



Taking about the future is no alibi for the unresolved present  
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### Resistance to the Vocabulary of Established Reality

Yılmaz Düzgüner



348 born O.T. (Wohnung), 2006, 10-min, b/w, silent, 6-40 mm

Yesterday is yesterday, and every day is the last day of the present. Every day every hour, every minute, once elapsed, becomes the past. Really? If it were not that simple there would be no present, and this nebulous period of time between the past and the future would not exist. According to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle the ineffectiveness of every hundred percent exact definition (including that of the present) is directly connected to the measuring apparatus applied, and to the problem that when observing a whole consisting of many parts, the parts themselves are not observed. The same can be said about the certainty. Such uncertainties crop up as much as taking the measure of the present and if numerous simultaneous events as in looking into the past. One in retrospect can specify characteristics be (re)constructed through a reduction of complexity. This is the way history is predominantly written, important events are the point in time and the position from which the analysis is made, an analysis of the past is necessarily subjective. The results of the investigation are as exactly determined by the subject under investigation as the intention with which the analysis is carried out.

Applied to Andreas Burtis' installation *Die ersten Tage der Gegenwart* (The First Days of the Present), which consists of two films, several well-framed images, and a text, the question of the artist's intention is a matter of the press release says: "The background to the presentation is an interest in the German terrorism of the 1970s, particularly with its minor figures, such as Margrit Schiller, who was less motivated by radical political convictions than by the search for meaning and group solidarity. For her, however, underground living easily conformed to her notions of freedom, isolation and resistance. In price and form very high paperback operations."<sup>12</sup> So the theme of the installation is a chapter in German history that the artist himself can only have experienced as a child. His knowledge about it is of necessity second-hand. Yet it is understandable that someone like Andreas Burtis, who was born in Germany in 1970, would have been interested in the history of his country, and that he would have been in a different country. His starting point, then, is both involved and disinterested.

The *letzten Tage der Gegenwart* originated in 2006, which is at once too early and too late. Bunte's work narrowly missed *Raging Terror: The RAF: Exhibition and the furor it created* at Berlin's Kunst-Werke in early 2005, but had been around too long to become part of the 30th anniversary commemoration of the "German Autumn" of 1977. In an interview that also appears in the present publication Bunte describes how his curiosity about the RAF was not awakened by the exhibition but, as so often with his work, by a book. The story of the terrorist Margot Schiller was interesting to him in its mundaneness, which was entirely at odds with the radical denial of normalcy demanded by the RAF.

This contrast between the sameness of a bourgeois existence and the continual state of emergency of terrorism is dealt with in various ways in the three films. Fagerberg, in *Useless Violence*, is stuck in a room with a camera that records the camera already observes the rooms of a lower block but that have been in general arranged by the artist. Their fugitive state and an increasing number of clues indicate their conspiratorial use. A typewriter, scissors, glue and other utensils hint at the production of anonymous threatening letters or flyers. A casually placed key in the bathroom and a breakfast containing several passports' contents are the important clues to the matter. The way in which the camera registers the objective distance to what is shown, raises the question of who is actually doing the filming. Is it a policeman behind the camera, collecting evidence? Has Andreas Bunte found this material? Its status, like that of the collages, remains ambiguous.

Despite the sober gaze and the avoidance of direct dramatic effects, the obvious absence of the film's inhabitants creates a tense, threatening atmosphere. It seems as if they could turn up at any moment, interfere with this observation and endanger the unwanted visitor – for this is how one feels when watching the film. But these departed occupants can be interpreted metaphorically as the absence not only of danger and resistance but also of political consciousness, giving the work's title a complexity beyond its historical dimension.

The shots are prefaced—or, in the film's looped presentation, interrupted and at the same time strengthened in their atmosphere of latent violence—by superimposed fragments of texts. Similar to those in the collages, they are a mix of quotations from Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Giorgio Agamben, etc. that the

artist sometimes borrows eagerly, but often simply uses as a starting point for statements rewritten in the same linguistic mode to suit his context. Because neither the film nor the collages attribute the quotations exactly, all the heuristics appear to be equally authentic and seem perfectly articulated in speech. In the film, the artist's voice is heard in the first two minutes, but is then replaced by a narrative, as both are experienced simultaneously, not successively as in the film. In these works Andrei Butts adds text and drawing in a commentary many pages from interior-design and other magazines from the 1960s and 70s, and the film is a collage of these images, with the text of the quotations from Guy Debord – "Influence has made this world, but cannot live in it (sic)" – and becomes a statement about an entire generation. The collage technique not only refers to an early-twentieth-century artistic current with often direct political aims, but is also used here much as one might imagine it being used by a modern architect: to make a statement about the pressure-driven outline of a building, only recognizable at a second glance.

