

## On Art Terms between Autonomy and Functionalisation

*By the 1990s at the latest, and not only in Germany, art has been increasingly integrated into various areas of society. That development inevitably led to a change in the (self-)image of players in the field of art. A middle-class, patriarchal approach manifested in “inspired works” shifted to societal acts, often in groups, in a variety of differing formats, and in new venues such as project spaces or clubs. That development benefitted from the special situation in Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Affordable rents and the temporary availability of empty buildings opened up a “free space,” allowing - for a short time - artists to work without financial pressure, away from the art market. At the same time, the state institutions withdrew from involvement in the areas of art and culture. Even the institutions that continued to receive public funding were subject to draconian austerity measures and increasing pressure to justify their existence. The comprehension of art began to shift from a self-determined practice to a concept of putting art into operation.*

*The current debates in Berlin about cultural policy and the desire to understand them both theoretically and strategically, make the uncertainty of the players visible. The dichotomies that have prevailed to date are eroding and the balance of power is becoming more complex. The relationship between autonomy and functionality in the field of art needs a discursive and theoretical adjustment.*

*In July 2014, at the invitation of Haben und Brauchen, a workshop was held at the Berlin University of the Arts with philosopher and art theorist Ruth Sonderegger. It was dedicated to exploring how the concepts autonomy on the one hand, and functionalisation (or heteronomy) on the other hand have shifted in meaning in recent years, and whether or to what extent they are still relevant now to the work of Haben und Brauchen.*

*What follows are selected excerpts from the discussion.*

Workshop with Ruth Sonderegger on July 4, 2014  
Berlin University of the Arts, institute for history and theory of design  
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Ruth Sonderegger (RS):

The concept of autonomy is freighted with a lot of expectation which makes it complex and ambiguous. Therefore it might be worth differentiating between some of the facets of its meaning. [...]

Let's remind ourselves of the etymology – *auto* – self – and *nomos* – law. If we restrict ourselves to Occidental aesthetic theory, which is of course only a small part of aesthetic theory, then at around 1800, there were many programmatic formulations. Let's take Wilhelm Schlegel as one example. "Romantic universal poetry," and here he means the entire body of art that existed at the time, "alone is infinite, just as it alone is free and recognizes as its first law that the will of the poet and the artist can tolerate no other law above itself." That poets, meaning here all artists, accept no law above them, is therefore the first law or the only law, meaning more or less a law of lawlessness. Within the occidental bailiwick that is perhaps a kind of culmination of programmatic demands for aesthetic autonomy.

If we now look at how that demand for autonomy further developed in aesthetic theory, we see two fairly different applications of the concept. On the one hand there is the idea of the autonomous area or field of art in society, and on the other, autonomous artworks. The best known of those who precisely analyzed the idea of autonomy of the artistic field, Pierre Bourdieu, talks of relative field autonomy. On the other side, if we remain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are Adorno or Rancière. [...] They speak of autonomy only in relationship to an individual artwork. That distinction seems crucial to me.

Anyone who has followed the autonomy discourse even a bit knows that the debate is much more complex than my dichotomy between the two ways of using autonomy suggests. But I'll now attempt a schematic characterization of the two positions.

Bourdieu argued that the autonomous field of art began to establish itself at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford University Press, 1996). It gave rise not only to art criticism, with its media and salons, but also such things as public museums and theaters, meaning the institutions that the new field needed to assert itself in society. Laws appropriate to the new field needed to be established and defended, one example being that art should be free of economic imperatives and moral postulates.

[...]

[...] Bourdieu talks about a “relative autonomy,” but he finds that autonomy to be not particularly great. In many areas he even sees it as very problematic, namely as the bourgeoisie’s lordly instrument of distinction designed to safeguard and pass on its own privileges – mainly the privileges of money and leisure time they believed to be necessary to experience art. So in Bourdieu we can see a very strong use of the concept autonomy, but one whose problems Bourdieu addresses from the outset.

