



Talking about the future is no alibi for the unresolved present.
For the present is not an end!

Resistance to the Vocabulary of Established Reality

Yilmaz Dziewior



Installation of *Die Aktion: Tage der Gegenwart*, 2009, 16mm, 60 min.

Yesterday is yesterday, and every day is the last day of the present. Every day, every hour, every minute, every second, becomes the past. If it were that simple, there would be no present, and the redoubtable period of time between the past and the future would not exist. According to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, the multidimensionality of every hundredth second 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, a dispersion or standard deviation must arise which is described as uncertainty. Such uncertainties arise as much in taking the measure of the present and of numerous simultaneous events as in looking into the past. Only in retrospect can specific characteristics be retrospectively traced, a relation of complexity. This is the way history is predominantly written. Important facts to be given in time and the position from which the analysis is made, and which method is technically speaking, which "apparatus" is used. And the result is as exactly determined by the object's situation as the relation with which the analysis is carried out.

Applied to Andreas Bunte's installation *Die Aktion: Tage der Gegenwart* (This Last Day of the Present) (2009), which consists of two films, several text fragments and eight collages, a first seems advisable to take look at its apparent subject matter. The present release says: "The background to the presentation is an interest in the German literature of the 1930s, particularly with its mirror figures, such as Margit Schiller, who was less motivated by radical political convictions than by the search for meaning and group solidarity. For her, however, underground reality largely consisted of loneliness, isolation and resistance to a more and more highly regulated order." So the theme of the installation is a chapter of 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 Bunte, who was born in Germany in 1970, would have a closer relationship to these things than someone socialized at a different time in a different country. His starting point, then, is both received and deconstructed.

The video *Tage der Gegenwart* originated in 2006, which is at once too early and too late. Bunte's work narrowly escaped flagging. The RAF exhibition and the film it created at Berlin's Kunstlerhaus 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 by an article with the work by a book. The story of the terrorist Margit Schiller was interesting to him in its mundaneness, which was entirely at odds with the radical ideal of normally devalued by the RAF.

This contrast between the banality of a bourgeois existence and the continual state of emergency of terrorism is dealt with in various ways in *Die Aktion: Tage der Gegenwart*. In one of the two films - *O.T. (Wohnung)* (Current Apartment) - the camera carries over the rooms of a seven-block flat that have been carefully arranged by the artist. Their lightness and an increasing number of clues indicate their conceptual use. A newspaper, scissors, glue and other elements left at the production of anonymous, freewriting letters or fliers. A casually placed rug in the bathroom and a briefcase containing several passports complete the impression of a hideout. The way in which these items are registered, the objective distance to what is shown, raises the question of who is actually doing the filming, but a question behind the camera, collecting evidence? Has Andreas Bunte found this material? In a sense, 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 enforce the unwanted visitor - for this is how one feels when watching the film. But these depicted occupants can be interpreted metaphorically as the absence not only of danger and resistance but also of political consciousness, giving the work a complexity beyond its historical dimension. The shots are prefabricated - in the film's staged presentation interrupted and at the same time strengthened in their atmosphere of latent violence by superimposed fragments of text. Similar to those in the collages, they are a mix of quotations from Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, George Agabian, etc. that the artist sometimes borrows exactly, but other times 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 quotation exactly, all the texts appear to be equally authentic and seem peculiarly antiquated in speech. In the collages the relationship between text and image is more immediately apparent, as both are reproduced simultaneously, not successively as in the film. In these works Andreas Bunte adds text and drawing in a commentary manner to pages from mirror-image and other magazines from the 1960s and 70s, a then modern, now perhaps suddenly-looking young scene is suggested by a quotation from Guy Debord: "Terrorism has made the world, but cannot live in it. It is not - and becomes - a state of mind of an entire generation. The collage technique not only refers to an early-modern-century artistic current with often directly political aims, but it also used here much as the right image to being applied, in a limited context. One example is the pressure-down outline of a building, only recognizable at a second glance.

The respectivity of the installation's individual elements is variously formulated: interior shots from *O.T. (Wohnung)* can be understood as a commentary on the exterior in *O.T. (Anatomischer) (Anatomical) (Fetus)*, while the collages have a direct relationship to both films. In relation to the conspiratorial apartment the collages raise questions of authorship, as they deliberately alternate between Bunte, 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 putative terrorists conceal their identity, the artist himself also withdraws behind his own variation. The deprofessionalization of the matter here is a contrast to the origin of the work, which according to the press release proceeded from a concrete theatrical project. It is not only the author who dies here in Richard Bartsch's sense, the unpolitical subject also loses significance, which takes the questions raised by the work onto a level that goes far beyond 1970s Germany.

