

SHUTDOWN PROGRAM

The Shutdown Program of the Württembergischer Kunstverein is being published gradually on its website, through its newsletter, and via other digital channels. It is meant to reflect on questions, themes, and works from the two currently closed exhibitions – Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead: Politics of Life and Alexander Kluge. Opera: Temple of Seriousness – with a view to the present situations caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Many of the conflicts that have been preoccupying artists, theorists, and activists for years are now not only clearly coming to light, but also strongly intensifying. At the same time, we are witnessing things which go beyond our previous horizon of experience, with outcomes that we cannot even remotely imagine. What implications will all of this have for shaping a future of which we have long since known that there can be no “business as usual”? The Württembergischer Kunstverein wishes to use the shutdown period – and well beyond – to reflect on these issues and others openly and publicly.

WHITE
CUBE

WHITE

PANDEMIE

SHUTDOWN

Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

On March 13, 2020, we were forced to close our exhibition *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead: Politics of Life*, which had opened just a few weeks before, due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and the resulting public health crisis. That same day, the exhibition *Alexander Kluge. Opera: Temple of Seriousness* was not even able to open. Just a few hours before the planned opening event, the shutdown was enacted.

In such times of hundreds of thousands of cancellations, closings, and postponements within the art world, which are strongly impacting the majority of artists and freelancers, the precarious conditions on which the art industry is founded are becoming blatantly and drastically obvious. Of all people, it is the artists who are usually most strongly exploited here and who lack financial security. The aid packages adopted in recent weeks in many European countries are good and needed, yet they most starkly reveal the shortcomings of the system – and sooner or later they will serve as a blueprint for declaring that sharp cuts in the public art sector, which has long been working at its existential limits, are unavoidable. In the end, it will be the artists and freelancers who must pay the twofold price, for they are always the first ones to be affected when cuts are made.

Instead, the experiences gained during the present crisis need to result in a complete rethinking and repositioning of funding for arts and culture – rather than putting already famished public organizations on another diet, as is to be feared, and thus pushing them toward an even stronger reliance on visitor numbers. This dependence, the excesses of which ran counter to any seriously intended educational mandate long before the corona pandemic, is now proving to be the Achilles tendon of the system.

Perhaps mass events of a physical kind will have soon run their course as indicators of successful cultural work. Yet in the worst case situation, this will only mean that the dominion of click counts, long since brought into position, will ultimately prevail. The euphoria with which art institutions are currently extolling how their program can be transported into the virtual realm could easily backfire in a world where immaterial distribution licenses have long represented an economic scale that is not recoverable through “feet.”

We need to renegotiate the structures of the art industry completely anew. The point here cannot be to maintain the status quo, but rather to realign the conditions, tasks, and objectives. It is vital, on a cultural-political level, to finally establish a firm foundation for reliable and appropriate pay for artists, but also for freelance curators, educators, graphic designers, technical teams, assistants, authors, translators, conservators, research fellows, and interns, and not least for the security and cleaning service providers who are nowadays usually employed as contract workers. We need institutional funding that ensures fair working conditions in the art world on a sustainable and future-oriented basis. At the same time, it is important to terminate the forced transformation of public organizations into the model of profit-oriented enterprises, along with the accompanying motto “more is more.” We need to use this period of stagnation to discuss what the roles of public art organizations could be in the face of climate crisis, social inequality, digital surveillance, growing nationalism and right-wing radicalism, among other intolerable conditions.

The current situation shows with utmost clarity that things cannot continue as they had been; not in the art world, not in the public health system, not in the care sector, not in climate policy, not in the food industry – and certainly not in regard to all of those people whose life and death do not count in the arithmetic of neoliberal economies: refugees, the homeless, modern work slaves, functionally and neuronically diverse individuals, ethnic minorities; in short, anyone not covered by the present-day hymns of care and solidarity. In the coming debates, it will be crucial to collaboratively conceive, shape, and politically demand the necessary changes in the various spheres of society, instead of playing the one area against the other.¹

At the moment, the future appears to be negotiated and decided on a political level almost exclusively by virologists and politicians – and there are, in fact, hardly any women involved. Sociologists, philosophers, or even artists have no say here, as if they had already been dismissed as voices no longer relevant to society. On the rise are white males staging themselves as doers, heroes, or military leaders pursuing predominately national interests. But, especially now, shouldn't we be focusing more on the vulnerable and fragile facets of life?