By contrast, people like Adorno or Rancière concentrate to an extreme on the autonomy of the individual work of art. They embrace autonomy – and in the full knowledge of the mechanisms of the bourgeois understanding of autonomy called into question by Bourdieu. Because the autonomy of an individual work often, or even in almost all cases, is directed critically at the rules of the field of art. Adorno and Rancière for instance would certainly argue that the field of art is always determined by external forces; that there is no autonomy in it, or at least very little. Yet despite that, a single artistic practice, a single work, can be autonomous. Or to put it another way: In their eyes, field autonomy is not really that autonomous. That’s why I feel it is important first of all to distinguish between the autonomy of the field and the autonomy of the individual work. [...]

The reason I find Bourdieu’s “The Rules of Art” so worth reading is because it so full of paradox and contradiction. That is because Bourdieu developed his theory of field autonomy to a great extent from an artwork – by reading a Flaubert novel that is about the creation of the art field [Sentimental Education]. That’s an unusual approach for a sociologist, but a very exciting one. In “The Rules of Art” there is also an extremely interesting postscript, in which Bourdieu more or less turns around virtually everything he said up until then about the criticism of autonomy in the field of art. [...] In the age of the new turbo-capitalism, which was in the offing as early as the 1990s, it was necessary to defend the autonomy of the field and to stand behind the autonomy of individual artistic practices. Here, autonomy apparently is no longer to be understood as only a bourgeois instrument of hegemony. [...]

[...] Once you’re clear on the ambiguity of the concept of autonomy, you realize that some theoreticians, such as for example Kant, who is located at the beginning of occidental aesthetics of autonomy, speak of the field autonomy of art, even though institutions are virtually absent from his work. He talks about that autonomy as a very special logic of judgment. According to him, aesthetic judgment is completely distinct from scientific, political, or moral judgments. The fact that in considering Kant, we can speak only of a logic

of aesthetic judgment and not field logic is certainly partly due to the fact that the institutions that make up the field of art barely existed in his era, meaning the second half of the 18th century. When Kant speaks about the autonomy of art, he is speaking about a type of judgment that transcends history. [...]

[...] So much for now on classic theories of autonomy. I think one can see that understanding of that controversial concept varies extremely widely.

[...]

[...] H+B 1: What I'm missing is a pair of contrasts that I feel is very important: Kant doesn't just open up the reception side, but also the production side. And by saying artistic genius is a natural talent, a natural factor, he brings the concept nature, and therefore that of society, into the discussion. The poisonous trace in the concept of autonomy is, so to speak, the asocial aspect, the non-social, which Kant introduces and which then, for example is perpetuated in the concept of autonomy in fin-de-siècle thought. That is also the political crux of our debates so far. The problem with our discussion was not "non-societal versus societal." That the real issue, I'd say.

RS: [...] The societal blindness of Kant's autonomy shows both on the side of the genius as well as the side of the reception. Because both are removed from time and therefore also from society. With Bourdieu, by contrast, it's clear from the start that the autonomy of art is a societal fact.[...]

I myself am more strongly influenced by Bourdieu than by Kant. With Bourdieu it's always clear: In its autonomy, art is part of society. Fields such as science, religion, and politics are just as relatively autonomous as art. Thus autonomy means that those fields have their own laws and logic, but not that they are lawless.

H+B 1: The problem with Kant in my opinion, is that he repeats what happens in "Critique of Pure Reason." He doesn't interpret perception as a productive act.

RS: And of course, the demand for autonomy was not as self-evident in Kant's time. There were people who did not think as unsocially or anti-socially as he did. To give you an example, just five years after Kant's "Critique of Judgment," Schiller's manifesto "On the Aesthetic Education of Man" was published, in which Schiller entrusts art with the task of political education. So one can't really say that Kant was simply a child of his time. Rather, he took a

strong and controversial position. [...]

[...] I know that you at Haben und Brauchen deal with texts that that question the clear distinction – between autonomy and heteronomy - regardless of whether you're thinking about field theory or individual artworks, art production, individual art practice. You know that the distinction has gotten more complicated these days. That the concepts are dissolving and, of course, that means autonomy is starting to flounder. [...] [...]