The reciprocity of the installation's individual elements is variously formulated in a direct statement by O.T. (Wohnung) can be understood as a contemporary art work, O.T. (Wohnung) can be understood as a contemporary art work, and as a Dutch relationship to both films. In relation to the contemporary apartment the collage raises questions of authorship, as they deliberately alternate between free, anonymous letter or claim of responsibility, and thus may also be interpreted as a comment on the disappearance of the author - here in a dual sense, as not only do the public terrorists conceal their identity, the artist himself also withdraws behind his own narration. The depersonalisation of the material here is a contrast to the origin of the work, which according to the press release proceeded from a concrete (marginal) person. It is not only the author who dies here in Roland Barthes's sense; the unpersonal subject also lives again. This is taken up in the questions raised by the subject on a level that goes beyond 1970s Germany.

In *O.T.* (Wühnung!) the buildings are frequently shot from low angles and awaken quite differing impressions. The heroically framed memorial to Ernst Thälmann, for example – a former chairman of the Communist Party of Germany – strengthens and situates the radical messages of the text fragments. The same can be said for the fascist architecture of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, whose political iconography Andreas Bunte frankly draws attention to, although without placing it exactly. Other buildings, by contrast, give the impression of being potential targets or can be seen as places frequented by the terrorists who live in the East.

[illegible]

All elements of the work are pervaded by the political, social and psychological significance of architecture. In *Die letzten Tage der Gegenwart* buildings and spaces are both theme and method. Theme in the form of interior and exterior shots of buildings, and method in the installation's precisely placed wall elements, which not only define a suggestive space for the collages and films, but are themselves an important part of the formal and thematic setting. The physical experience of

the installation is primarily determined by these provisions—sewing firmers, which deeply crease open signatures, direct the reception of the films and collages. Their handmade, fragile exterior, as if still under construction, underlines the effect of the collages, which also do not conceal their production process. The use of 16-mm film is notable in this context, too, as it not only creates the already mentioned sense of temporal distance, but also seems less immediate than 35-mm film. The use of film, however, is not only a matter of technology: very rare and as more constructed depiction of reality than photographs, digital film has a greater potential for directness and thus—despite the discussion on the manipulation of images—a greater authenticity than celluloid, which has per se been associated with the truth. The use of film is also a matter of self-reflection: media-theoretical work is shown among other things by the film magazines in the apartment—they are primarily placed, but noticeable as the central conveyor. They refer on the one hand to the politicization that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, and on the other hand to the work of the artist. In 1967, for example, the magazine *Der Film* featured a cover by the artist Günther Kieser. In 1977, along with eight other colleagues produced their film collage *Deutschland in Herd (Germany in Aulern)*, which investigated the relationship of the Federal Republic to the IRAT terrorists. But the film magazine also serves as a medium for the work of the artist. In every issue in which digital television was set up, the magazine was replaced by a

The discussion on the status of artistic production and means of production is complicated by Andreas Bunte's deliberate blurring of the relationship between fiction and reality, in the gallery situation, documentary content and mode of exhibition are artificial to their implied gesture of illusion, and it is precisely such breaks and inconsistencies which widen the discussion about this period of German history and take it onto an abstract level. Or—as Bunte put it in the heading to this text, taken from one of his collages<sup>1</sup>—the vocabulary of reality is confronted with a stance of resistance. And this can also be articulated in artistic production.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Altewiler, *Die letzten Tage der Gegenwart oder das Alibi-Syndrom*, Schöner Verlag, Bern-München-Vienna 1971. The sentences quoted here form part of the cover of his book by the German resident Swiss sociologist of economics whose cooperation with the tobacco industry created an inglorious press furore some years ago (cf. Dietmar Jütte/Klaus 'Forschen schadet! Freie Gesundheit' in *Weltwoche*, ed. 47, 2005). It is commented and apparently informative tone the book resembles the phrases in the collages and films of Andreas Bursi.

<sup>2</sup> Press release for the first presentation of *Die letzten Tage der Gegenwart* in the Galerie Ben Kaufmann, Berlin 11.11.–23.12.2006.

Andreas Bunte // **May the Circle Remain Unbroken** and other Works with Film

In his 16mm films, Andreas Bunte (\*1970) “skilfully mixes facts with newly produced material, uses original source texts and invents characters (...). The production of his films is preceded by extensive research. But it is not only an interest in history that moves him: by working with the power inherent in utopian projects he makes the almost superhuman will to change society perceptible in an impressive way.” Silke Hohmann, Monopol 2/2008

Andreas Bunte's artist's book was designed in the style of a film magazine from the 1960s (Film) that has become a classic because of its large-format film stills and sequences as well as its beautifully simple typography. Numerous images from Bunte's archive of research material supplement the texts, which discuss four of his film installations.

Contributors: Michelle Cotton, Yilmaz Dziewior, Katerina Gregos, Kathrin Meyer

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contact@anagrambooks.com