AUTHORS, SITES, INSTITUTIONS: THREE VECTORS IN THE SPACE OF VISIBILITY

The visibility and comprehension of art are determined by their circumstances (creation, presentation, and context) as much as by the works themselves (artefacts, concepts, constructs, and actions). Three vectors define this space of visibility: the paradigms of authorship, the specific topography of an exhibition space, and the cultural function of an institution. These three aspects are the subjects of the work of FAMED (Sebastian M. Kretzschmar, Kilian Schellbach, and Jan Thomaneck).

1) Authors / Groups

FAMED is a group of artists who exclusively create co-operative works, which means that they do not form a temporary collective of individuals, who disperse after a work is completed. This is what distinguishes FAMED from a film team or a theatre company, which dissolve after an intense or even excessive period of co-operation, only to come together again, perhaps, for a new film project or play, in a different constellation, in newly defined roles. This practice of variable groups, also commonly found in music, is unusual in fine arts. Even though their name would fit perfectly, FAMED does not work like a pop group either, whose sound and image is created through the interplay of typified roles (singer, drummer, bass player, and lead guitarist). Such typifications are often blown up to clichés, as is exemplified by so-called air-guitar contests. FAMED is also not a company with a clear hierarchy and structure of ownership.

There are no defined roles in FAMED. The co-operation of the three artists is situational – yet also permanent. The dynamic of the group provides the discursive foundation for creative acts. The precedents for this approach cannot be found in music, theatre, or film, but in the attempts in fine arts to overcome singular authorship and the connected ideal of originality based on unique works of art. These attempts would include the simultaneous performances of the Futurists and Dadaists, as well as the co-operative writing and drawing experiments of the Surrealists. In Socialism such modernist approaches were forged into an ideology of collectivism, which also artists had to submit to nolens volens. [1]

Socio-critical Western conceptual art of the 1960s was defined by the self-determined formation of art collectives. "Art & Language" at first refrained from the production of artworks al-

together and rather used discourse, publications, and teaching to reinforce the demystification of art. Much as it had already happened in Surrealism, political differences within the 1960s collectives lead to various entrances and exits, inclusions and expulsions. Since the 1970s many stable art collectives that sought to combine their political programs with pragmatism were established. "General Idea" (Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal, AA Bronson), for instance, lived and worked together steadily for 25 years.

Independent from ideology, FAMED put their conceptional model of collaborative feedback under the rules of a "politics of friendship" (FAMED on FAMED). This means: there is no such thing as a single instant of original inspiration, every piece of work and every exhibition require time for communication, for collective consideration, for evaluation of variants, for the rejection of various versions, until a final consensus is reached. The realisation of a piece is accelerated once the three artists begin to work on the result according to their routine of operation.

The creative dynamic within the group and the exploration of the specific site of the museum are hinted at in the title of their exhibition at Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, "Exile of Possibilities". Various options for the title and the space concept were developed, yet only one of those many possibilities was eventually sent into the museum and therefore, metaphorically, "into exile". The museum does, however, not only offer an exile for art, a possibility to translate it from limbo to conclusiveness, to apparent eternity even. FAMED views the museum as a "space of possibility". As such the step into this particular exile offers novel opportunities, options that were not there before, instead of putting them to rest with a claim to conclusiveness in musealisation.

As might be expected, the artistic work of FAMED often deals with questions of authorship. In some of their concepts the group suggests a symbolic change of roles: the artists become producers and promoters of fellow students ("Making of an Artist (Rien ne va plus)" 2004) (fig. 1, p. 26), or they offer to inscribe the artist's name onto the skin of the buyer and vice versa the collector's name onto the skin of the artist ("[FAMED] I", "[FAMED] II", and "[Your Name]" 2003/04) (fig. 2, p. 27). Such forms of participation or interaction may also be directed at anonymous actors: with "Dead Letter Office" from 2007 (fig. 3, p. 27) we will never know, whether the instructions for a performance that were included in a letter without

an address were actually performed or ignored by the postman in charge of undelivered letters. Such role playing, concerned with the mutual authorisation to become an author, performed between artists, colleagues, collectors, and observers, is used to examine the layers of meaning and unspoken rules of artistic practice. It remains secondary if the offers are accepted, put into practice, or ignored. "Even though they are designed for a specific situation and for participation, the works do not necessarily require completion through the active participation of the audience; rather, the openness of an unfulfilled process offers an exemplary instant of meaning-production: if there is no demand, the offer will remain – and with it all the issues connected to it – suspended, in limbo." (Tina Schulz)[2] Or, to return once more to the title of the Leipzig exhibition: possibilities remain in exile only until reality catches up with them and takes them back home.