Judith's text on the changing function of art [see Siegmund, Judith, Reflections on the Changing Functions of Art, lecture, Turin, 2013, author's manuscript] uses six focal points to illustrate why the division between art and other societal fields is under debate. [...] She cites: activist art, social art, educational work, creativism up to, and including the creative industries, social work, and art research. Those are all fields that are beginning to crumble, where art reaches deep into other fields. Judith argues that those are all signs to artistic practices that can no longer be integrated into the autonomy paradigm, or only with great difficulty.

Juliane Rebentisch, whom you have also read [see *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst / Theories of Contemporary Art*, Hamburg, 2013] describes almost exactly the same phenomena, but does not assume we are on the cusp of a dissolution of the autonomy aesthetic. Her thesis rather is that art is increasingly an integrated product of other fields. At some point art began to become part of the negotiations around artistic institutions and employment, including the economic aspects, issues of producing knowledge – but also above and beyond the artistic spheres of action. Art appropriates, so to speak, more and more societal fields and the art sector keeps becoming larger. In other words, the boundaries of art are expanding. But that is no problem for autonomy in Juliane Rebentisch's view.

There is also something like a middle position; Sven Lütticken wrote about it extensively, in reference to Rancière. With regard to the abovementioned expansion of the art field, they both take the stand that one and the same practices, one and the same artifacts have both artistic and non-artistic functions. I would say that we're talking about three diagnoses of their time that all examine breaks or changes in autonomy, but which all come to very different conclusions of those effects. [...] [...]

So far, however, I've been lax in addressing the political implications of how we perceive autonomy. [...] Since 2009, autonomy has been – for example in the Netherlands – a key

concept in the self-organization of artists. After the Dutch educational system experienced cutbacks little by little, a similar action was taken with art, but all at once and vehemently. The field was basically clear-cut. In response, many artists, activists, and the Van Abbe Museum founded the Autonomy Project. They've published three Autonomy Project magazines. It's revealing to read there that the concept of autonomy, which was previously used by people that tended to have left-leaning views, was so to speak imposed by the Dutch rightist government from above in 2009. Autonomy in art was a demand from above, in the sense that: Art doesn't need subsidies, art should be able to assert itself in the marketplace. That is autonomy. That's a pretty interesting, brutal perversion of what we previously understood autonomy to be. There was a quite well known liberal politician in Holland named Johan Thorbecke, who said in 1843 that art was not a government matter. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, artists began using that in the sense that politics should not meddle with the content of art. Suddenly, a rightist spin was put on that understanding, meaning - we politicians won't meddle, however that also means there will be no more subsidization of art.

So there was a very rapid and complete turnaround in the understanding of autonomy. In the wake of this turn around there was great discussion about whether not interfering meant that the state shouldn't meddle in quality or content issues, or whether it meant – or implied – that the state shouldn't meddle in the subsidy issue either. Under the current prevailing conditions, that would in fact mean leaving everything to market forces.

By the way, the debates in the Netherlands also showed that it had not escaped the artists there, that projects such as community art practices, art in public spaces, and so forth had been heavily functionalized by politics; that, in fact, societal engagement had to some degree become an imperative – despite the autonomy dictated from above. [...]

So there are political demands connected to autonomy and they can be very right leaning, as well as being leftist. [...]

H+B 2: I'd like to just briefly explain how we actually came to the concept autonomy. We wondered what the basic legitimization or argumentation for art subsidy is these days. We then noticed that the basis was still that classic idea of autonomy and just then the transformation was being implemented aimed at increasing functionality. That's why we wanted to take a closer look at the concept of autonomy. With the practices of the 90s, it was quite clear that the aim was to break with artistic autonomy and we should be clear about what the consequences of that are. What does it mean to turn your back on it and what might be an alternative to it? It's also interesting that the concept of autonomy in the practices of the 90s also had a political

connotation; it pushed for an anti-institutional practice, one that uncoupled itself from specific institutions. So what's the verdict on that, in the neo-liberal sense or under the current conditions? Do we need to re-think it again?

