

Introduction: Counterinsurgency Strategies¹

We – who are we? I hear on the radio: “We as a society...” – we reject this! We deny art. We say art must be fought. We reject criticism, especially the constructive kind. We strongly advise against refusal. We say the art of art must be investigated. Artists who say that no artist should have to have to are not really artists but secret agents. I say we.

Because we know full well what it is that we’re referring to, we’ll go ahead and call what we make, without hesitation, art. Though we’ll also call it war. And communication. And freedom, truth, love are what we use. We explain nothing; we demand no understanding; we need signs. To become form is to be a borderline. The “I” is a production process; we need a model of communication; the “I” is not a choice of any old identification. So, we’re interested in: infrastructures, media, organisation and institutionalisation. We’re not going into the factory with ‘Art’ written on it. Should we build a factory? It wouldn’t be enough.

Research into art as communication begs the question of: which and whose rules? And what’s worth communicating about? With whom? We understand as homologous aesthetic, political and economic structures. They form out of one evolution in the means of knowledge and power, which determine us in real terms. The practice runs ahead of us. That’s why artists are in fact responsible for everything.

Communication to what end? Using art as a model for developing an art for more realistic models of life’s distinctions. Besides, evolution is a network and not a family tree – there’s always more than one origin, more than one era. Unity is a deceptive condition of discriminatory knowledge, a tool. The pattern of the family tree is brought into the network as a means of knowledge: it is the perspectivity of the network. It is limited on the one hand by how many dimensions the observer is able to process – how many sides a boundary may have, in order to be conceivable – and on the other hand, by the interests of knowledge, or rather the lines that are to be followed and drawn. Realism is always abstract. It’s intentional that we do not speak of constructivism. This realism demands: Epistemology. Documentation. Organisation. For a competition of fictions.

Art, which must here be denied, emerged with the markets of a bourgeois public. A market is a form of organising exchange which assumes that participants, insofar as they follow their own interests, together develop not only a good distribution of units for exchange but, beyond that, also a valuation of exchange in terms of price as well as a reflexivity towards the means of exchange, i.e., currencies as rates. These variables are interdependent since it’s not supply and demand for product x that determine the price but the relationship between the ratio of product x’s supply/demand and the ratio of medium y’s supply/demand that determines the price. However, the relationship of the ratios does not regulate itself, as both ratios (the market for x and the market for y) usually depend on different relations, markets or networks. Moreover, there is a hierarchy of markets and their currencies, which results in one currency gradually prevailing over others. This is because civil rights and liberties, which regulate access to markets (who’s allowed to participate at all and at what cost), define a person’s freedom by the limits of another person’s freedom, with the exception of the right and obligation to private ownership of the means of production. The monopolisation of certain means of production thus ensures which currencies will prevail as though of their own accord, distorts the system of market organisation – and ultimately replaces it.

One example: here is a space for exhibiting. There are producers. All have the same amount of time. Each person may exhibit at some point. The others regard and evaluate the offer, they exchange arguments. They criticise, interpret, praise. These utterances are offers that hit upon different demands. They come to an understanding about how to evaluate what’s offered and the offers of the offered. In this way, consensus or dissensus can emerge. What is found out is neither objective nor does it have to be rational. The participants have come to an understanding about themselves: about the values they bring with them (from other markets), about their argumentation and rhetoric, i.e., means of exchange, and about their products. They have generated a meaning, and each has gained a relation to their opinion. The standards of each person’s sense of meaning, as well as the meaning of the whole group

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evolves with the process. This ideal situation has a range of conditions. As such, the market participants must be equal. No single person may have too much influence, no one may have nothing to offer; they need equal access to the means of production and exchange. However, they must all be different and demand different things, for if all were to want the same thing, nothing could be exchanged and there would be no equal distribution but rather a bubble. (That is to say, an internal hierarchy develops that feeds on a distortion of the outside.) To be able to exchange, there must be difference and equivalence: something must be different, otherwise the exchange is meaningless, but it must also be of equal value in the eyes of the exchange partner, otherwise it would be not accepted into the exchange. Only in this way can a standard evolve that produces the exchange processes' real values and the truly appropriate distribution of the exchange units. Thereby a process emerges that optimises the value of the exchanged units for the desired exchange and secures their distribution within a given context. Whether the aim here is refinement/optimisation, complexity, accumulation, equal distribution or destruction, or whether it's the enhancement of those making the exchange, the means of exchange or the standard that is given precedence, all depends on the medium/currency and the possible and permissible processes of exchange, and is thus a conceptual question.

