of Black and Brown artists with a paternalistic peace of mind, relieved of the burden of critical judgment by the guarantee that praise for the oppressed is a virtue. As I listened to the repeated intonation of the homonym "eye/I" in Jemison's audio installation, it seemed a cynical reflection on the narcissism of the viewer. In any case, the artist insisted that the piece was not meant for art-world jet-setters, but for the St. Louis Wheel's typical visitor (although I have doubts whether that elusive everyman even exists).

The art critic must always struggle with the solipsism of the eye/I, including the acknowledgement that the art they are reviewing may not be "for" them. Counterpublic insists that it is primarily (if not exclusively) for the residents of St. Louis, and especially the city's more or less

disenfranchised residents. The most abstract and elusive of projects remain insistently grounded in the specificity of the city. For example, while Torkwase Dyson's architecturally-scaled sculpture *Bird and Lava* (Scott Joplin) deploys the artist's signature vocabulary of black geometric abstraction, its austere form is supplemented with biographical references to one-time St. Louis resident Scott Joplin. Work tuned to other sites suffers when transposed to St. Louis. Raven Chacon's *Music for 13 Paths* was conceived for a 2021 exhibition in Toronto in reference to the Toronto Purchase (aka Treaty 13). It consists of a performance and installation of 13 wind chimes, redividing the Western 12-note octave into 13 pitches. In St. Louis, this beautiful gesture seems orphaned. The insistence on the local reveals an anxiety around both reference and relevance. Claims about whom a particular artwork or exhibition is "for" rarely articulate what it's for. The apparent straightforwardness of Counterpublic's address to the community is embarrassed by its mode of address, that is, art.

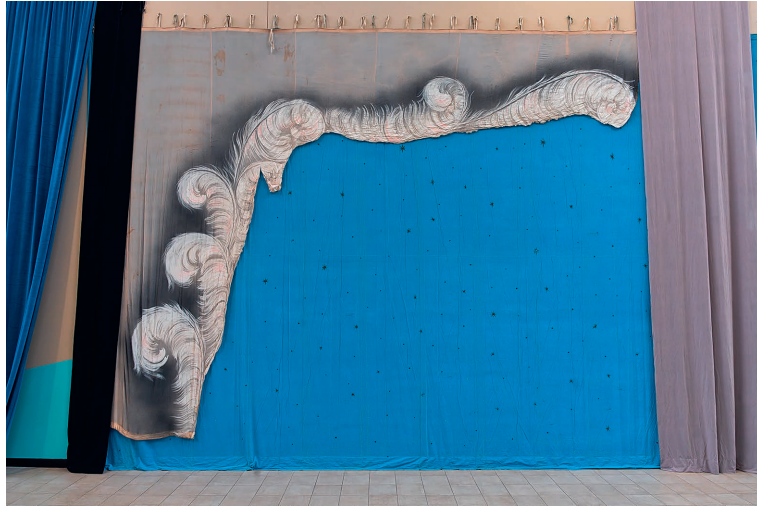
Perhaps, to borrow the mission statement of the fashion label Telfar (there were plenty of Telfar bags at the opening, after all), Counterpublic's address can be defined as "not for you – for everyone."<sup>5</sup> For example, the implication in New Red Order's call for land rematriation (the "give it back" emblazoned on the billboards and repeated in the video they created for the exhibition) is that when you realize the land is not "for you," it can become available for everyone, including you. The only way "you" can be part of "everyone" is to refuse possession, even self-possession.<sup>6</sup> In its best moments, Counterpublic teaches us to beware reifying the community as object or subject of representation. Such moments are an



Damon Davis, "Pillars of the Valley," 2023

opportunity to recognize the political stakes of aesthetic judgment, its capacity to posit a community beyond that which is directly referenced or represented by the work in question. For example, Anita Fields's installation *WayBack*, a diamond-shaped arrangement of low wooden platforms modeled on the ceremonial architecture of the Osage Nation, interpellates viewers as guests: they are welcome to visit but encouraged to acknowledge that they are on native land. At the end of the exhibition, the platforms will be integrated into Osage communities in Oklahoma, connecting their ancestral territories to their current,

displaced home. Matthew Angelo Harrison makes a guest of his own work by inserting three modest sculptures into the impressive collection of the George B. Vashon Museum of African American History, founded by Calvin Riley in a St. Louis Place mansion. While drawing visitors into the museum is itself a laudable aim, the sculptures' aesthetic qualities point beyond the museum to other sites, stories, and subjects. These found objects encased in resin enact a haunting drama of transparency and opacity that challenges the kind of discursive capture typical of museums as well as biennials and triennials.



Steffani Jemison, "Untitled (Ripple)," 2023

The roundtable discussions on the opening weekend took place at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation under a monumental Ellsworth Kelly titled *Blue Black* (2001). The participating artist Robert Green, whose studio is in the St. Louis Place neighborhood, referred to this work in his comments, explaining "blue-black is the darkest you can be as a Black person." Although Kelly would likely be scandalized by the ascription of a racial metaphoric to his piece, this openness to interpretation is part of the work's aesthetic power. Politically oriented exhibitions like *Counterpublic* should not underestimate this power. It is only because art cannot be addressed to a specific audience that it can always be held to account. This is what links liberation and obligation.

