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Seminar

The art of participation – from the 50s until now

“Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon’s Indochine policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?”, asked Hans Haacke in 1970 in the MoMA and requested that the exhibition visitors put their ballot either in the left or in the right Plexiglas box. With the “MoMA Poll”, Haacke expanded the structural guidelines of the artistic field by shifting the previous requests for participation by his colleagues, such as John Cages “4’33”” (1952) or Robert Rauschenbergs “White Paintings” (1952), to an analysis of the political conditions of cultural productions. The Fluxus and Happenings movement of the sixties re-developed these approaches. For example, artists such as Yoko Ono or VALIE EXPORT torpedoed the support of the recipient with “Cut Piece” (1964), or reversed the prevailing viewing relationship with the “Tapp and Tastkino” (1968).

In the practices discussed here, the observer is integrated as an operative magnitude in the artistic creative process and challenged to (inter) actions, contrary to reception aesthetics at the end of the sixties, which concentrated on a hitherto neglected instance in text interpretation, namely the recipients, and found therein “implicit readers” – a consideration that Kemp carried over to art history in the middle of the 80s and therefore found the expression “the observer is in the picture”. However, post-structural theories and visual studies approaches of observer research have suggested that there is no such thing as an external observer anyway – which is reason enough for us to be interested in various communication models.

Participation practices in the nineties expanded their field of action by including actors of the exhibiting institutions, like Andrea Fraser did in “Gesellschaft des Geschmacks” (“A Society of Taste”, 1993) or by taking place in so-called public spaces such as with Gregg & Guttmanns “Offene Bibliothek” (“Open Library”, since 1991) and Christine Hills “Volksboutique” at the dX. Today, participation is the criterion of Web 2.0 (browsing, sharing, collecting, producing). So it’s no surprise that Eva and Franco Mattes held their re-enactments of EXPORTs “Tapp and Tastkino”, among others, in Second Life in 2007, or that improveverywhere.com has been initiating global chaos scenes on via mailing lists since 2001.

Next to exemplary examples of participation art, the seminar will also discuss the artistic-political participation debates in the form of for example, the Beuys foundations, like the German Students’ Party (1967). We will systematise forms, techniques of addressing and degree of participation and we will deal with the results of art-historical analyses once we are no longer talking about an individual artist but rather about collective productions of meaning.

Further Information:

<http://www.bkb.eyes2k.net/uniHH09.html>