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## Scaffolding 2016 \_ Ace Hotel Talks JUN 04, 2017

First on my agenda of this talk –is– that I will tell you about the FORM of this conversation, that I have prepared for today.

The slide show – that I brought for inspiration – is showing three workers, who are building a scaffolding around a town house in my hometown Vienna. I documented them, while they were building it from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor; which took them 4 days due to weather conditions.

The slide show itself is inspired by Allan Sekulas Untitled Slide Sequence from 1972, where he documented the End of Day Shift at the Convair Division Aerospace Factory in San Diego.

Therefore, it shows 25 pictures, each of them arrested for 16 seconds. The sequence should be repeated for three times.

Today, you will miss the typical clicking sound of the projector. That said, I hope that this will inspire your imagination. For: Slideshows usually transport didactical content – whether it is in school, in art historian college courses or at home with your family.

This art piece is showing **documentary photography**, which captures particular experiences of the everyday... in order to characterize modern life. That is the definition of my choice for this project.

Following this introduction,

I have prepared – up to three – segments that deal with different aspects of the assisting structures of the art world. Each of them is timed to 5 minutes and hopes to engage a conversation right afterwards – either in your head or in this group of people.

I have prepared this text in order to read it out.

This must seem over-prepared and stiff for such a small group of approximately 15 people.

BUT – I have just recently enjoyed the symposium of the critical studies scholars of the Whitney Independent Study Program. Sitting in the auditorium, I decided that a talk, prepared in written form is a highly gratifying practice of sharing thoughts.

Other references to this conversation can be found in the following exhibitions:

“Why pictures now” by Louise Lawler in the Museum of Modern Art. Lawler is an artist of the so-called picture generation. Her photography examines the functions and codes of representation. Which means, she looks into the context of HOW art pieces are PRESENTED in the world. And in the art world, specifically.

“Debtfair” by Occupy Museums at the Whitney Biennial 2017. Occupy Museums is a group of artists founded in 2011. Their piece was visualizing links between asset-management – which is nothing else then trading debts – and both the real estate development in Manhattan, and young, indebted artists of the contemporary art world.

And: “Over” by Sidsel Meineche Hansen at 38 Ludlow. This show focusses on the production labor of the show itself. As an example, you can find the list of twenty-nine producers, assistants and other helpers for the art pieces on the homepage as well as on the hand out.

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The first segment will now deal with basic thoughts to the relations of THE Art world and THE Real Estate Development.

A cynic – like me – looks closely at the acclaimed power of art — to change the society, and points to the real-estate-development-market that has gentrified whole areas of Brooklyn’s East River Waterfront just within the few years that I did not come to New York City. If we – as artists – are honest to ourselves: Real Estate has much more power to change a society.

I read terms like **Innovative Capitalist Design** or **Incentivized Urbanism** – which is a term for an Urbanism,,, that strives for continuously improving attractiveness. And I know that these economic phenomena are arguing with the same – Power of Creativity – that artists are using as working basis. Roughly, it would be the quest for a disregarded spot of world, that can be improved by creative input. It needs the eye and the strategy of the **developer** to form —desire out of — disregard.

This can open our discussion to a couple of topics:  
For example, we could talk about a parallel between art and real estate: Both seem to privilege a stunned totalizing form of vision.  
The over polished facades of the town houses of my hometown are an indication that real estate improvement focusses on first impressions and therefore creates surface of luxury. – Which is basically what art does for art collectors.  
Even closer to myself — I could just take a look at MY CRITERIA, when I check for an Air BnB and compare it with my own state of housing.

Or, we could talk about the art districts of the big cities we are all coming from. I read about L.A.’s art district and I think it is one of the most fitting examples: The former depressed industrial neighborhood east of downtown was named the city’s “arts district”. Now it is home to overprized cafes, juice bars, luxury condos and the largest gallery complex in the world: Hauser Wirth & Schimmel. Real estate speculation seems to draw on the bohemian appeal of artists, —who live in large, affordable spaces – so the cliché.

The article goes on: “Artists have fled east of the L.A. River, south of the freeway, or to other parts of the city. The downtown Los Angeles Arts District was dead on arrival. But then, the city government was never interested in preserving a viable creative life for local artists.”

Finally, we could talk about the fact that lots of super rich real estate industrialists are art collectors – or as Occupy Museums pointed out – in the Board of Trustees of art institutions. Their art installation featured a quote from Larry Fink, who is CEO of Blackrock, a mega-asset management company. He is Councilor of the Trump administration. And — he is Trustee at the Museum of Modern Art and the New York University. The Quote reads: “The two greatest Stores of Wealth internationally today are — Contemporary Art and: — Apartments in Manhattan.”

