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Uncategorized October 14th, 2015

SEHGAL AND ENTERING THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

LANGUAGE

English
Nederlands (Dutch)

RECENT POSTS

I'd like to be a poet

“My mother is dead. My father is dead. I'm gay. I'd like to be a poet. This is my house.”

Aernoud Bourdreuz

The Stedelijk Museum regularly invites guest bloggers to share their experiences and ideas about a particular subject, work or exhibition. Aernoud Bourdreuz is a lawyer for the art world and a collector of contemporary art. He talks about the distinction between the “world of systems” and the “world we live in”, and considers that this is reflected in the works of Tino Sehgal.

Nothing is as comfortable as a clear system. Just think of our legal system. We know the law and we know where we are with it. In this system the lawyer is assigned an important role. He draws up the agreements in writing. In this way there can be legal certainty.

And then there was Tino Sehgal. When his work was sold to the Stedelijk Museum nothing was allowed to be drawn up in writing.

The purchase was concluded verbally at the solicitor’s office of Allen & Overy before a notary and in the presence of employees of the Stedelijk Museum. The employees had to recite and learn by heart the five most important conditions which Sehgal imposed on the sale.

In this way Sehgal refused to follow the notary’s system, in which the written record is the most trusted method for providing security.

There are many other systems in our society, such as the economic, political and medical worlds. According to the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (born 1929), these were always concerned with the rationale of means and ends; while keeping a goal in mind, the means are

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The ludic quality of Jordan
Wolfson’s robotic sculptures

Everything to Lose but our
Chains

Everything to Lose but our
Chains

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chosen to achieve that goal. Unsurprisingly the goal often turns out to be power and money.

The world we live in is confronted by these “system worlds”. This is a world in which everything has its essential form without being packaged, locked or distorted by a system. It is a world in which the starting point is not the agreement, but what is universally accepted. It is a world in which man does not pretend either to himself or others.

System worlds are attractive. They provide support and protection and can help to make a profit more quickly. There is a risk that the system worlds can start to lead a life of their own, disconnected from the world we live in.

The result is that people no longer take responsibility when they use the system, or hide behind it, for example, by appealing to the law. They can start to believe that anything that cannot be proved in law does not actually exist, or that a work of art by Luc Tuymans or Marlene Dumas can be prohibited with an appeal to the recent system of copyright, although their art belongs to the movement of appropriation art, which goes back centuries and is part of the world we live in. What happens in this case is that the system world overrules the world we live in, although the system world should actually follow the world we live in. In this context Habermas refers to the colonialisation of the world we live in by the system world.

Sehgal seems to refuse to give these system worlds a chance. No advertising is allowed for his exhibitions – advertisements which could raise high expectations to lure me into the exhibition with the help of clever laws from the marketing world. I did not see any catalogue with which I could have placed Sehgal’s work in a museum context. There was no

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communication about the purchase price, so that there were no commercial connotations, and there are no explanatory texts in the gallery to tell me to which collection the work belongs so that I can place it in the art world.

I entered the coal black gallery without any idea of what was waiting for me. I carefully shuffled forward into the middle of the room. It was only after a few minutes, which seemed to last forever, that my eyes became accustomed and I could see how other visitors were awkwardly finding their way in the space. Or were they interpreting the work? And had I become an interpreter myself, just as the notary had been an interpreter at the purchase?

According to Habermas the world we live in is run by the rationale of communication, in which the truth can be discovered behind this communication. This seems impossible to me. After all, we don't even know when we are deceiving ourselves. By simply omitting all communication and by leaving out the system worlds, Sehgal enables us to enter the world we live in.

What an enrichment

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