2) Sites / Situations

The first exhibition by FAMED in February 2003 played with the transfer between two geographically close, yet architecturally and structurally very different places. When the artist Uwe-Karsten Günther was still a student at the Leipzig Academy of Visual Arts (HGB) he established an art space called "Laden fuer Nichts" ("Store for nothing", LfN). This site, located in Sebastian-Bach-Straße, a circa ten minute walk away from the academy, was an outspokenly anti-institutional, self-organised off-space. The project quickly developed a dynamic of its own as its reputation soared, eventually it would serve as its founder's diploma piece. When the site was closed after the building where it was located had been sold, an exact replica of the LfN to a 1:1 scale was constructed inside the gallery of the HGB and later went on an international tour. The replica was used to exhibit new works in various locations by artists who had been involved in the project before. The contribution of FAMED to this project, on occasion of the HGB Rundgang presentation, was a last intervention at the original site in Sebastian-Bach-Straße (fig. 4, p. 28). They closed the replica and reconfigured one part of the yet non-refurbished former shop that had housed the LfN into a well lit "white cube" – the context of the exhibition of the LfN replica inside the "white cube" of the HGB gallery was thus transferred back to the original site. This rather succinct transformation proved to be

viable for the future in three ways: the project anticipated the refurbishment of the shop in Sebastian-Bach-Strasse and furthermore the future of the LfN as a professional gallery located at the Baumwollspinnerei, and finally, the project was programmatic for a whole series of later "Spatial Reconfigurations" by FAMED.

Most of these interventions altered the possible uses of and approaches to a space. "Spatial Reconfigurations #6", which was presented at the Steirischer Herbst Festival in Graz in 2007, is one example: the group changed the layout of the exhibition site by inserting two walls in such a way, that the new space segments could only be accessed via the adjoining rooms. "The unity of the work is thus displaced into the memories of the visitors, who can only synthesise it in the reconstruction of their sequential means of access." (Reinhard Braun)[3] In 2010 FAMED sealed the entrance to the exhibition space at the Columbus Art Foundation in Leipzig for the exhibition "Allegorie und Versprechen" ("Allegory and Promise") and built a new entrance with the own studio door. The "Spatial Reconfigurations" of FAMED make only subtle changes to the given architecture and often verge on the edge of perceptibility. This connects them to the conceptual spatial interventions of the 1960s, which took place both in public space and within the context of art.

In the 1960s, site specific art was established as an attempt to avoid the limiting context of art, as an escape from the "white cube" into urban space or nature. Conceptual art was so to speak confronted with an outdoor reality check in order to test how far a boundless definition of art could carry. In the 1980s, site specific interventions established themselves as a new and successful genre ("Skulptur Projekte Münster" would be paradigmatic) and replace the notion of "drop sculptures", which are flung out of studios. Following a complementary string of thought, conceptual art defined the "white cube" as a specific site that can be artistically exposed, as well as theoretically and critically analysed through interventions. "The Ideology of the Gallery Space" was the subtitle of Brian O'Doherty's well-known essay "Inside the White Cube". Michael Asher was one of those artists who examined the specific characteristics inside and outside of art spaces. In 1973, he had the white paint on the walls and the gallery lighting removed for his exhibition at Galleria Franco Toselli, in order to make the space as such and the marks of its history of use visible again. For

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"Skulptur Projekte Münster" Asher had a caravan parked in different spots throughout the city, which resulted in subtle shifts of conspicuousness and meaning. In the city centre, the connotations raised were different from those in a residential area, in an industrial estate, in a parking lot, or in a park. [4]

The "Spatial Reconfigurations" of FAMED represent a hybrid of strategies of self-expulsion from the "white cube" and self-referential analysis inside the "white cube". They show that every exhibition space is specific, that it necessarily must be self-referential to a certain degree, but that it also always remains embedded in an exterior context. For "Thinking Space" (2008) (fig. 5, p. 28) FAMED sealed the window front of the project space ":emyt" in Rosa-Luxemburg-Straße in Berlin-Mitte, an area that had developed into a new hotspot for galleries and fashion labels. The plywood used to cover the windows darkened the exhibition space and thus drew attention to FAMED's modification of the interior lighting. The panels at the same time served as a reminder of the annual precautions taken by shop owners for the 1st May demonstrations of the left-wing scene. The material furthermore hinted at the at the time smouldering conflict in Rosa-Luxemburg-Straße around a shop run by a fashion label popular among right-wing extremists. The seemingly succinct gesture thus fulfilled various functions: it pragmatically blackened out the inside of the "white cube" and at the same time altered the public presence of the site, it incorporated narratives related to Berlin's autonomous scene, and made reference to a current political conflict in this particular street.

