

Welcome to the Second World Congress of Free Artists, Aarhus

November 2010

On our way to the panel discussion, we wander through exhibitions that appear to us like empty classrooms. We are living in the midst of an "educational turn" in art, which congeals democratic processes into the semblances of classrooms (in our experience, among the most undemocratic of situations) and into line items on an artist's teaching resumé.

It has been some time since we last convened: 54 years, two months, and 18 days to be exact. What took us so long? In our first meeting Asger Jorn levied his opening address against the academic formalism of the Bauhaus and its training of artists into the artisans and engineers of capitalism's dreamworld.

We are no doubt in a different world today.

In Europe, the Bologna Process combined with the alibi of an ongoing financial crisis, is leading a privatization of Universities and Academies. The current protests and occupation of universities in the UK, and those that have taken place in

Germany, in Austria, in France, attest to a general refusal by students to accept this situation.

In the United States, students of the arts are being asked to pay extortionate tuitions while artist-teachers host panel discussions on pedagogical methodology. These invariably end in the enervating consensus that art is an unteachable subject. There, students are hungry for a more social and equitable world. We have seen moments where that world forms in universities and art schools, but only in brief flashes. And we make students pay dearly for it.

We are not against an examination of art in its turn towards pedagogy. On the contrary, we applaud those who work with and without educational institutions to re-orient the training of the "good artist" from an adequate performer in a world she did not create or ask for, to a transformative agent in a social process.

We would just like to interject that art is not a disciplinary subject outside of its application in the world.

Right.

What is the "good artist" today if not a traveling salesman? An artist today is expected to be as much a globe-trotting lecturer as a committed pedagogue, as much an administrator as a creator, as much a public relations department as a critical intellect. (Can one exist as a critical intellect in a PR department?) Is the "good artist" today just an effect of institutional cutbacks?

We have organized a Congress here. Why? What reason can there be for artists, the freest, most independent people in society – people who live like "the lily of the field" – to come together, organize themselves, and undertake theoretical discussions?

Asger Jorn's language had a pertinence in its time, perhaps, but today the description of artists living like "the lilly of the field" must be tempered with artists who now live like canaries in a coal mine. (The most independent are also the most vulnerable, but the most vulnerable are not always the most independent.)

We take it for granted that we begin as free artists at our own peril. And yet to avoid nihilism, and the various

fundamentalisms of the present, is to take *this* world as if it were the best of *all possible* worlds.

The teaching of art must entail the transformation of the "good artist" into the free artist, which is to say, a free agent, which is to say a vanishing point.

So, why have we convened here today? We the most free of individuals? Why are we here if not to exert for a moment a certain degree of autonomy, to learn from ourselves, and to bring together a few bodies in tentative proximity if not solidarity?