In the ideal market there is, in principle, really no strategic cooperation (as in a network) and no rule-based processing nor centralised control (as in hierarchies). Free competition prevails. The system of such a market is embedded in and penetrated by numerous other market systems and lives from the exchange with other currencies. A unified and exclusive world currency in an autonomous system would no longer pose an emergent system but a hierarchical network. (Black) markets would be pushed to its margins, from where they would feed and eventually subvert it. Markets form an innovative and extremely productive system that is so sensitive and so easy to throw out of balance that it can rarely be sustained for any length of time. The terms market, hierarchy and network describe forms of organisation. Their use, however, is so ideologically reshaped that now they are almost only conceivable as personifications. It's important to be able to differentiate between their ideology and their function. In their current usage, "markets" and "free competition" have been turned into their opposites. Finance and art markets are specialised for forming bubbles and are not in a position to develop a reflexivity towards their standards; they're unrealistic and they would immediately collapse if they weren't able to make use of the production of other systems – in order to devalue their standards. In this sense, art is no longer a self-regulating system. This is inflation art. It devours reality. No one needs it anymore.

The public as the sphere of an audience that collectively develops a set of common standards through criticism, with which it can conceive itself and attack external domination is, ideally, a market system. It's a common origin of bourgeois aesthetics, politics and economics. The market of the public is at the basis of democratic order, since here it is voted upon how and what must be voted on, through self-organisation and with an openness to the outcome. Without this process of voting, elections would be meaningless. Art was a form of bourgeois public life, as market, salon and exhibition, as well as an object of bourgeois public life, as work and commodity, and a currency of bourgeois public life, as critique, though also as a status symbol when currency becomes a commodity in turn. As critique, art is realism, idealistically it was glorification: state art. Since the state has become prey, it's now inflation art.

We want to distinguish the public as an ideally conceived market, as that which we see as a model for its functioning, from its ideology as bourgeois self-description. The ideal conditions for equality of wealth and opportunity for the participants, the freedom of access to the market and competition within the market, as well as the siblinghood of those participating, are neither pre-given from the start, nor can they be produced by the market itself. All must play their part, which is to say, supply and demand; all must be equally strong; all must be different, i.e., connected to different market systems; the surplus value that arises through the development of a common standard must be made wholly communal and not privatised or siphoned off one-sidedly. An external set of regulations would have to guarantee these conditions perpetually. Beyond this, the functionality of the model would depend on basic conceptual conditions, such as: the conception of how boundaries are to be drawn in the production of meaning and how many dimensions this model would have. With the conception of boundaries as identity and transgression on the one hand, and a one-dimensional framing by a world conceived as uniform and comprehensively designed on the other, a function as in the ideal model is excluded. This was Milton Friedman's version: the freedom of the supposed individual. A self-regulating market system is thus completely ruled out.

The model doesn't work as declared. But it's not as if the model never worked. It works in the way that larger or smaller groups are always excluded from the market and treated as mere resources. Many are only utilised in order to become obsolete and to increase the pressure of selection. The day labourers are excluded from the political, aesthetic and economic markets. They do not trade but are instead traded. They are part of the subsystems lining the market, which are built in hierarchies and networks. They are split from themselves and crossed through by others who are no better than they are. This is the waste. And there where the market should be, cartels have formed very rapidly, a network of oligopolies. A certain exchange takes place, since there is no single actor who oversees the process but rather a cooperation/competition between a few actors whose activity penetrates and weaves through various networks. As long as the risk factor of "time" cannot be wholly eradicated, evolution remains possible. But this system maintains itself through redistribution and not through innovative development. The barriers to entry to the market, i.e. the costs of entry into a new market, are enormously high, such that it remains certain that there cannot simply be an innovation just because people might need it. In a market that is distorted by networks, demand is no longer regulating or constitutive of a standard, since demand is anticipated. A professional critic exclaimed: Everyone's always reading the same thing! What does this mean? She ascertains that she's always reading the same thing as everyone else. But why? And what does that say about the state of her profession?