H+B 3: Shouldn't we hold on to the concept of autonomy, especially when we see moves like the neo-liberal maneuver in the Netherlands? So: "If you want to be autonomous, prove yourself in the free market!" is one incredibly clear statement. I understood that the endowment of art with autonomy around 1800 had a third level, autonomy of action. That third level was suddenly theorized back then as the idea that art came from institutional contractual relations that were more or less empirical. It was suddenly clear that art was no longer something to which some ruler treated himself. That strong institutional connection was dissolved and the result was the formulation of the concept of autonomy of art. [...]

In the Marxist tradition there was, I believe, an attempt at some point to capture that terminologically with the somewhat fuzzy term "social contract." Art is indeed more than a mere flourishing plant, but how is that reflected institutionally? [...] After the attempt to organize social functions bureaucratically failed so noticeably and Soviet socialism was abandoned, it almost looks as if society, out of a kind of helplessness, is switching to the next management system, which is called marketing. [...] Long after the "golden age of capitalism" and the compromise of the welfare state, artists today are suddenly subject to the dictates of the free market again. And it's a question of the arguments, and I don't know if we can do without the concept of autonomy, especially given the shameless twisting.

RS: I understand the need to hold on to the concept of autonomy. But we have to be conscious of the fact that the term autonomy can be flipped to mean freedom of markets. That applies, of course, to the entirety of society, not just to art. The chances are not particularly great to immediately push through a basic income. But the question is whether it might not also be a form of avant-garde to say okay, if art is so important, then let's start with a specific group of people in extremely precarious circumstances and try out something like the idea of a basic income. And the answer to that question, in my view, is yes. But of course that has to go hand in hand with the demand for a basic income for everyone, instead of just for artists.

H+B 4: What we [Haben und Brauchen] tried to do in the manifesto was to argue for a balance of autonomy and social-ness. Because art is also one way for society to achieve self-awareness. It's a powerful societal component, but the pre-requisite is that it is not purpose driven.

RS: The argument makes sense to me that a society that does not want to entirely give up common property would do well to think about an appropriate subsidy model. But I don't think that support should be tied to specific projects or content, but rather simply afford people the chance to work according to their own self-determination.

H+B 5: [...] And one more thing peculiar to the visual arts. I think it has a special role to play. Somehow it's clear that politics understands the need to subsidize institutions, such as orchestras, museums, and theaters. Honestly, I'm appalled at how many visual artists say, 'I'm somebody who can't conform, I'm not going to organize myself, I'm not going to help found an institution, I'm not going to get involved in politics, I'm a private person,' and so on. So politicians seize hold of that and say, 'Suit yourself, then find private funding if you see yourself as one against society anyway.' [...] That is precisely the opinion of Berlin's mayor and his undersecretary – Visual arts are created in private and are not society's business since the artists are only individuals. That's a strange, wrong-headed understanding of autonomy, the idea that you free yourself from everything, and as an individual. To me, it's a fundamental problem that I don't see, for instance, in theater. That aggressive contrariness in the visual arts against any kind of organization leaves me at a loss because I don't know how to argue it.

H+B 1: It's only with the FDP that the concept of autonomy functions such that art has to look out for itself on the open market. [...]

Politics much prefers to invest in repetitive techniques. It can't get close to individually producing artists – visual artists, composers, writers – it doesn't understand them, it has no support systems. [...] It's a lot easier for institutions to subsidize institutions than non-institutions. [...]

Visual artists in Belgium or Holland have that social support. [...] The labor office doesn't compel them to send out 30 job applications a month; rather they are supposed to make art. But then we're back to the problem of politics' capacity to judge art. Who is an artist and who isn't? Politics is not in a position to decide. And neither should the labor office be deciding who is an artist and who isn't. At that point, the concept of autonomy is completely sunk, right? I'd rather replace it with freedom or self-will or something like that. But if we do away with it – and that's the problem we fought about – in favor of utility that has nothing to do with art, then we're shooting ourselves in the foot.

H+B 4: The way that the changes in the position of art around 1800 were considered has led to the use



of this concept of autonomy. There was shift – The people who commissioned art were no longer just churches or diocesan towns. The public was recognized as a sort of sponsor of art. That awareness was seemingly already in place, but apparently not formulated in the Romantic tradition, it was not used to more clearly define the concept of autonomy. That development worked for a few decades, but is now dissolving. The radical formulation of neo-liberals is: The market! And: “It’s about appealing to a public, and if you can appeal to them, they’ll pay for your art.” [...]