We would like to use the shutdown period – and the time beyond – to engage in reflection on various levels, examining how many of the conflicts preoccupying artists, theorists, and activists for years are not only clearly coming to light now, but also strongly intensifying. At the same time, we are witnessing things which go beyond our previous horizon of experience, with outcomes that we cannot even remotely imagine. What implications will all of this have for shaping a future of which we have long since known that there can be no "business as usual"? The entire globe is immersed in the mode of an enormous social experiment. Yet it is also the responsibility of art and culture to subject the evaluations and conclusions of this experiment to a multiple societal corrective measures, including differences.

With our shutdown program, we aim to spark an open and public debate on the aforementioned aspects and others. The program, which will be developed gradually, includes commentary, conversations, and new views of topics, questions, and works from our presently closed exhibitions. Moreover, we will be inviting various authors to make contributions to and from other contexts. A third strand will entail a continually growing collection of links to new and existing texts and artworks, already freely accessible on the Internet, which to us seem relevant to the coming debates.

With the shutdown program we are striving for a long-term exploration of issues related to a reconfiguration of the future. Therefore, it will not be limited to the period of the actual Württembergischer Kunstverein closure. Eventually, it will take place – with or without masks and minimum separation – in real physical space. We are looking forward to the latter most fervently.

¹ Bowing to pressure by the French trade union group Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques (SUD), a court in Nanterre recently directed the Amazon corporation to only dispatch "essential" items: food or products related to hygiene and cleaning. According to the union, books do not count among these essentials (see <https://taz.de/Nach-Urteil-in-Frankreich/!5679228>). This example demonstrates how the justified battle against the exploitative human resources policy of major corporations, when pursued too one-dimensionally, ends up misappropriating the relevance of culture.

Shutdown Program

See:

<https://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/2020/shutdown-program>

Shutdown Program #5

VIDEO

Yes, We Fuck!

MAGAZINE

Crip Magazine #3

Context: *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead: Politics of Life*

The video *Yes, We Fuck!* by Antonio Centeno Ortiz and Raúl de la Morena (2015, 59') is one of the most beautiful and touching films about sexuality and at the same time a strong political statement, demanding the right to sex and physical closeness for everyone, including those who were already locked up before the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic due to their functional or intellectual diversity.

Ortiz writes about this topic in the current issue of the *Crip Magazine*, founded by Eva Egermann.

The magazine explores forms of representation opposing the conditions of normality/abnormality.

Shutdown Program #4

ESSAY

Dialog mit Covid-19 (Dialogue with Covid-19)

(Only in German)

Hans D. Christ, March 30, 2020

Shutdown Program #3

SKYPE-CONVERSATION

Hans D. Christ and Alexander Kluge

(Only in German)

Originating from the exhibition *Alexander Kluge. Opera: The Temple of Seriousness*, which has not yet been able to open, and the short essay "Exhibitions without Space," a conversation between Alexander Kluge and Hans D. Christ has emerged. It meanders along various stations within the project, along the boundaries and possibilities of an exhibition without space—or in digital space—and of our new, unwelcome guest, COVID-19.

(Only German)

Shutdown Program #2

VIDEO DOCUMENTATION

Alexander Kluge. Opera: The Temple of Seriousness

by Martin Mannweiler and Elisabeth Kuon

Shutdown Program #1

DTCP: VIRTUAL TOUR

through 9 stations of the exhibition

Alexander Kluge. Opera: The Temple of Seriousness

(Only in German)

Shutdown Program

DISCOURSE / LINKS

We continuously compile links to a selection of current texts and other contributions in the web that deal with the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, its current and possible future effects, but also with its historical contexts from different directions.

VIDEOS ONLINE

(in progress)

<https://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/2020/exhibitions/actually-the-dead-are-not-dead-politics-of-life/videos>

NEWS

Reopening of the exhibition programme

May 8, 2022, 11 a.m.

Extensions

Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead. Politics of Life
until August 23, 2020

Alexander Kluge. Opera: The Temple of Seriousness
at least until June 14, 2020

We are continuing our shutdown programme, which is conceived as a long-term reflection of the current situations caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, even after the reopening.

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