These "markets" are for the sale of products that no one needs, but whose exchange is extorted by the debt of a higher meaning; there is thus constant demand for what no one needs and that which everyone might need finds no demand. Why? We are all little Midas kings in whose hands everything becomes worthless money. The exchanged commodity devours the use, where the medium of exchange is withdrawn from the transformation through a monopoly. The higher debt is identity: the individual shopping cart that must be filled with social meaning or status through transcending exchange, without the exchange generating its own standard since this remains withdrawn at a higher level. This is the distortion. The critic – she has to stop bragging.

Dysfunctionality is the purpose of this system. Its function doesn't serve the increase of general wealth, helpful, new inventions or realistic versions of a common reality. The system doesn't allow itself to be changed, improved or reformed because the dysfunctionality of the system is its intended function. This is the exploitation.

The exploitation, distortion and waste that this system generates disorganise its own functioning. But it's the exploited who always pay the price of this disorganisation. Why do they pay? The meritocratic ideology – that everyone has the same opportunities, every service is fairly paid, the best ultimately prevails, to each his own – produces a direct chain of equivalences between liberalism and fascism. The problem is not the duplicitous condition of equal opportunity but the missing condition of human dignity: it has to be won or proven, exchanged or purchased, or else it doesn't exist. The undeniability of this connection is not a moralistic but an epistemological problem.

Through entry into the market – overcoming the private individual's subjectivity to participate in a trading public – the ideology of bourgeois public life realises the abstract universal that represents that public. It's the Bildungsroman cycle. This universal is reason, the critique of usurpatory rule, the people's freedom. Through entry into the market, the proprietor overtakes the propertyless, who are excluded for that reason, and exploits them. This is how he realises himself as man. The public is the medium of transgression. The proprietor denies that exploitation is taking place insofar as he claims that in principle, everyone is in a position to realise themselves as human. A form of realisation for which transgression is necessary, and which is, in principle, open to everyone. In other words, to those who are permitted entry to the public sphere through ownership. This circular restriction of entry is what we call the public. The circle could only ever be vaulted through fraud: original accumulation, or rather expropriation. In the bourgeois public, the private is passed off as the general and the general privatised. But what's private is ownership. The bourgeois public is the private sphere of the owners.

For those of us who do not own any of the means of production, this is not our public. It's not our public. What we need is not part of it. We have no public. We may take part in a public that exploits us or be wasted. The public is for us the retroactive consent to our exploitation, the consent to participation in the wasteful production of things that we don't need, while it keeps us from living. The public is the casino of the Indian reservation. We're the Indians. Can I say that? Lots of people feel guilty about the exploitation of others, and that can only be a first step out of the war of the exploited against each other if identity, as a product of exploitation, is recognised and dropped as a commodity.

We are not the ones profiting from the exploitation. If I'm not permitted to reject my privileges in order to say that this waste, distortion and exploitation doesn't produce me in the way I want to act but rather as a reduction, then I can't stand in solidarity with those who experience a worse reduction. Those who utilise the differences between those more and less exploited for hierarchisation, or indeed, for the production of meaning, only affirm the system of theft. It's the actions that count. We want to generate our own, other public, and to do so we need different, modified structures of meaning production.

We want to retain the germ of enlightenment and a critique of domination, which is embedded in bourgeois ideology, without letting ourselves be deceived regarding whom the market of the public belongs to. Not only its limitations of access, which here and there have been flexible, but its entire conception is false: one-dimensionality, fixation on identitarian knots and non-reciprocal edges and its reductionism towards unitary currencies.

Bourgeois rule has integrated its critique in that its public's market represents the dispute over leadership within this domination. If we reject this apparatus, why should we continue to deliver arguments, images and methods? Individuals can be added by committing their skills to a party in the dispute over hegemony and counterhegemony. In doing so, they actualise the existing apparatus of domination. Every critique that can be heard within the accessible programme of "the public" serves the established rule and not the exploited. Every image that becomes visible in the existing cycle of "the public" glorifies exploitation. That is why it's important to study the programs, to understand the cycles. Truth is a question of organisation.

We will recognise that the programmes have logical errors and have to investigate: who benefits from them? The concepts that underlie our understanding of world, society and economy follow a recognisable pattern. And they have errors, gaps, collaged parts. What do they mean? Our capacity to act is based on views of the world and people, methods of thought, conceptions and concepts, that cannot be tested in real terms because they function through their use – they produce the reality in the first place. They can be criticised aesthetically and epistemologically: as conventions that have at their source different though related institutionalisations. And they're not only incomplete due to a lack of certain knowledge but because the gaps are useful. It is art's task to represent the function of these gaps. In what sort of a world is that beautiful?