Many have consciously distanced themselves from the distinction of artist or non-artist with specific practices, because they didn’t want to see themselves as part of that comparison. That comparison has been a fundamental issue in art practice since the 1960s. One gets hung up in that ambivalence, in not wanting to be reduced to the identity of artist, with all that it implies. But in terms of subsidy opportunities, or structures, or working conditions, in the end, one is forced to come back to it. That's an important point. It’s not just about the working conditions of individual artists, but rather actually about the working conditions within the structures that are being dissolved. Those are educational places, production institutions, distribution systems. A lot of institutions are involved as part of the working conditions of the individual and it's not that easy to uncouple from them. [...]

H+B 1: There is a Solomonic verdict by the Federal Labor Court or the Constitutional Court. A judge decreed that an artist is somebody who is considered an artist by other artists. It really couldn’t have been done any better. Of course artists have doubted whether being an artist is really the wisest choice or not. But the reality is that it is linked to an identity and a vocational concept, as well as a self-identification.

H+B 4: In the broadest possible sense, those are all aspects of societal distribution battles. Since the 1980s, there hasn’t been more social support, but rather less, simply because less societal gains end up the state coffers, right? You could say that certain companies don’t pay taxes anymore, so there’s a shortage, which is responsible for the virulence of the discussion. But actually, if you look at the Gulf states, where they are pouring money into art, it doesn’t need to be that way at all. If enough money is available, maybe you don't even have to ask what it's used for, what the specific purpose is. So perhaps the appropriate stance would be: nope, no specific purpose; it’s just great to have a museum and it's great to also have those critical positions. It could in fact be argued from a situation of generosity, if that is possible. At the moment, unfortunately, we are living in an era, in which that generosity is completely unthinkable, in which rather everything is calculated down to the last cent. [...]

H+B 3: And the dilemma affects not just artists. Shouldn't we be expanding the battle, from a strategic position? But can artists afford that? The fact that it's been under discussion for years is perhaps a clue that they can. But the societal potential to escape this dead end is also lacking. When people are depraved and discouraged and distracted and not capable of getting organized, there's nothing you can do. So we probably can't expect much from artists, either. [...]

RS: We can learn a lot from France in this respect. The Intermittents et Précaires d'Île-de-France have achieved a lot, and artists play a very important role in it. [...] Artists in France have contributed enormously to the creation of a rudimentary form of ensured income. [...] As soon as something is achieved somewhere, other groups join up. In the Netherlands, for instance, the (illegal) cleaning people managed to get organized into a union. So there are examples of how to achieve a lot. Regardless of where you are, a precarious life is unlivable. [...] So I wouldn't so much ask whether we as artists are in a particularly or differently precarious position than others. What's more important are the crossovers and solidarity with others living hand to mouth, so that different institutions can be developed.

H+B 2: I think it's interesting that we're talking about distribution battles here. We were just talking about generosity, but that generosity has to be eked out of the definition of what is actually practicable. It's about distribution battles, right, but it's always also about the power of definition. At the moment, that means saying anything is possible. But along with that open power of definition comes the fact that you no longer pay attention to the past, because you can be anything and discuss everything until it's done and dusted, including the past. It's a huge problem that archives are under enormous pressure due to extreme budget cuts. We need to think about what time frame we want to anchor autonomy in, and also where we want to anchor ourselves. [...]

H+B 5: What does generosity have to do with autonomy?

H+B 3: They sell it like that, right?

[...]

RS: I think the concept of common property is really utterly crucial. It's about a demand here. We would like to live in a world, in which not everything is calculated according to monetary value. Neither the survival of individuals nor that which they share. I think that shift is needed

and, of course, that's a battle. And it's not in any party's platform.

HB 8: What function does art have in society then, if common property is viewed as the central location or value? [...]

RS: That is the crux of the societal debate – challenging the capitalist mechanisms in the distribution of resources.

H+B 9: But isn't something also lost in this discussion of community? We've fought so hard for that difference in art and suddenly we're saying, hey, great, we want community. [...]

