

MOUSSE 54
AGENDA

220

absent), the actions mechanical and far from erotic or passionate.

One installation feature complicates this impression: the gallery space is undarkened, the ceiling neon lights at full power. The objective, analytical approach of the mechanical sex scenes and of the factual list on the wall appear somehow unsettled by the disturbed visual condition, as the bright light often hinders a precise and comfortable visualization of contours. The impression is then doubled: in the moment you try to dissect, to define, to constrain what sexuality is, the less clearly you see. Maria Eichhorn's work seems in this way to reveal and at the same time question the process of making sexuality public, objective, measured, and standardized. As Judith Butler reminded us some time ago, and it is still valid today, sexuality is less natural, subjective, and private than one may think.

The relation between what is seen and what is not entitled to be seen seemed to be further and simultaneously developed in Eichhorn's exhibition *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*, recently on view at Chisenhale Gallery in London. As the title suggests, the show focused on the issue of time: for the entire five weeks of the exhibition, Eichhorn required the gallery to close. Visitors arriving at 64 Chisenhale Road found only an information plaque: "For the duration of Maria Eichhorn's exhibition, Chisenhale Gallery's staff are not working. The gallery and office are closed from 24 April to 29 May 2016." The sign on the gate continued with the announcement of a symposium, held the opening day, which intended to explore contemporary labor conditions and featured lectures by Isabell Lorey, political theorist, and Stewart Martin, professor of philosophy and fine art at Middlesex University. The decision to close the space, to explicitly ask the staff to suspend working activities, to not offer art pieces to be seen but rather to invite people to a discussion on labor, incites a reflection: What agency do we attribute to art, what value do we ascribe to time, and what is the distinction between work and leisure? Considering today's neoliberal subsumption of not only work but also sociality and supposed free time, this invitation seems quite crucial.

Both the Berlin and the London exhibitions can be described as critical. They are projects that respectively critique the standardization of sexuality and oppose capitalist logics of production and exploitation. But if we think of the recent suggestion of "oppositional" artworks as a game of complicity with capitalism and its languages, an "accelerationist" aesthetics (Steven Shaviro) as a way to implode the problem by the same means, then Eichhorn's work does not seem critical. The visual dimension of both projects, however reduced, is—as is any aesthetic intervention—not as neutral as many commentators define it. The sober and plain typeface chosen for the London gate sign could be interpreted as a conscious stance against the visual imaginary that contaminates the dimension of free time exploited by neoliberal forces, be they corporate, mainstream, pop, or commercial. Similarly, the gesture of interrupting work productivity, while organizing a symposium which deals with a (traditional) critical analysis of the problem, appears not so "oppositional" in this recent sense. In a similar way, the sober aesthetics of the Berlin wall text, the 16mm film's warm color tones, as well as the vintage projector don't appear complicit with nor reference in any way the visual imagery that determines sexuality today, namely the digital realm of Internet pornography or the ubiquitous presence of sex in the commercial sphere.

But what does this recent definition of "critical" art imply? That the aesthetic

accelerationist strategy is to be prescriptive? That only artworks complicit in the problems they address are to be defined as critical? Or that you're forced to represent explicitly current configurations of a phenomenon in order to speak of it?

First of all, why shouldn't it still be legitimate to abstract from the particular in order to address an issue? The specific aesthetic feature of Eichhorn's Berlin project suggests a representation of something crucial today by way of highlighting its longer history of visual means (16mm films), as the naturalization of standardized sexuality is a process that began long before the Internet. Secondly, looking at the London Chisenhale project, one reasonable question to ask is whether instigating a discourse about capitalism without complicity scheming is still effectively a valid instrument, if not to radically change human consciousness, then at least to attract attention to and awareness of the problem.

There is another important factor: the employment of an analog projector and 16mm format in Berlin, and the decision to replicate a gesture of 1970s radical conceptual and institutional art (see Robert Barry or Michael Asher) in London, suggest a force that can be highly constructive: nostalgia. The power of nostalgia lies in inducing a moment of reflection that, while not a wish for an actual return to the past, can help give meaning and coherence to the present. The gesture of closing a gallery is nostalgic for a time when an act of this sort was a transgression (not really today), while organizing an academic symposium evokes the 1960s and 1970s countercultural hope to change consciousness by discourse. The decision to employ 16mm film and an analog projector is nostalgic for a less invasive and omnipresent mode of visibility than that which determines sexuality today. Experiencing both of Eichhorn's shows, in 2016, might induce one to ask why transgression, ideas of conscience transformation, and visibility are not the same any more and problematize, by contrast, how they look now.

MARIA EICHHORN: FILM LEXICON OF SEXUAL PRACTICES 1999 / 2005 / 2008 / 2014 / 2015

(5) GALERIE BARBARA WEISS
Kohlfurter Strasse 41–43,
10999 Berlin, Germany
galeriebarbaraweiss.de

Text by Isabella Zamboni

A gray analog film projector installed on a shelving unit appears in the white space of Galerie Barbara Weiss in Berlin. A list in alphabetical order is printed on the wall: "Anal Coitus," "Anilingus," "Breast Licking," "Wax Play," and so on. Under the list, the indication: "The films will be screened on request."

Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices 1999 / 2005 / 2008 / 2014 / 2015 is a collection of twenty short 16mm films, silent and in color, which the visitor must select and ask a projectionist to screen on the wall. Shot as narrow close-ups with a static camera against a neutral background, the scenes correspond literally to the titles on the wall and mainly depict sexual practices that are depersonalized (faces are generally