The conceptual collage in which we live is changing. The bourgeois market of the public is no longer the decisive apparatus. Nevertheless, it's good to grasp its concept since its ideological terms still simulate Enlightenment in an era of obscurantism and leave people fighting to find representation within it and practise critique. This is wrong. They can offer their representation and their critique as commodities; they alter nothing about the rules and the nicely distributed discretionary powers in the regulation of exchange. Summer, free markets: everyone naked, the police drive through the park.

In the emergent cybernetic order, markets – not only due to errors but also conceptually speaking – are no longer the place where the standard comes into being. Markets, parliaments, exhibitions – the standards are set elsewhere. In hierarchical networks, if they're large enough, standards can be scripted. Markets remain risky and important. They can no longer be conceived as "free." We must choose the conceptual standpoint and its possible perspectives.

With Brecht, we want to propose an historical scheme:
Man as victim, plaything, who cannot define the laws of motion
– the old description.

Man as agent in a world imagined as modifiable, in which he must position himself
– the modern description.

Man as plaything of the system playing out within him, constantly stepping into his portrayal of a changing world that he is in fact always changing
– the cybernetic description.

Man as his own respective changeable and changing world in the ranking of representations. He feels unburdened by those who take from him and drive him in circles. Conversely, he always gets lighter
– the description for neoliberal subjects.

This is what we propose:

The system finds that, in the given protocol, a decision is needed and therefore it seeks out resistance. It develops into a chain of forced decisions. Thus, it becomes an algorithm. Man wants to become borderline.

Those who develop the programmes into which we enter are the super artists and the head foresters; they have the best apparatus there has ever been for the control and management of these playthings.

We live in a time of constant counterinsurgency without insurgency. Who are we conceived to be? That's why it's wrong, anachronistic and naïve, indeed modern, to assume freedom and critique. Think of the far-reaching consequences! Another realism is needed.

We have to set up our models so that the available standards, currencies and standardising concepts no longer derive from an evolutionary public but rather so that they cannot be scripted by metalevels that are not accessible to the markets. But the apparatus for controlling and managing the playthings is not the playing field. There is no playing field. The playing field expands with every action.

The only theoretically conceivable, stable end state would be the abolition of time as the risk of innovation. Mastery of time production through total synchronisation. This state would be eternal: a big bang. In contrast, it is conceivable that longer periods of time will occur in which not much good will happen. Without risk, no joy.

Who is man? Humanity was a promise of the bourgeois private owners' ideology; they always had to be realised through a transgression in which the majority could only take part as the transgressed. So, one would have to ask about the technology that man would be.

What is art? So, who are we here? What do we produce? To whom exactly do we speak? What do we do? The task of an epistemological realism is to describe the productivity of the existing programmes, regardless of how illogically or defectively these models and programmes seem to have been constructed. Our task is still to develop and establish better programmes. Programmes and models that are more realistic in that they can grasp more worlds and waste none. It's our task to collect content and documentary material. We may not prepare it for use in the existing apparatus; we want to find the form whereby we can ask ourselves: who do we want to talk to about this, really? Who do we want to share this with? How will they get on with it? Which is a good medium for this exchange precisely? "Air conditioning" in an exhibition space is an interpellation but not of Enlightenment.

This is the decisive question for us, whether a person hopes to be given access to an imagined "market," or whether they go without it. This question is misunderstood by the person who consider themselves an idealist but will always be a hypocrite. Whoever is dependent on prostitution through the manufacture of saleable products should demonstrate this, and then they can adopt a realistic attitude that would perhaps refer beyond the conditions that force them into prostitution. Anyone who isn't forced to do so can only be a blackmailer. But blackmail can be just as naïve and hypocritical as prostitution – as critique. And of course, we do it voluntarily. Because wisdom says: if we want to establish new markets, we have to make do with the existing means. These are essentially: prostitution and blackmail. Who's interested in new markets?

Our medium is the public. There is no public. We are making infrastructure. What do we need here? An apparatus for the production of meaning and a model of communication. Who's interested in this? Whoever is interested must be informed about the operative possibilities of those who are not interested in a public.

Berlin, July 2020, Fabian Ginsberg
Translated by Miriam Stoney