Some works of FAMED are specifically designed for a particular site, others can be adapted to different locations, and yet other works stand for themselves and are independent of location. This classification is a strong simplification of the multiple facets of correlation that exist between site and work. Site specific aspects of art always put its autonomy into question: in what depth can art reflect its context, how strong does a transfer to a new context change the meaning of the work? From the perspective of art history this bilateral relation already became apparent with the readymades of Marcel Duchamp: originally they were only a "private experiment" conducted in Duchamp's studio: "Call it a little game between 'I' and 'me'." [5] When they were first exhibited in 1916 in a New York gallery most visitors ignored the mundane objects placed in the entrance area. It was only one year

later that the urinal submitted anonymously under the title "Fountain" for an open exhibition would cause a scandal, since the fact that it was not exhibited represented a breach of the rules set by the "Society of Independent Artists". In the 1930s, Surrealism presented readymades together with scientific models and magic fetishes. It was not until the 1960s that readymades would regularly appear in exhibitions. Half a century after its invention, the readymade gained a new visibility in Pop Art and Nouveau Realisme, where it unfolded its power to redefine the context of art.

The interventions of FAMED lead to similar shifts in meaning, not in terms of reception history, but as part of an artistic strategy. In 2009 the exhibition "Out of Place" at ASPN gallery presented a small cabinet in which a light bulb was suspended close above the ground. Together with a neon writing asking "Will I Be Missed?" (fig. 6, p. 29), the work had a melancholic air. By contrast, in the exhibition "Allegorie und Versprechen" ("Allegory and Promise") at the Columbus Art Foundation in 2010 a light bulb disappeared at the end of a long wire through a hole in the ground of the exhibition space and thus hinted at the vacancy of the huge space below. Here, the light bulb did not seem to evoke existential questions of self-esteem, but rather seemed to play with the economy of attention, with support from the neon writing on the wall behind it: "That Which Appears Is Good / That Which Is Good Appears". Even though both exhibitions took place at the Baumwollspinnerei in Leipzig, the connotation of the simple light bulb on a wire was different in each setting, altered by the way it was staged in space, as well as through the comment of the respective exhibition title, and finally by the other works exhibited. The quote borrowed from Guy Debord, "That Which Appears Is Good / That Which Is Good Appears", takes on a different meaning in different contexts: as a graffiti on the wall with neon lights serving as quotations marks it oscillates between an act of clinging to street credibility and otherwise the hope for recognition in the "New Talent" section of Art Cologne 2005 (fig. 7, p. 30). Five years later, the quote from Debord as an entire ring of neon letters paraphrased Bruce Nauman's "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths" from 1967. This likewise tautological sentence was originally placed as a "shop sign" in the window of Nauman's studio, where it entered into competition with the other neon advertisements in the area; thus the circuit to Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" is closed.

The exhibition at Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig also features a hanging light bulb – this time it is suspended from the ceiling of the seventeen metres high main hall. Under the title "Exile of Possibilities" the exhibition goes beyond the space usually assigned for the Award. The modernist rhetoric of the building's architecture is thwarted. Although there is already plenty of daylight falling in through the enormous glass fronts, a further "tiny light" is brought in from "afar" via a long wire. Instead of the intimacy of a small cabinet or the gaze into the vast emptiness of an industrial space, the light bulb now, also in a metaphorical sense, illuminates a site that is already in the spotlight: the institution of the museum and the formulas of pathos in their present architectonic shape.

3) Institutions / Criticism

With its title "was draußen wartet" ("what waits outside") the Berlin Biennale 2010 intended to direct the view beyond the art context toward the real world, to explore global economic, political and social crises, and to resist the "tendency to turn away from reality and toward art-immanent and formal problems."[6] The largest exhibition space was situated in the Kreuzberg SO 36 district, in a long abandoned derelict furniture shop near Oranienplatz. This lead to a conflict with the local left-wing scene, who attacked the Biennale as an early sign of gentrification on their turf. In the surrounding streets and at the entrance to the exhibition anonymous posters greeted the visitors with the names, photographs, and e-mail addresses of the curator of the Biennale and the director of "Kunst-Werke": "Guten Tag, mein Name ist Kathrin Rhomberg / Gabriele Horn. Ich bin Gentrifiziererin!" ("Hello, my name is Kathrin Rhomberg / Gabriele Horn. I am a gentrifier!"). The protesters argued that art spaces contribute to the process of gentrification and in consequence to the displacement of the lower-income local population. To counter this development they suggested symbolic and real forms of resistance. The authors of the posters were probably unaware of the "Fluxhouse Co-operative" initiated by George Maciunas in SoHo in 1966. Maciunas turned empty lofts into cheap living and work spaces for artists. This explicitly anti-real-estate-speculation initiative by artists taking self-help action was indeed an early sign of a thorough gentrification of SoHo, a process that has in turn driven artists, galleries, and even museums (Guggen-

heim SoHo) out of the area – except for a few artists who bought their lofts from Fluxhouse Co-operative and eventually became rich.