In *O.T. (Wohnung)* the buildings are frequently shot from low angles and awaken a claustrophobic impression. The horizon line is raised to Ernst Tollmann, for example - a former chairman of the Communist Party of Germany - strengthens and distorts the radical message of the text fragments. The same can be said for the facade architecture of the Palazzo into Civita Italiana, whose political iconography Andreas Bunte tracks down attention to, although without giving it priority. Other buildings, by contrast, give the impression of being potential targets, or can be seen as places frequented by terrorists who live in the flat. Andreas Bunte's previous work *May the Circle Remain Unbroken* (2005) also dealt in a certain way with exceptional figures (here referred to: Thomas, the Chamberlain and Frank Lloyd Wright), but the argument of *Die Aktion: Tage der Gegenwart* must more again against the background of his own history, or that of momentous historical events in his home country. Although in both installations the individual is set in relation to a self-organizing group defined by strict hierarchies, and even if the reference to the hermetic circle around the architect Frank Lloyd Wright can perhaps be associated with Bunte's personal situation as a student of Gerhard Meier, with his intense interest in architectural history and strict call for allegiance. In *Die Aktion: Tage der Gegenwart* the ostentatious stance of identification and distance is adopted by someone who is himself affected by the matter. A strange feedback mechanism comes into play that primarily results from the intertextual of the events. The apparent emotion of the awaiting text passages in film and collage is undermined by ergonomically objective and isolating elements. Despite the concern the artist can be assumed to have for the history there is a marked establishment in both image and presentation. The tight cropping of the collages and the textual inserts in *O.T. (Wohnung)*, for example, are told in an atmosphere of reserve, which is brought about by the temporal distance evoked through language and technique (edited film). Yet the mood of the installation is not in suspension, it is both at an endpoint and a relational response.

All elements of the work are pervaded by the political, social and psychological significance of architecture in *Die Aktion: Tage der Gegenwart* and space as both theme and method. There is the tonus of interior and exterior shots of buildings, and method in the installation's precisely placed text elements, which not only define a suggestive space for the collages and film, but are themselves an important part of the formal and thematic setting. The physical experience

of the installation is primarily determined by these provisional-seeming elements, which despite creating open questions, direct the reception of the film and collages. Their appearance, height, exterior, and if fall under construction, underlines the effect of the collages, which also do not conceal their production process. The use of film stills is visible in this context, too, as it not only creates the already mentioned sense of temporal distance, but also seems less immediate or further than digital images, for example. Similarly to collages, which in their very nature are a more constructed depiction of reality than photographs, digital film has a greater potential for distance and thus - despite the discussion on the manipulation of images - a greater authority than collages, which has per se a historical bias. The fact that Andreas Bunte operates very precisely on the self-reflexive, media-theoretical level is shown among other things by the film magazines in the apartment - they are primarily placed, but noticeable to the careful observer. They refer on the one hand to the publication that took place at this time among former comrades such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge and Volker Schlöndorff, who in 1977 along with eight other colleagues produced their film collage *Deutschland im Herbst* (Germany in Autumn), which investigated the relationship of the Federal Republic to the RAF terrorists. But like a newspaper the magazines also double the medium of film stills by evoking a time in which digital television was still an unimagined

medium. 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 attributed to their original position of history, and it is precisely such breaks and recombinations which widen the discussion about this period of German history and take it onto an abstract level. Or - as Bunte put it in the foreword to this text, taken from one of his collages - "the vocabulary of reality is confronted with a distance of resistance. And this can also be articulated as artistic production."

Photo installation: Die Aktion: Tage der Gegenwart (This Last Day of the Present), October 2009, Berlin-Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (Museum for Art and Craft). Photo: Silke Hohmann. Photo release: This Last Day of the Present (2009) by Andreas Bunte. Photo release: The German Autumn (1977) by Alexander Kluge and Volker Schlöndorff. Photo release: The German Autumn (1977) by Alexander Kluge and Volker Schlöndorff. Photo release: The German Autumn (1977) by Alexander Kluge and Volker Schlöndorff.

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 of 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.

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