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In my quality of a European observer of the contemporary art scene at large and in the light of the theme of the present conference, I would only bring to the fore a few non-structured remarks on arts and politics and the intricate relations between both ; not only because I think that these do not fit into a schedule or have binding causal relations linking them to each other, but most of all because I do not wish to associate with any of the "parties" in this conflictuous relationship.

- After the breakdown of the "iron curtain" and the implosion of the communist dictatures in Eastern Europe, the traditional leftist neo-post-Marxist discourse seems to have lost most of its credibility in the West. The post '68 syndrome, some sort of social critique based on a curious mixture of syndicalism, ecological considerations, etc... which led to a politicisation of the artistic discourse à la Hans Haacke, seems to have lost its relevance.

- It seems as if it has been replaced, in America at least, by less utopian political ideas and visions on our society. Our economic system is questioned on its (in)human implications, not on its political foundations as such. In line with the ideas of postmodernity, artists now seem to have found peace with the idea that art mainly operates in the artistic circuit and that

politics belong to the realm of politics. At least the museum building has once more become the centre of artistic discourse, as opposed to the "art-on-the-street" and "art-in-the-0land" mentality of the late sixties and seventies.

- However, all in all, recent art is characterised by a growing concern with values that are more humanist than politico-economical considerations. This appears for instance in the "truisms" of Jenny Holzer and in the poster-like works by Barbara Kruger. The remarkable fact that Holzer represented the United States of America at the Venice Biennial of 1990 shows that her work and, per extension, the stance she adopts, meet with some degree of official recognition.

- the content of her statements in the form of truisms cannot be retraced to any of the known traditional leftist, rightist, etc.. discourses, but most of all has affinities with the feminist critique of the past decade and with other emancipation movements. This also comes to the fore in the work by Barbara Kruger. Because of their refusal of party politics and their preference of a broader scope, but most of all because of the irony in their work and the references to the visual imagery of the language of commercials, they stand closer to the work of Andy Warhol than to "politically conscious" artists à la Haacke.



- After the turmoil caused by new censorship proposals as advocated by Helms and Hatch in the wake of the Mapplethorpe incident at the Washington Corcoran Gallery, a large proportion of American Art tries to come to terms with this most thorny of issues. The AIDS crisis also mobilised many artists, cf. the participation of Grand Fury in the Venice Aperto and the involvement of artists as divergent as Laury Anderson and David Hockney at the ACT UP-sales in favour of AIDS-campaigning. The work of Torres Garcia and Zoe Leonard, both featuring in recent Belgian group shows, seems to have this disease as its main subject of content. In 1987, Am Far International started a campaign in the U.S.A. that soon became the most important one ever organised in the art world : A.A.A. or Art Against Aids; first in New York, then here in Los Angeles, later in San Francisco, Chicago and Washington D.C. Under the active patronage of Ms. Elisabeth Taylor, A.A.A. collected over 6 million AM \$ for the benefit of programmes in the struggle against AIDS all over the world. This summer, the first campaign outside the U.S.A. was held in Basel, Switzerland, after comparable events organised by other organisations such as the Frankfurt rally, presided by Jan Hoet. Typical of these events is that they do not question the status or the nature of art as such, "in se" ; they certainly do not subscribe to an aesthetics that blurs the differences between the function of art within a given society and the nature of art, as was the case in the conceptually oriented researches of the late sixties - early seventies. This new form of campaigning uses the newest and most efficient marketing



techniques and has escaped the endearing pseudo-bohemian post-hippy syndrome of the earlier home-spun variety in favour of a markedly urban and realist approach.

Amongst the different movements that unify their efforts to help the campaign Art Against Aids, we can find an impressive list of contemporary artists, owners of galleries, museum curators, collectors, art critics and theoreticians.

The response to these campaigns was considerable and proves the growing engagement of artistic circles to attack this alarming problem and to find adequate solutions. As of yet, other eminently modern and urban, social problems like drugs, the homeless etc. have not been dealt with in the same thorough manner, probably because the arts community is less directly concerned, but most artists clearly took a stance regarding issues like sexism and womens lib, homophobia and gay lib, the new censorship and artistic freedom, racism and cultural pluralism.

- Typical of the influence of the provocative art of Andy Warhol and its ambiguous relation towards social critique is the extremely obnoxious art of Jeff Koons and his likes. On the one hand they seem to shamelessly flirt with the excesses of the commercialisation of art ; on the other hand they carry this social-political evolution to its ultimate paroxysm.

- The problem of the homeless, as it comes to the fore in the work of artists like Jeff Wall, who is also amazingly influential in Europe, is also treated and visualised on the basis of its

(lack of) humanist dimensions, not as an illustration of a (marxist) analysis of history and society.

- Overall, as appears from the above paragraphs, we could state that the art of nowadays, as it originated in the United States and quickly spread all over the world, does have political connotations, but these are no longer a translation or a visualisation of a preconceived political dogma or program ( i.e. a marxist one). The enormous importance of multi-cultural exhibitions like for instance "Les Magiciens de la Terre", the fact that women outnumber men on the contemporary New York scene, that Non-Western and Black art seems to have added new inspiration to an otherwise tired and overreferential so-called postmodern scene, the identity claims of Gay-Lesbian and Jewish artists - both of course have always been overrepresented on the cultural scene according to their demographically small numbers, but not as such - the redefinition of art and the use of non-specifically artistic materials like neon publicity on Times Square (Jenny Holzer) all point to a renewed and more inspiring osmosis between the arts on the one hand and social critique on the other hand. The tyranny of political dogma is replaced by a pluralistic and realistic emancipatory discourse

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