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Statement for the panel discussion on „Innovative Artistic and Economic Practices“ for „The Wave“, organized by I-Wei for February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at Beta-Haus, Berlin-Kreuzberg

Walls, barriers, borders, segregation, exploitation, poor payment, exclusion, racism, sexism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-islamic attitude, religious fundamentalism, all these phenomenons create segments, divisions and separated fields in society, where people have limited rights only or even no rights at all.

Above all we are facing a neoliberal form of capitalism ruling almost the whole globe independently from the particular political system such as dictatorship, oligarchy, fundamentalism or democracy in a western style.

More than twenty years after the collapse of the so called „Iron Curtain“ we are facing a complex process of a Unifying Europe. During the whole last year in many cities and countries of “old” Europe as well as of “new” Europe the twentieth anniversary of the vanished iron curtain was used to celebrate the process of unifying. The distinction of “old” and “new” Europe refers to Donald Rumsfeld’s comment he made while making a difference between “the alliance of the willing” and western Europe more or less trying not to participate in the struggle against the “axis of evil”.

But at the same time new borders have been erected (Schengen Treaty) to stop the migration from outside of Europe. Due to globalization the flow of capital got much faster and easier. The money market tends to invest in countries with the best prospects for high rates of surplus value. The “opening” of Eastern Europe for investments by multinational companies introduced a brilliant “field” for cheap wages respectively best exploitation. Of course poor countries with low level of wages are much more interesting for industries with the need of many workers than the “old” Europe with somehow better wage standards. As a backlash the collapse of the real socialist Europe and the victory of the so called free market zone were used by entrepreneurs and multinational concerns in alliance with the help of governmental politics to adjust the western social standard to the poorer countries.

While billions of money alone in Germany are available to support the banks to avoid a total collapse of the bank system only little money is available to support unemployed people and the poor for a dignified life, for education and not last but least cultural affairs.

While the alliance of the willing under new leadership of Barack Obama is continuing its unwinnable wars in Afghanistan and even partly in Iraqi, one of the most influential

international conflicts has been casting its shadow over the Arab world without any solution insight for more than forty years. While the western world is fighting the fundamentalist Islamic countries (ignoring the most supportive ally of the USA Saudi Arabia) they are at the same moment bystanders in the conflict between Israel and the Palestine People in Gaza and the occupied part of Palestine. As long as there is no save solution for both Israel and an autonomic future state of Palestine this conflict will enforce more violence and infect other regions in the world.

What have all these problems to do with art? Everything and nothing at the same time. During the last decades social and political critic, the raising of questions concerning democracy, exploitation, oppression, fight for equal right for people independently from belief, sex, sexual orientation and colour were subjects of international exhibitions even in mainstream institutions of western world. At the same time the neoliberal system is succeeding to force the state making it easy to redistribute the wealth from a majority to a minority.

A side effect is that in many countries in the western world the cultural budget has been cut, while the money has been more and more directed to support companies, banks and the low wage-policy of companies (in order to enable them to maintain their plants instead of closing plants and moving them to a different country with other wage norms).

So, we as cultural workers have learned more and more to raise critical questions in form of exhibitions, catalogs, books, articles within a neoliberal capitalist culture with sometimes even no payment at all or only very low fees.

Therefore we are allies and help the state as an instrument for neoliberal capitalist system to sustain a vivid and critical cultural scene as a proof of cultural democracy. This is what Herbert Marcuse meant with his term from repressive tolerance.

Let me list 6 critical points:

1. Left wing cultural institutions are often structured in a repressive and hierarchical form, sometimes hardly to see from outside. In contrast to a positive aftermath of 1968 a new hierarchization is quite common. This problem is valid for almost all cultural institutions regarded as progressive. They offer progressive subjects sometimes in even radical forms with radical

points, preaching transparency and democracy but at the same time they practice exploitation in a shameless form. They expect artists which are known as living and working in a precarious way to contribute and participate for nothing or even to spend own money for their contribution. This is true for artists as well as other cultural workers like curators, organizers among others who are not yet well-known.

2. Sometimes there are totally different norms of payment, and of other conditions for artists contributing to the same group exhibition. Famous artists getting good payment, better reproductive conditions (like better hotel rooms etc.) while the unknown are expected to work for nothing. Sometimes persons are even formulating these expectations as a kind of deal. Participating in a good context with high-ranking names for the price of working for free!
3. In participating in these structures, don't we automatically support repression and exploitation?
4. In case we do so? Why do we participate? Probably only for the prospect of a personal career?! In case not, we probably participate to make a critical point public? But, wouldn't it be better not to participate and to propagate a strike against such institutions? This might sound funny and impossible. But why do we expect workers to go on strike but not in the arts? Another reason for participating might be that we only are in urgent need for a platform to make ourselves know in public to improve our position in the cultural scene?
5. While we are following our strategy getting famous as cultural critic of globalism in the art scene, to get more influential, don't we do this with prospect of a better position in a hierarchy resulting in a better payment?
6. Where is the critic on the cultural scene and practices as part of the neoliberal capitalism?

These are only some points which I came across during my experience in the cultural scene. I don't want to be a hypocrite and claim that I have any solution. I myself am part of this game or even better termed circus.

Thanks for your patience!