Counterpublic triennial 2023, St. Louis, Missouri, April 15–July 15, 2023.

#### Notes

- 1 Counterpublic's cofounder and artistic director, James McAnally, cites Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); and Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2002).
- 2 "Community Report" in *Counterpublic 2023*, exh. cat., ed. James McAnally (St. Louis, MO: Counterpublic; March), 37.

- 3 This commission has since been put on hold due to the sexual abuse allegations against Adjaye. See the announcement "Counterpublic, July 5, 2023" at <https://www.counterpublic.org/7-5-2023>.
- 4 For a variety of perspectives on these issues, see Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, eds., *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
- 5 There is a similar logic in insisting that only when Black lives matter will all lives matter, and that, until then, to claim "all lives matter" is to imply that Black lives do not matter.
- 6 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten warn that "[the real danger] is recourse to self-possession in the face of dispossession," preferring instead "to be among the ones who cannot own, the ones who have nothing and who, in having nothing, have everything." Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013), 17, 96.

## THE PROPRIETARY IMPASSE INHERENT IN POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM: IDENTITY, POLITICS, PROPERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF (AESTHETIC) FREEDOM

Jaleh Mansoor on "Art's Properties" by David Joselit

The mere mention of "identity politics" has assumed the properties of a magic potion: it causes an intense reaction while its contents seem to be ever more arcane. In her review of David Joselit's recent publication, Jaleh Mansoor thus appreciates the author's gumption to enter into this highly contested discourse with a new argument. She, in turn, offers her critique with both academic gusto and rigor. Mansoor utilizes the review as a forum to probe the issue at the core of Joselit's latest book: property. If the issue of cultural ownership is relegated to the realm of the symbolic, the ongoing legacies of oppressive material histories are placed beyond our analytical reach, and the grounds for the politics of solidarity that Joselit advocates are hence removed.

David Joselit's *Art's Properties* is a lissome, succinct, and courageous if ultimately limited retort to increasingly hegemonic – despite grand pretenses to the contrary – identity politics in art. Joselit's primary point is that while identity has come to be mobilized in a logic of property, art is inalienable and incontrovertible at the level of its significance and thus can never finally be owned. This position holds, Joselit supplely argues, despite art's increasingly financialized accumulation as surplus capital on the part of collectors who have, hold, and bet on claims to its material support.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, in parallel to its economically inalienable excess, Joselit insists that art can never be political insofar as its resonance exceeds context. Art's excess of meaning, by definition, remains irreducible to the forms of closure expected of identity and property. Its substance is reconstituted anew in the mind of the viewer across time and place – that's what makes art art.

Yet Joselit is equally at pains to respect the stakes of heated politicized deliberations around the representation of racialization in the culture sector, not least in the wake of Black Lives Matter

and new cycles of struggle against racialized capital and the long historical, material, and social shadow of American slavery. For the author, the all-governing problem that distinguishes current debates is the question of ownership. When it comes to the question of "cultural appropriation," if anything is appropriating anything, in Joselit's estimation, it is the political appropriation of art through identity and representation. This possessive drive, frequently presented as well-meaning progressive politics, has ironically led to an impasse where it is difficult to assign any convincing political virtue at all: "art has been politicized by a possessive gaze – a gaze whose power arises from the appropriation of art's alterity" (97). Joselit inspects artist Hannah Black's letter to white artist Dana Schutz. The letter accuses Schutz of the white cultural theft of Black pain. For Joselit, Black's logic internalizes and mimics the white aggressor. He summons Audre Lorde, Hortense Spillers, Christina Sharpe, Saidiya Hartman, Zadie Smith, and above all Sylvia Wynter – especially her critique of "man" or of universalized anthros as a category entrenched in modern European property law. These authors have formed a rich canon of Black Feminist debates on the limits to proprietorial identity. Through this generous intertextuality, Joselit argues for a politics of witness and solidarity over ownership.

The author misrecognizes, or disavows, so-called primitive accumulation – the prerequisite accumulated wealth, or "fixed" capital, necessary to the foundation of the total system of modern capital and the wage system, aka modernity. This presents a logical conundrum that won't stay in its historical box insofar as a modern structure running on paid labor, or the supposedly free sale of one's labor, is founded on the accumulation

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Fon: +49 (0)30 30 10 45 330

### VERLAGSLEITUNG / MANAGING DIRECTOR

Silvia Koch

verlag@textezurkunst.de

### REDAKTION / EDITORIAL BOARD

Fon: +49 (0)30 30 10 45 340

redaktion@textezurkunst.de

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THIS ISSUE WAS CONCEIVED BY

Sabeth Buchmann, Isabelle Graw, Antonia Kölbl,  
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Susann Kowal

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### ANZEIGEN / ADVERTISING

Diana Nowak (Anzeigenleitung / Head of Advertising),

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Fon: +49 (0)30 30 10 45 345

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Diana Nowak

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