

Against the Inertia of Disillusionment

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'This time calls for opposition', Chantal Mouffe has often said. The phrase both sums up her analysis of contemporary politics and calls the reader to action. I would like to suggest that 'for an artist, every time calls for opposition'.

Mouffe argues that every hegemonic order rests on an exclusion – that which dominates rules by excluding. My own position as an artist arises from this insight. I believe that artists should be in the foreground of exposing exclusions and of advancing alternatives. The artists' role is to challenge the dominant order. At present, the dominant order is that of a capitalist market economy, in which stability depends on the profit of a few and the suffering of the many. Such an order suppresses alternative visions of how to organize and value the world. Some alternatives become obscure in their marginalization; others become neutralized when the market appropriates and 'recuperates' these in the name of profit. But as Mouffe emphasises, 'every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. Things could always be otherwise'.¹ Understanding this is essential for artists. Otherwise an artist ceases to be an artist – an artist moves towards the position of an entrepreneur or a decorator becoming a functionary of the system. Imagination, as a vehicle for political and social change, is the artist's medium.

The art I am referring to here is what Mouffe describes as critical art: 'it is art that foments dissensus that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony.'²

By including autobiographical episodes, I want to expose myself as a case study of an art practitioner who believes in art as a means of changing the world. This change I see as an effort to diminish injustice.

Recollections

As a senior in the Staedelschule art school, I worked at the front desk of Frankfurter Kunstverein selling tickets. I suffered from the pain of disillusionment: the world