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Protesting Capitalist Globalization

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Since the mid-nineties video has played an important role in my artistic practice. In theme-specific installations realized in art institutions, such as "Learned Homeland" (1996), "Institutional Racism" (1997), "The Global 500" (1999) and "Sustainable Propaganda" (2000), video was a central element that was employed in combination with text/image montages or photos in wall and spatial installations. These videos are based on interviews that were conducted for segments of the topic of the exhibitions.

Since 2000 I have been making videos apart from exhibitions, which can also be presented outside the immediate field of art. These videos move between art and political activism and deal with themes and practices of resistance in a non-institutionalized left.

In this text I would like to formulate some thoughts on two videos finished in 2002, which focus on the partial fields of the movement that is usually called the "anti-globalization movement" in the predominant media discourse.

The video "This is what democracy looks like!" (38 min., 2002) deals with events revolving around a demonstration prohibited by

the police against the World Economic Forum on July 1, 2001 in Salzburg, in the course of which 919 demo participants were surrounded for seven hours for no immediate reason by martialist police forces. The democratic basic right to free speech in public was suspended, while the non-democratically legitimated leaders of corporations were able to expedite the neo-liberal reconstruction of society without disruption within the framework of the WEF behind closed doors. As a participant in the demonstration, I ended up inside the encirclement by the police and tried to film the events with the video camera from within the demonstration.

Shortly after July 1st, I decided to take my video material on the events around the encirclement of the demonstrators as the starting point for a video. At the same time, I was confronted with the fact that I was addressing an event of which the course and dramaturgy were strongly determined by repressive police tactics and the arbitrary actions taken by politicians and police. Through being encircled by the police, the demonstrators were forced into a predicament, in which their possibilities for reacting to the hourly changing negotiation positions and the repressive conduct of the police were severely limited. This unequal power relation convinced me to address the events exclusively from the perspective of the demonstrators and to leave out the perspectives of the police, the mayor or "neutral" observers, which already dominate media reports. For this reason, I conducted interviews with six demo participants several weeks later, whose descriptions and assessments are marked by the distance of time and a critical reflection.

The decision to realize the video "This is what democracy looks like!" was accompanied by the intention of additionally working on another video about a different segment of the anti-capitalist movement, which was to focus more on political practices and options for taking action beyond immediate reactions to police

tactics. I decided to make a video about one of the groups that I find most interesting, the Italian Disobbedienti (the disobedient ones), which carried out actions against deportation prisons still under the label "Tute Bianche" at that time and took part in mobilizations for a democratic globalization. The Disobbedienti are distinguished not only by their political analyses, but also demonstrate options for agency and possibilities for an alternative social development. With the video, I wanted to address the actions and theoretical considerations of the Disobbedienti, who are still too little known outside Italy. For this reason, I conducted a series of interviews with the protagonists of the Disobbedienti for the video in collaboration with the author Dario Azzellini in summer 2002.

In both the video "This is what democracy looks like!" and the video "Disobbedienti" (54 min., 2002), only people involved in the "movement of movements" speak up and assume the role of active speakers in the video. Whereas the image level in "This is what democracy looks like!" consists of video material shot by myself and other video activists in Salzburg during the demonstration, and the interview partners are not seen, but only speak about the events represented by video images, in "Disobbedienti" there is an emphasis on the physical presence of the discussion partners. All the interviews were filmed standing in places that are immediately significant for the practice of the Disobbedienti. The way the interview partners are staged and the sequences shot while walking underscore the importance of the body for the concept of the Tute Bianche.

Both the videos "Disobbedienti" and "This is what democracy looks like!" largely dispense with off-camera commentaries, which evaluate and create distance in many documentaries as transitions, comparisons and questions, or which, in the case of a militant

group, express separation from the actions. Through this formal reduction and the strong presence of the protagonists, Dario Azzellini and I approach the topical position of the interview partners as filmmakers. The conceptual arrangement of the video indicates our fundamental agreement with the analyses and practices of the Disobbedienti, through which the video becomes a political statement.

The videos are thus fundamentally contrary to the investigative journalism of bourgeois media, which insists on its alleged neutrality. The "democratically balanced" television news feature, for instance, that contributes to the exclusion of left-wing perspectives and perpetuates this exclusion despite its asserted objectivity, is only a direct point of reference to the extent that it is exactly reversed in this video practice. The motif of the political activist, so popular in television news reports, as a "violence-prone demonstrator" (the attribution invariably occurs only in the masculine form) is the starting point in both videos for debating the discourse on violence, through which attempts are made to divide the anti-capitalist movement into "violence-prone" and "peaceful" demonstrators, pitting them against one another and thus weakening the movement.[1]

In discussions the video "Disobbedienti" is sometimes criticized for the density of its information and the simultaneous complexity of what is said, because the video requires the full attention of the viewers throughout the entire duration of 54 minutes. In the way it is edited, "Disobbedienti" repeats the high speed of the speech of the interview partners as a formal element and makes no attempt to resolve it with breaks. In order to focus the viewers' attention even more on the arguments of the protagonists, the continuous flow of images in the video is interrupted in several places with white surfaces. These white surfaces are directly related to the

white overalls of the Tute Bianche, the function of which is explained in more detail in the video, but they are also the expression of a wish to inspire viewers to fill the visual lacunas with their own ideas. In other words, they represent the attempt to find an open visual correspondence for a development that is to progress questioningly and without prefabricated models in keeping with the concept of the Disobbedienti.

Less often there is a criticism that the video tends to heroize the Disobbedienti. Yet when one asks people, who are in part politically active themselves, about the reason for this criticism, one hears that the rejection is based on the spectacular appearance of the actions and an asserted avant-gardist comportment of the Tute Bianche or the Disobbedienti (which they themselves negate). As the representatives of the Disobbedienti eloquently describe in the video, however, the spectacle is purposely used to attract the attention of the media. It is thus not an end in itself, but rather a calculated strategy. Contrary to the argument of heroization, in the video Francesco Raparelli also addresses the criticism of the Disobbedienti that it is a problem, when the Disobbedienti's civil disobedience becomes a logo or verbal representation of practices that have already been carried out by other subjects of the conflict.

I would counter these objections with the importance of conveying the political practice and assessments of the Disobbedienti, thus providing audiences outside Italy with an opportunity to learn from these experiences, to critically reflect on them, and to perhaps even adapt one facet or another into one's own ideas or practice.

Because of their subject matter, the videos "This is what democracy looks like!" and "Disobbedienti" are also shown and received outside an immediate art context. In addition to presentations in political contexts, there are also presentations in cinemas and at

video festivals. For me, though, it is immensely important to continue to show the videos in art institutions, because I regard them as central places, where there is a certain scope for dealing with marginalized political perspectives and practices.

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[1] Cf. Dario Azzellini & Oliver Ressler, Die Macht des Gewaltdiskurses, Kulturrisse 04/02