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In the second segment, I want to focus on the Labor of the Art World. I would like to consider that every museum-show, every gallery event, every art piece, every artists’ residence is sustained by an assisting structure – a Scaffolding, I would like to call it, for the sake of this talk. ——— This work force does not only support the art world; it also keeps it ever evolving.

If we exclude those, who are employed on a stable contract basis, we still have a broad range of art related staff – which can be combined to the so-called class of art workers or cultural workers: Museum staff, installers, docents, interns, studio assistants, shippers, some of the curators, et cetera.

Since the big labor movements, the working class has been a highly diverse mass of people. There is only one standard, which unifies the whole working class: The economic conditions — that force workers to sell their labor as commodity, for a wage and for the loss of their energy. Here I would like to draw a connection to the class of art workers: Most of us know TO WHAT EXTENT the institutions of enterprise culture are reliant upon cheap, outsourced labor. What we call “flexible” part time labor, is in fact a precarious employment: The majority of art workers are suffering constant anxiety of finding and keeping art related jobs. No matter how mind-numbing the job can be.

Since art institutions took over big factory complexes to show art — like the MASS MOCA for example — some cultural workers work were the blue collar workers worked before. In these factories though, the product is produced by immaterial labor – labor that produces immaterial goods, like services, cultural products, knowledge or communication.

In 2010 Hito Steyerl, she is a German artist and essayist, proposed to have a closer look at the Politics of the art field – as a place of work. She proposed to look into what art DOES, ——— not what it shows. She draws the conclusion that art is currently rooted in semi-capitalistic structures. This fact opens the system to be available as a service structure for all kinds of events. And,,,, it invites external power structures into the decision making process.

This might explain another problem that Steyerl points out: Not even political art is addressing the internal conditions of the art field. I quote: “Even though “political art” manages to represent so-called local situations — from all over the globe and routinely processes injustice and hardship – the conditions of its own production and display remain pretty much unexplored.”

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In the third segment, I want to share my own professional experiences with the assisting structures or “scaffolding” of the art world. Since my graduation as a fine art photographer, I have been earning money as install photographer for up-and-coming galleries in Vienna. I am not going to lay out my working conditions in this field, because it repeats most of the things we have already said.

Instead, I would like to point out the aesthetic qualities of this service in the Age of Digital Reproduction.

From the point of view of the install photographer, — art is next-to-always presented in insufficient spacial conditions:

The strip light – for example, ———— which is the contemporary state-of-the-art understatement that young galleries inherited from off-space culture. The strip light, always draws a gradient on the white wall. Additionally, the run-down wooden floor of these spaces reflect their color back on it.

For an install photographer, the white cube is never white.

The digital apparatus of photography therefore — makes me already start to plan the photoshop post-production, while I am still photographing the art.

But, let’s focus on the white wall: The human eye has always been forgiving in the past. The visitors of a gallery are conditioned to see the whiteness of the wall, — (because they know that it has been colored white.) Pictures were most of the time used in exhibition catalogues of Museums and were predominantly for those who had experienced the exhibition. Additionally, there were Graphic Designers and Lithographers who took care of the outcome of the visual representation.

In the age of art blogs like contemporaryartdaily, all of these mechanisms have to be optimized for online distribution. Computer screens are back-lit and therefore the eye is less forgiving.

I can assure you, that all the images you see on Contemporaryartdaily are heavily retouched. For those who are sceptics, I invite you to have a look at the Contemporaryartdaily coverage of the Whitney Biennial in 2014, which the Contemporaryartdaily editors did themselves:

This is — how pictures usually look like, before Photoshop.

Whether the editors of Contemporaryartdaily contemplate it or not, it is NOT ONLY the artist's name and the gallery's reputation that help — in their selection process. My point would be, that it is the whiteness of the wall, that enhances the value of the art piece in front of it. At least for those, who only see the exhibition online – and this is the growing population of art-invested people.

There is another, important factor — that increases the value of an art piece in the contemporary world: It is the statistics within social media:

As much as the digitally-fabricated white wall is supporting the importance of the art piece ----- it also increases the sense of the universal equality of art things.

But what else could be expected from a format that shows all phenomena in the very same setting: ----- on a glowing screen, ----- surrounded by perfect whiteness and: --- -- always competing with unrelated content of other websites.

It is here, where typically – the young – gallery and museum staff are creating additional value, by posting and reposting those images, by holding up networks to art blogs and art magazines. As I said, it is the statistics that are creating the digital “aura” of the art piece in the contemporary world.