RS: You mean if we talk so much about common property, we overlook the power relationships and the differences in the collective? [...] After all commitment to a critique of power and commitment to common property are not mutually exclusive.

H+B 4: When I think of general goods, I don't immediately think of community, but rather of public railroads. It's appealingly provocative to say that maybe the artistic field, the artwork field should be viewed as a form of social organization. I don't exactly know how it could really be organized, but it's a provocative idea, really.

H+B 10: From the point of view of artists, that's completely obvious, but I imagine a lot of resistance from other groups, who'd say, 'why are things I'm not interested in common property in which I'm forced to participate?' Even the parties would say they have enough other things, kindergartens or all the other social facilities that are far more important for the community – why art? So we'd somehow have to deal with all that.

H+B 1: [...] There is fairly good wording about art in the Berlin coalition agreement. It's under-financing that's the problem. The SPD has the manic problem that art and social services are always competing with each other. And as a rule, art draws the short straw, regardless of how many different ways you define art. You can trot out Habermas or Kant or Adorno in your arguments, nobody gives a damn. There needs to be a generational change, there need to be drastic personnel changes.

H+B 8: Yes, but what are we to make of the fact that the CDU doesn't have that problem at all?

H+B 1: It works differently with the CDU and their conservative concept of art, but it's not necessarily

better. The CDU likes to fund operas and museums, it doesn't generally weigh its expenditures against each other, say a Ludwig Museum against a kindergarten. That only happens with an SPD mayor. They argue differently, but de facto they don't subsidize living art; they subsidize the repeat offenders and the known artists and the ones who are phoning it in – pleasing art, in a word. [...]

H+B 2: How does somebody position themselves in that and what terms are we dealing with and who suddenly uses the same ones, or are those even the right terms? We always come back to the same questions. [...]

RS: Of course, it's not that you can't use the term autonomy anymore at all, but it's pretty dangerous if you're not aware of where it can lead you. [...] If one wants to stick to that term, then autonomy has to mean: hand over money, but don't dictate what it can be used for. Politicians have a social responsibility to ensure that open scope, including financially, and on the individual as well as the institutional level, I'd say. If a specific party platform uses the terms autonomy or self-determination, then it's very clever to pick up those terms and continue to use them. It's also a clever strategy to look at how they themselves describe the fields or how they address the artists. [...] But to come forth with the argument that 'yes, but you want it too, and at the end of the day, you get something from art too' seems incredibly dangerous to me.

H+B 5: Everybody has to do their part ...

RS: Exactly. "If that's what you want, then do your part, otherwise hold your peace." Then you gamble away art as common property.

H+B 5: And out of the platform?

RS: Yes, out of the platform.

H+B 2: So did I understand correctly? What you're really saying is: autonomy in the public interest.

RS: Yes. An autonomous space that is not defined, that belongs to everyone. If we want that, there has to be individual support for people living on the edge and you have to fund institutions for it.

H+B 4: At this point, is there a genuine artistic strategy and not just adapted political maneuvers or a political action? The arguments that limited funding needs to be distributed onto different areas and so on are really based on absurd suppositions. The background argument is, ‘we can’t afford a lot of things’ – and that in the middle of a society that is literally suffocating in the wealth of merchandise it is capable of producing. Nobody would notice the small luxury of an artist’s subsidy. You could almost say it’s a classic case of working on the wrong consciousness. [...] And isn’t a broad base necessary to mobilize for the installation of artistic strategies? [...]

H+B 5: First and foremost, we need to develop a different culture of dialogue between the players. It’s our opinion that a lot more could be done for art and cultural production in other (senate) sectors, but the basis for that dialogue is completely lacking. Nobody from their side speaks up and shows commitment, you’d have to force it somehow. And to do that, you need long talks with a lot of players. We have a situation in Berlin at the moment where really new civil society players are appearing, who actually achieve things. We could definitely use that situation productively.

RS: So the idea behind the dialogue concept you’re working on is to bring all those players together?

