

Doom spa

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CITY WEST

This zine is produced on the occasion of
doom spa campus
Piazza Virtuale–Piazza Fiscale
3rd + 4th December 2022
N 52.512044 E 13.322171
Ernst-Reuter-Platz
Traffic Island
Berlin
All best, Anke Dyes



/en

This text was created for use in a different context. It is here offered in a lightly revised form, as a basis for discussing an issue the author feels no more responsibility (or capability) for than does anyone else. A medium-sized institution in the west of Germany had requested the contribution of a text for its annual in-house magazine. From the email thread, it could be concluded that the museum became aware of the author after having had others turn it down, perhaps due to the theme for 2023: 8000 characters had been requested on the topic of identity politics. One of the key issues (with this issue) seems to be —as might become apparent in the choice of the topic— that identity politics is often understood not as a critique of special interests, but as a demand made in their name.

Translated by Matthew Scown



- ↗ Putting the quality of this text to one side: are its observations familiar to you? Does people politics play a role in your work life or personal life? Or in the overlap of the two?
- ↗ And if so, are digital networks the ideal medium for people politics? Do digital networks play a role in your work life or personal life? Or in the overlap of the two?
- ↗ Have you ever intentionally not installed an adblocker on your browser, so that you'd be able to see what identity your social media use to sell your profile data?
- ↗ Would you be surprised to find out what others really think of you? Or do you know very well because—thank you oh so much—they let you know all the time?
- ↗ Do these questions affect you more or less than they affect others?
- ↗ Would you like to be called up again on the phone and asked what radio stations you listen to?
- ↗ Do your parents know a lot about art?

Questions to launch the discussion:

In an art world driven by competition—over prices, stipends, galleries, artists, exhibitions, recognition, money—issues and conflicts often get negotiated on a personal level, rather than factoring in the structural aspects that actually determine them. Critique is thus at times dismissed as envy. This overlooking of the actual conflicts is particularly acute when it comes to the creators' identities—and what said identities do and do not facilitate for their bearers. When identity politics becomes an accusation—even where the actual issue lies elsewhere—then it plays out something like this: instead of placing its faith in the quality of the artistic work, some institution or other is said to place it only in the identity of the artist, and exhibits the latter's art on that basis.

- The partial (and partially legitimate) conflation of author and work is misunderstood as marketing to a market that seems to thrive on attention alone. Where reference to the creator's identity is made for the economic benefit of artists, the identity marker "other" can be enviously interpreted as an advantage where it is in truth a marker of restrictions. Some ascriptions in fact encourage work to be received in such a way that—be in tolerance or condescension—picks up on identities and incorporates them into reflections on representability and autonomous forms, even where they do not in the narrower sense relate to the artwork. Even where—as mentioned previously—it is legitimate to bring on board the author's specific subject position so that the discursive significance of the work can be understood, the narrowing of possibilities that follows from the day-to-day routine of

the art world with its programs and trends is an issue barely worthy of the name identity politics.

A curator friend of mine—herself assigned an identity that speaks to the unchosen circumstances of her life while saying nothing about her interests or research, whose identity fits and does not fit, so to speak, hiding and disguising while still pertaining to her own biography—has referred to the whole ensemble as “people politics.” It would be fair to object that all “politics” has something to do with the “people”—either those doing it, or those affected by it. Something different is meant here, however: rather than being a political debate on representation, people politics is a pragmatic tool for shaping programs—a reduction of people and that what is known about them to one or two factors pinned on to a person like tags to a social media post, making said person quickly categorizable and distinguishable from others. The biographical categorization becomes what the person represents; person and (a particular) role are short-circuited, leaving behind only a specific repertoire with a limited number of possible plotlines and developments.

See Egija Inzule’s piece for Texte zur Kunst’s “Identity Politics Now” issue#107 September 2017, S.58 ff.



A series of horizontal lines for writing, with three bullet points on the left side.



Identity discourses too—of which there are many—speak of how the identity never entirely fits with the self; of how there is a distance between one’s abilities and feeling on the one hand and, on the other, how said ability and feeling are classified within social structures, independently of the person. Per one of the most prominent formulations, subject and identity here are joined by a suture that holds them together while also making clear that the two are not one and the same.

See Stuart Hall „Who needs Identity“, in Identity: A Reader, ed. by Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans, Peter Redman

- On top of this there are the issues that lay on the other side of representation—namely that the curator mentioned above, for example, is not only reduced to her biography (in this case, her origins in Eastern Europe), but also to an example of and ambassador for an Eastern European perspective. This is a factor that becomes even more relevant in an art world ingratiating itself into the logics of digital spaces. Distinctions and demarcations between identities threaten here to become something of an unproblematic toolbox whose compartments or categories differentiate without evaluating, thus producing statistics without interrogating what might have motivated their demarcations and inclusions.

The internet was once touted as a place where you could divest yourself entirely of an identity tied to body, gender markers, skin color, accent, or other attributes before entering, thus liberated, into an exchange of ideas. In reality, most users remain bound to very same attributes, even if never directly asked about them. This is due (among other things) to data being simply more valuable when it can be associated with “latent factors” like race and gender—alongside those of income and creditworthiness. Digital advertising, online scandals, and cyber-bullying are still based on the simultaneous presence and absence of marked bodies as the bearers of identity; and in a worst-case scenario, anonymous users can insult, threaten, and exclude others based on identity.

See Hate Speech und Verletzbarkeit im digitalen Zeitalter [Hate speech and vulnerability in the digital age], especially the third chapter pdf at transcript-verlag.de

For artists especially, then, the application of *people politics*—making positive reference to what will be attributed to the in any case, from name to signature style to background—seems to be a no-brainer. This obviousness stems from the above-mentioned proximity of artistic work and biography: the artist’s own subjectivity is relocated to the artistic work, which then takes on subjective traits. The beholder is thus confronted with the problem of never fully being able to grasp a work of art, for the latter

always withdraws and cannot be classified. It then becomes possible to illuminate the room for maneuver—otherwise closed off by tags, sutures, or short-circuits—between subjectivity and identity.

Over the past two years, the art public has only to a very limited degree been able to gather before these quasi-subjects—these publicly exhibited artworks—and reflect on identities and their potentially open natures. The pandemic, then, interrupted a debate on who can actually feel alluded to and addressed by the exhibitions hosted so extensively in the preceding years. These various discussions touched both on the language used in institutions and on that which is exhibited: whose concerns are suitable for viewing, who the institutions show their artworks to, who they think of when hanging paintings. The justified doubts as to whether everyone is kept in mind here are perceived by some as identity politics in the service of special interests—rather than as the critique of special interests that is actually at hand.

Siehe dazu „White Walling“ von Aruna D’Souza