

Pictures in/and/as Discourse: Representations in the Subject/ Object Split

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http://www.quadrilogy.org/en/theory_individual

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What is the relationship between artistic and curatorial/critical discourse? They oppose one another in a relationship of competition over authority. Often forgotten in this very academic conflict is the encounter of the beholder with the work that stands against its own discursive background. The question of the role of subjectivity in art, if we think here of popular TV formats that have long absorbed art theoretical subjects like the constructedness and mediacy of subjectivity, can also be tracked along non-academic lines.

The suspicion of illustration or instrumentalization: the former is raised against artworks that are accused of only being able to be decoded by way of theoretical references, the other vis-à-vis curatorial or critical appropriation that leads to the obliteration of its object. This understandably defensive attitude regarding contemporary iconoclasms that would like to dissect the complex, ambiguous image or thing into components of a discourse, seems to be a paradoxical gesture of protection and condescension. For as we know, artworks do not stand outside the discourse, but are part of it. They do not simply reflect the world in a more or less transparent way, but belong to it.

These suspicions are less a matter of the "correct" or "false" contextualization or interpretation of artworks (in the sense of a more or less welcome agreement between thing and discourse), but the question of the relationship between artistic and curatorial/critical discourses to one another. A relationship of competition in terms of the division of authority that is not free of hubris, or, in other words, in the meantime seems quite academic, for these professional (and often intersecting) roles are not necessarily so privileged. The artwork does not reveal itself in an artistic or curatorial conceptual paper, but rather in the encounter with the beholder (who occasionally is neither an artist, nor a critic). Now, intended here is naturally not a "disinterested" or inno-

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cent beholder figure, but one that is just as discursively-bound as all the other figures in the art field. But their discourse is not necessarily the same one as that in which their professional colleagues move.

And thus, the theme of subjectivity can by no means only be sought out in debates in philosophy and art history. This realm is not only shaped by the knowledge of Barthes, Deleuze, or Foucault (knowledge of which no longer being the prerogative of the professional) but obtains much input from the most various everyday cultures and mass media realms. Not only because each portrait, each identity card, and each choice of a certain running shoe negotiates certain identitary conceptions, but also because here and in many other contexts structures emerge that overtake, as it were, the questions that are elaborately staged in the realm of art. Without now wanting to exaggerate the importance of reality TV or contemporary celebrity formats: they have long absorbed art theoretical themes like the constructedness or mediated aspect of subjectivity or perhaps have only simply pretended to do so. The conscious, ostentatious absence of "immediate" expressivity in media doublings and refractions does nothing to counter the current need for authenticity.

Communicating subjectivity is clearly less a problem than its avoidance, be it in the form of signature, gesture, or authorship. In the face of Hal Foster's dictum, "Perhaps all our models, not only of history but of the aesthetic, are secretly models of the subject", this is perhaps unavoidable. Hal Foster's formulation is at the same time a statement and a symptom of the suspicion of illustration and instrumentalization. The anthropomorphization of the artwork/thing, that seems to be subjected to a false text, is yet another example of this.

Translation by Brian Currid, Berlin.

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In its on-going series »Theory / Conversations« the Burger Collection engages in conversations with artists, theoreticians, art historians and critics about changing topics related to the exhibition and research project 'Quadrilogy'. The 'Quadrilogy' was started in 2009 and will evolve in the up-coming years under the curatorial leadership of Daniel Kurjakovic. A first series of conversations with art historians and theorists such as Manuela Ammer, Berni Doessegger, Michael Gnehm, Catrin Misselhorn, Stefan Neuner, Beate Söntgen, Frédéric Wecker, and Giovanna Zapperi was published in the first exhibition catalog titled *Conflicting Tales* (2009). More information about the first exhibition, the catalog and further aspects of the 'Quadrilogy' can be found on the homepage www.quadrilogy.org.