H+B 10: Yes, many of them, and then talk to members of the senate, so that there’s new awareness on both sides, which you need in order to formulate demands. It’s about an understanding of what art actually is, or what artists do. And that is so totally different outside of art than within the art world that’s there’s understanding at all.

[...] RS: On the one hand it’s about clearing up the position of artists, which might be called ‘de-ghettoizing.’ At the same time, I believe you have to constantly make it clear how and why it’s about processes that affect not just artists. Of course, you also have to impart an understanding of what it means to live as an artist, in order to break with the clichés. But it’s also important to get away from the thought pattern that says, ‘money’s tight everywhere and if we take it away there, or if we want something there, we have to take it away from other people.’ That image of scarcity has to be expunged from both the head and the action. [...]

H+B 3: The most specific thing that occurs to me in this era of economic maximalism, and what I actually enjoy the most, is spearheading actions that challenge those dominant laws - increasing efficiency, a shortage of funds, all of that. That image of scarcity is the archetypical foundation of all economic doctrine.

[...]

H+B 2: In the cultural policy decisions of the 1990s, the argument was the deregulation would lead to a more open scope of operation because content work and decisions would gain more autonomous space, so to speak. Specifically, institutional tasks were turned over to private operators, or common property was sold to private organizations. During the parliamentary debates back then, everyone supported that course; there was never a dissenting vote, because it meant everyone was being served. It was like that for a long time until Kulturprojekte GmbH, which was simply waved through. That deregulation was never argued with scarcity. Nobody said we can't afford it anymore; instead there was always talk about gains in the sense of more self-determination for the institutions.

H+B 3: But the ultimate assertion of all those deregulation measures happened in a moment of crisis. After the bank scandal [collapse of the state owned bank society in 2001], Berlin simply didn't have the money. Suddenly there were no more counter-arguments.

H+B 2: Definitely. But it's interesting how that freedom or that concept of autonomy was applied to the deregulation of institutions.

H+B 3: Outside of the art scene, too, the use of the term autonomy has changed, including in the political arena. In the 1960s and 70s, it was clearly positioned to the left of the spectrum and then it was used in management books and pro-business milieus and completely recast.

RS: [...] Funktionalisation and autonomy are a couple of terms where I sometimes think, let's turn those concepts into something else. On the other hand, I think that's too simple, or simply unproductive, because you end up arguing about what somebody exactly means. That's a distraction from what we should really be arguing about.

H+B 3: You can only afford to do that if you have alternatives. [...]

H+B 1: The idea that art per se has no function is just as crazy as the idea that art should be subordinated to state expediency. The freedom of art is to be allowed to feel your way around anything, and that has to be ensured. We need to direct that to the state too as a demand. We don't need to ask the state to support democratically useful art. We don't need to define the term freedom at all; freedom is defined by a lack of freedom, it's pretty simple.

RS: There's also a tendency these days to say that since we brought up "community art," since we started with activist art, that's why we now have the social democratic or rightist shit. I don't think that's correct. Judging all those practices because they brought us this new, prescribed art, is just nonsense. And something like the creative industry would have emerged without a lot of groundwork. Of course there are problematic art practices, but I wouldn't reproach artists themselves for that horrible functionalisation from outside the arena.

H+B 7: You have to see it clearly within that precise historical context, where it simply has a different meaning, and meanings change.

[...]

H+B 8: What I find interesting with the new kind of agency concept is that, for instance, a colleague of mine, a choreographer, was invited by the administration to consult on how, say, seats could be designed differently. So you could then ask, do we really have to do that too? On the other hand, I think it's interesting because it means art and its role in the broader context of society receive greater appreciation. Her knowledge as a choreographer will be incorporated not into design something artistic, but rather into doing something for society.

[...]

H+B 11: So it's more about the person and not about art per se. It's about specific skills, knowledge, about the special training, the specific way of communicating. If you say that artists have a special way of dealing with things – in the theater they do it differently than film, and architects have their own way – then art would no longer be absolutely other than, say, architecture. It would be sort of a cooperation on one level, and there would be consequences to that in the theory. That absolute otherness of art couldn't be sustained. Something to ponder with a question mark.

H+B 1: You just said that art is no longer the other. Are we back at Kant?