Does art today remain only an "avant-garde" for the redevelopment and commodification of socially deprived areas? When do methods of criticism become stabilising factors for the system? Where does institutional criticism lead to in the "long march through the institutions"? Does the establishment of "institutional critique" as an academic genre still allow for self-criticism?[7]

All these questions are far too complex to answer in a catalogue essay about FAMED. And yet they are connected to the work of the group. Their intervention "FOOD" at the Artforum Berlin in 2008 showed that despite the common notion that there are no taboos left and that all borders have been dissolved in the context of art, it is still rather easy to reach sensitive spots quite soon and that borders are indeed quickly raised and defended firmly (fig. 8, p. 31). FAMED was invited to design and comment the VIP-Lounge at the Artforum. They built a small architectural enclave open to the public right inside the VIP-Lounge, where they intended to serve some self-made soup for free to regular visitors and VIP guests alike. The official catering company of Artforum saw this as unwelcome competition and threatened to withdraw entirely. The intervention was eventually allowed, but only for a few hours during the opening night. And that although we can find a number of established precedents for "FOOD" in art history: FAMED explicitly refers to the "FOOD" co-operative which was initiated by Gordon Matta-Clark and existed between 1971 and 1973 as the first restaurant in the contemporary culinary wasteland of SoHo. It soon became the nucleus of the SoHo art scene and furthered the development of the local artistic self-image and other artist groups. The reference to such forms of precarious social self-organisation was intended as a conceptual statement on the commodification of art. Just as the Berlin Biennale saw itself confronted with reality via the intervention of the left-wing scene, the symbolic intervention "FOOD" met real opposition from within the institution and its economic framework.

The possible conflict between the real and the symbolic function of art shows particularly clearly in explicitly political art. It may also surface, however, in a less extrovert way as part of an almost unnoticeable "game between 'I' and 'me'" (fig. 9, p. 31). With an untitled work from 2007 FAMED reminds the visitors of an almost

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entirely forgotten artist of the 1970s, whose work consisted in deleting his own name from all art related events he was invited to. The perhaps unexpected and radical success of this approach led to the end of his career and possibly also his suicide. Such examples show that the historical interest of FAMED goes far beyond the canonical positions of conceptual art. It focuses on marginal operations on the borders, which push themselves toward invisibility, which put the assured permissiveness against the perceived exclusivity of the art context. FAMED does not only engage in an art-immanent context analysis, they rather explore the interdependencies of ethic, aesthetic, political, and economic value systems. If, according to Jacques Rancière, "politics are first of all concerned with what can be seen, what is said about it, and what one can make of it", then the work of FAMED is implicitly political, not in the sense of blatant political art, but because it reveals "the intimate and paradoxical connection between a concept of art and a concept of politics."[8] The search for fame and visibility appears to be just as complex, laborious and possibly fatal as the attempt to render oneself invisible and to be forgotten. Fame and anti-fame are after all two sides of the same coin.

Notes:

1
For example, the Karl Marx mural that decorated the main building of Leipzig University on the Augustusplatz was produced between 1970 and 1973 by a collective of three artists who collaborated only for this project: Rolf Kuhrt, Frank Ruddigkeit, and Klaus Schwabe.

2
Tina Schulz, You never walk alone, in: FAMED. Works, Artist publication 2006.

3
Reinhard Braun, Reading back and forth, 40 Jahre Steirischer Herbst: Öffentlichkeit, Erinnerung, Rebellion, Graz 2007.

4
Additionally, there is the aspect of time. Asher re-staged the intervention for Skulptur Projekte Münster 1977 for projects in 1987, 1997 and 2007, always using the same caravan at the same parking sites. The records illustrate the changes in urban space over the course of forty years and the way in which the design of the caravan begins to stand at odds with its surroundings. Cf. Skulptur Projekte Münster 2007, (Eds.) Brigitte Franzen, Kaspar König, Carina Plath, Cologne 2007, p. 22–33.

5
Cf. Dieter Daniels, Duchamp und die Anderen, Cologne 1992, p. 170 et seq., and Calvin Thomkins, Duchamp. A Biography, New York 1996, p. 159 et seq.

6
http://www.berlinbiennale.de/ – on the exhibition.

7
Cf. on canonisation as a genre: Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, (Eds.) Alexander Alberro, Blake Stimson, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2009.

8
Jacques Rancière, Ist Kunst widerständig? Berlin: Merve 2008, p. 34.