

Art and Contemporaneity

Art and Contemporaneity

Edited by
Frank Ruda and Jan Voelker

diaphanes

*This volume was published with the financial support of the CRC 626
of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*

First Edition

ISBN 978-3-03734-209-1

© diaphanes, Zürich-Berlin 2015

All rights reserved

Prepress: 2edit, Zürich

Printed in Germany

www.diaphanes.com

Table of Contents

Preface	7
<i>Alexander García Düttmann</i>	
For and Against the Contemporary An Examination	9
<i>Judith Balso</i>	
“No, nobody could ever call me his contemporary.”	23
<i>Oliver Feltham</i>	
What is Contemporaneity in Theater? Atomism versus Atavism	45
<i>Frank Ruda</i>	
We Are All Hot Girls in a Mental Asylum The “Hollywood Left” and Contemporary Democracy	59
<i>Mark Potocnik</i>	
Fire walk with me Canetti’s <i>Auto-da-Fé</i>	77
<i>Barbara Formis</i>	
The Urinal and The Syncope	91
<i>Vladimir Safatle</i>	
The Exhaustion of the Critical Form as Aesthetic Value	107
<i>Georg W. Bertram</i>	
Benjamin and Adorno on Art as Critical Practice	127
<i>Jan Voelker</i>	
To end the End Philosophy and the Poem in Badiou	145
<i>Alain Badiou</i>	
Art and Mathematics	163
Contributors	175

Preface

Although art always takes place in time, its manifestations, actual works of art, can be characterized by the specific and close connection they maintain between contemporaneity and timelessness. In the first place, their relation to time must be differentiated in a twofold manner: on the one hand, there is the relation to the time in which they are embedded, and, on the other, the relation to the time that they themselves create. With regard to the former, works of art can be claimed to subsist and evolve in historically specific and singular contexts. They can attempt to play a part and participate in their own time, or they can distance themselves from it and declare or create a different time. In any case, works of art are always initially embedded in their time, circumscribed in a given historical present. This might imply genuinely artistic or art-specific, or cultural or political determinations and interrelations. Works of art refer to the present of art itself, or orient themselves from or towards a political or cultural present. In this first sense, art is historical because it consists of historically situated works. Thus, delving into the question of the contemporaneity of art, one has to investigate these historical contexts, the conditions of artistic works and production and also the orientational structures, laws and procedures of the works themselves.

On the other hand, works of art open up a time in which they themselves declare to exist. This time is precisely opened by and through their act of declaration. Artworks generate a proper space of time in which they assign themselves a contemporary relation to other works or to other moments in history, in which they call for such a relation. They found a time that is singularly proper to art and that, as such, does not exist before the works that brings it into existence. In this way, something new in art is always related to the specific new time of this art: Art creates time and thereby an ever specific history (in ever particular historical situations). In this time, which is proper to art, artworks can tie in with a particular tone, a specific color, a gesture, or with another moment of history to which they declare themselves contemporary. In this way, the time created and declared by art relates, in a second step, to the historical present as well, in which it finds something that cannot be traced back to it or be given an explanation of in terms of historical conditions. So, art is creative not simply in a material manner, but also in the sense that it creates its own transcendental conditions (in the Kantian sense of time and space). The creation of art is a creation of time and of history. This is why art is historical in a second sense, namely because its works are capable of creating a new

temporality, their own proper and irreducibly specific present. The singularity of this temporality, of this new time, has to be kept in focus when posing the question of the contemporaneity of art.

These two strands raise the question, as intricate as it is necessary, of the relation between art and contemporaneity, between historical specificity and historical singularity. In particular historical conditions (political and material conditions, conditions of production and of reception, the history of possibilities and impossibilities, the history of color) a specific temporality of the artwork emerges. Both temporalities – this is the hypothesis and the wager of this volume – are superimposed on by one another, namely as a timelessness of artworks as such. Although they are historically situated, artworks are able to exceed their own historical narrowness – a piece of art from ancient times can today still be considered an artwork. Despite sometimes being separated by an immense temporal distance, works of art are capable of establishing a trans-temporal validity enabling them to affect anyone far beyond the strict empirical limitations of their respective historical situations. Timelessness, then, is the result of art's own time as a cut through the frame of an historical present.

The texts assembled in this volume address from various perspectives the interplay of these different layers. Diverse and wide-ranging questions necessarily arise: First and foremost, there is the general question of how to think a relation between art and contemporaneity without giving primacy to one of the three different layers. How to think their interdependence and their interplay? But also, it is necessary to ask what the “contemporary” in art is. What is it that makes art contemporary? And how is it possible to relate contemporaneity to timelessness? What conceptual and theoretical tools and operations are able to capture the specific timeless quality of artistic works and at the same time to render plausible their historical embeddedness in relation with the creation of something new in art? How can we think of the creation of something new in art by contrasting and comparing this with other procedures of creation? How and with which methods or means does art become contemporary? Moreover, what does art become contemporary in relation to?

The reader of the following pages will encounter different answers to these questions. However, all these answers share one and the same starting point, as one of the most crucial questions to arise when dealing with the very definition, concept and operativity of art is how to link it to the concept of the contemporary.

Frank Ruda / Jan Völker, Berlin 2014