H+B 11: You can view it sociologically and philosophically. Bourdieu, i.e. the sociologist, attempts to describe this field, and philosophy creates another kind of perception. It is basically transferring the aesthetic to art, which was also a process in the history of theory. What remains is aesthetics absolutely exceptional status, which constantly puts art into that position of otherness. Strictly speaking, art is not cognition and art is not moral-practical action – it

can't be that according to Kant.

H+B 1: [...] The fact that cognition and moral interpretation and action all exist doesn't explain the world, so Kant is floundering. [...] I think it's really important when creating aesthetic theory not to uncouple it from theoretical structures, whether it's Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, or Adorno. You can't use Adorno's concept of aesthetics without considering the dialectic of the Enlightenment and his positivism critiques.

H+B 2: What's emerged is that the concepts of autonomy and function somehow overlay each other, so are not at all necessarily opposites, but rather that they are most interesting to us at the points where they complement each other. On the one hand, we have a concept of autonomy in concert with an idea of communality and in that sense, it also has a function. And you [H+B 11] were speaking, so to speak, about a concept of function that is determined autonomously, meaning not by assignment or with specifications. But in your scenario, that concept of function is still, somehow, attached to the concept of autonomy.

H+B 11: I certainly don't mean pure utility; I see utility as a different term.

H+B 2: But let's say, the way Ruth was going at the beginning, that we understand autonomy not primarily as not purpose driven, but as legislating ourselves - if we come back to that definition ...

RS: The law in it. It's not like I do something that has no aim at all, but rather I decide on the purpose or I define my laws.

H+B 11: John Dewey [see *Art as Experience*, Minton, Balch & Company, 1934] in describing art or artistic work says he sees it as a realization, as aligning oneself with aims. The terms aim and purpose go together. That is to say, you pursue very concrete purposes, and in that you realize something, which in turn means that the means adjust the purpose. When I do something, at some point, I realize it won't work so I start to adjust my means and those changed means result in new aims. And from those new aims come in turn new means, because I think about what I need to achieve them. Talking about art, the question arises, what material should I work with? Is video better than a performance, because I have my sights set on this or that? The aim changes along with the activity. And that's an internal drive to purpose, which is distinct from external purposes. I don't know if function is the correct term, but there is certainly a function in the thing and also a ... how could we put it differently?



H+B 6: Could we maybe call it the logic of the visual? Something that emerges from within the artwork, within the becoming or the process of working, which turns out to be meaningful and important for that work or that art to come into being?

H+B 11: Yes, but not from nothing, but rather because I start with my sights on something. [...]  
If you formulate it procedurally as you have: I decide to do something, but that decision involves allowing myself to be insecure about, for instance, the material, or anything else, I allow myself to be adjusted and that allows me to be conscious of the fact that I'm not starting from zero. That would basically be deciding on a purpose or to do something with the knowledge that something preceded it and that you're in essence creating an area where you can be influenced by disruptions, criticism, otherness.

RS: That willingness to to adjust over and over or to allow yourself to be adjusted by the material, that has to be in institutional thought as well, otherwise it's an insanely subject-centered, heroic whatever.

H+B 2: I also think that commitment to a context or a material is extremely important, because otherwise it quickly becomes the subjectification form of projectization and neo-liberalism and the requirement of constantly adjusting and re-adjusting yourself.

H+B 11: It's about a thing.

H+B 2: Exactly. You can't lose sight of the context and the direct relationship to something specific.

H+B 6: It's about artisanry, materiality, about ideas, about influences from outside and setting new aims. So it's a very, very big, complex area.

H+B 8: But you can't bundle it under the concept of autonomy.

RS: But pure expediency is no good either, because you'll be constantly confused about your aims.

H+B 11: About very specific aims. Maybe, about an inner expediency.

H+B 2: It's a self-determined purpose.

H+B 11: A teacher who says you have to do this or that is not a good teacher. He should incite the children to keep wanting something. So you also shouldn't say: I, as an artist, have no truck with education, indeed I'm not allowed to have any truck with education. If we demarcate ourselves that much and say, we artists are doing something different, better, then it's back to the ghetto.

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