

'Doing art politically: What does this mean?'

Today, the terms of 'political art', 'committed art', 'political artist' and 'committed artist' are used very often. These simplifications and abbreviations have long since been obsolete. They are cheap and lazy classifications. Not for a second do I think of myself as more 'committed' than another artist. As an artist, one must be totally committed to one's artwork. There is no other possibility than total commitment if one wants to achieve something with one's art. This is true for any art. Today there is a great confusion concerning the question of what should be 'Political' or 'political'. I am only interested in what is really political, the political that implicates: where do I stand? where does the other stand? what do I want? what does the other want? The politics of opinions, of comments and of views of the majority – does not and has never interested me. I am concerned with doing my art politically – I am not and was never concerned with making political art. The statement, 'doing art politically – not making political art' is a statement I took from Jean-Luc Godard. He said, "It is a matter of making films politically; it is not a matter of making political films". But what does it mean to do art politically?

- Doing art politically means giving form

Not making a form – but giving form. A form which comes from me, from myself only, which can only come from me because I see the form that way, I understand it that way and because I am the only one to know that form. To give form – as opposed to making a form – means to be one with it. I must stand alone with this form. It means raising the form, asserting this form and defending it – against everything and against everyone. It means to ask the question of form for myself and try to answer – through giving form. I want to try to confront the great artistic challenge: How can I give a form which takes a position? how can I give a form that resists facts? I want to understand the question of form as the most important question for an artist.

- Doing art politically means creating something

I can only create or fulfil something if I address reality positively, even the hard core of reality. It is a matter of never allowing the pleasure, the happiness, the enjoyment of work, the positive in creation, the beauty of working, to be asphyxiated by criticism. This doesn't mean to react, but it means to always be active. Art is always action, Art never is reaction. Art is never merely a reaction or a critique. It doesn't mean being uncritical or not making a critique – it means being positive despite the sharpest critique, despite uncompromising rejection and despite unconditional resistance. It means not to deny oneself passion, hope and dream. Creating something means to risk oneself and I can only do that if I work without – at the same time – analyzing what I am making. To take the risk, to have joy in working, to be positive, are the preconditions for making art. Only in being positive, can I create something that comes from myself. I want to be positive, even within the negative. Because I want to be positive, I must gather the courage to touch also the negative – that is where I see the Political. It means taking action, risking an assertion, assuming a position, a position which goes beyond mere criticism. I want to be critical, but I do not want to let myself be neutralized by being critical. I want to try to go beyond my own criticism, but I do not want to make it easier for myself with a – narcissistic – self-critique. I never want to complain as an artist, for there is no reason to – I can do my work, I can create something.

- Doing art politically means deciding in favour of something

I decided to position my work in the form- and force-fields of Love, Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics. I always want my work to touch each of these fields. All four fields are equally important to me. My work does not have to cover all these fields evenly, however, I always want all four fields to be touched. One of these four form-and force-fields, but only one, is the field of Politics. To choose the force- and form-field of Politics means that, in my work, I always want to ask the question: What do you want? Where do you stand? It also means that I always want to ask myself: What do I want? Where do I stand? The force- and form-field of Politics – just as the field of Aesthetics – can also be interpreted negatively, I am aware of it. But it is never about excluding or rejecting the negative, it is about confronting the negative also, working within the negative also and involving oneself in it, it is always a matter of not being negative oneself. Through my work, I want to create a new truth beyond negativity, beyond current issues, beyond commentaries, beyond opinions and beyond evaluations.

- Doing art politically means using art as a tool

I understand art as a tool to encounter the world. I understand art as a tool to confront reality. And I understand art as a tool to live within the time in which I am living. I always ask myself: Does my work have the ability to generate an event? Can I encounter someone with my work? Am I – through my work – trying to touch something? Can something – through my work – be touched? Doing art politically means considering the work that I am doing today – in my milieu, in my history – as a work which aims to reach out of my milieu – beyond my history. I want – in and through my life – to address and confront universal concerns. Therefore I must work with what surrounds me, with what I know and with what affects me. I must not give in to the temptation of the particular – but on the contrary – try to touch universality. The particular – which always excludes – must be resisted. For me this means that I want to do my work, the work that I am doing here and now, as a universal work. That is the Political.

- Doing art politically means building a platform with the work

Creating a platform enables others to come in contact with the work. I want all of my works to be understood as a surface or a field. This field or surface is the upper surface that enables access or contact with art. The impact or friction takes place on this upper surface, and through a contact, the other can be implicated. This surface – my work – must be a locus for dialogue or for confrontation. I think that art has the power and capacity – because it is art – to create the conditions for a dialogue or a confrontation, directly, one-to-one, without communication, without mediation, without moderation. As an artist I want to consider my work as a platform, a platform which is a clear opening toward the other. I always want to ask myself: Does my work possess the dynamic for a breakthrough? And I ask myself: is there an opening, is there a path into my work? Does my work resist the tendency toward the hermetic? My work must create an opening; it must be a door, a window or even just a hole, a hole carved into today's reality. I want to make my artwork with the will to create a breakthrough.

- Doing art politically means loving the material with which one works

To love does not mean to be in love with one's material or to lose oneself in it. Rather, to love one's material means to place it above everything else, to work with it in awareness, and it means to be insistent with it. I love the material because I decided in favour of it – therefore I do not want to replace it. Since I decided in favour of it – and love it – I cannot and do not want to change it. The decision about the material is an extremely important one. That is the Political. And because I made that decision, I cannot yield to wishes and demands for 'something else' or 'something new'.

- Doing art politically means inventing oneself guidelines

It means inventing one's own guidelines or appropriating them. My guidelines are: acting in headlessness; 'Energy = Yes! Quality = No!'; being weak – but wanting to make a strong work; not economizing oneself; self-expenditure; 'Panic is the solution!'; being both precise and exaggerating; undermining oneself; being cruel vis-à-vis one's own work, being tenacious, 'Less is less! More is more!'; 'Never won, but never completely lost!'; having the ambition to coin a new concept with my work; assuming responsibility for everything concerning my work; accepting to look dumb in front of my own work; 'Better is always less good!'; refusing all hierarchies; believing in the friendship between Art and Philosophy; being ready – because the first – to pay the price for one's work.

- Doing art politically means working for the other

Working for the other means first of all to work for the other within myself. It also means working for a non-exclusive public. The other can be my neighbour or can be a stranger, someone who frightens me, whom I don't know and don't understand. The other is someone I did not think of and did not expect. The non-exclusive public is not just 'all' or 'the mass' or 'the majority', the non-exclusive public consists of the others, the sometimes more and sometimes less numerous 'others'. Through and in my work I want to work for a non-exclusive public. I want to do everything in order to never exclude the other from my work and I want to include the other, always and without conditions. I want to include the other through the form of my work. The other is also the reason why I make no distinction between works in public space, in a commercial gallery, in an art fair, in a museum, in a Art-center or in an alternative art space. That is the Political. To work for the other enables me to position myself as an artist on the outside of the spectrum of evaluation.

- Doing art politically does not mean working for or against the market

The question is much more about understanding the market as part of the artist's reality and about working in this reality. Not wanting to work for or against the market is not merely a declaration. It is the awareness that only through autonomy and independence can art maintain itself beyond the laws of the market. Only a direct and affirmed confrontation with the reality of the market – despite the errors, the defects, the faults and the injuries – make it possible to resist and go beyond the market pressure and as an artist, I cannot become dependent. The artist – especially during the first years – always needs support and assistance. Although I know the importance of this support and assistance, I must never let myself or my work be dependent on it.

- Doing art politically means being a warrior.

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