

PPP [A]: POST > PARA > PATA> [AUTONOMOUS]

please note:

the following musings do refer primarily to the (social, cultural, aesthetical, historical) field we use to call [art].
this to be said due to the sad fact that from time to time it seems very fashionable for professionals in this field to either pretend not being interested in [art] anyway/anymore or to speak in more general terms, to be able to discuss the history, present conditions, and future of almost everything. the latter is rubbish, and the former is probably the most boring gesture to be encountered at large.

1. post

"post" is latin and means: "after". sorry, no alternative translation available.

hence in case the prefix "post-" is used, automatically the notion time comes into play. before - after. something changed, otherwise it would not make sense to mention it.

post autonomy therefore means: "after autonomy".

any problem with this?

indeed. if there is an "after autonomy", there must have been an autonomy before.

which is clearly not the case - remember, we are talking about art. as it can be all too easily grasped from art history even from a relatively naïve point of view, and - for those who love to think about it - also learned from more advanced [art] theory (see i.e. pierre bourdieu's "les regles d'art"), even in times when the claim for artistic autonomy was really in fashion, it was exactly that: rhetoric.

that art history loved (and to a certain extent still loves) to play with this term does not change the facts.

in other words: we have never been autonomous.

so how much sense does it make to continue this rhetoric game on the next level, now called: post autonomy.

this may depend on personal preferences how you want to spend your time. (btw.: what would you expect from a positive result - a how-to positively embrace your chains?)

however: when it comes to more practical questions, especially those of artistic practices: just forget about it.

2. para

given this, what about a little shift? why not try another prefix to handle our problem. in example, now from greek (but also used in latin), "para". para comes with a whole range of possible directions to proceed. "along with", "in parallel to", "beside" in spatial dimensions, "during" in terms of time, "against" in the sense of "counter-" as well as "beyond (the norm)" on a more metaphorical layer.

hence to speak of "para autonomy" might be a apt concept in case you would like to put critique against the traditional idealization of artistic autonomy. yet, with this we are still in the realms of theoretical debates.

now, what about artistic practice? could "para autonomy" offer more fruitful perspectives than "post autonomy"?

perhaps the way the appendix is used in psychology and psychiatry can give us a hint: to describe symptoms that, mimicking one disorder, are occurring within another disorder, but not so severe as to be considered co-occurring or co-morbid. hence, "para autonomous practice" could be defined as an artistic practice mimicking what normally is perceived as one buying in the idea of "artistic autonomy".

for an example at hand one might think of the work of sherry levine and other artists, some of them - maybe all too hastily - subsumed under the label "appropriation art".

on the other hand side, one might also look at artistic experiments that come to similar results precisely by making use of techniques usually associated with the loss of autonomy. i.e. seance, trance, automatic writing, deliberately diving into visual and/or acoustic noise - practiced in surrealism as well as in (post-)industrial culture.

in sum, whatever direction in understanding "para" we prefer, we find a broad spectrum of possible "para autonomous practices". yet, all of them, or at least those mentioned above, remain related to the phantasm of individual artistic autonomy; a core/center of gravity probably still sucking too much energy.

3. pata

therefore we finally should proceed to test another option. "pata". another prefix beginning with "p" - but this is not the point of course. rather fascinating is that here we have a prefix that does exist and not. perfectly borderline. for it has no history in classic languages, so no wonder it never made it into official dictionaries - neither those devoted to foreign words nor those dedicated to the new creations of institutional languages.

indeed, it was born in the realms of art, on an island consisting of water: in the famous novel "gestes et opinions du docteur faustroll, pataphysicien", written by the french poet alfred jarry in 1898. in high noon times of so called "artistic autonomy", btw.

the prefix has become somewhat autonomous since, inspiring a whole variety of artistic concepts and practices. however, if we try to pre-fix it to autonomy, we do so precisely because of its borderline character.

literally free, yet carrying the association to pataphysics and its methods, both deeply rooted in parody and pastiche. embedding critique against the institutionalized systems of power/state/belief/education without being eager to become an institution of its own.

any examples for an artistic practice that might be called "pata autonomous"?

sure. just think of neoism - by itself the perfect parody of avant-garde isms, but also quite inventive in terms of applied strategies like i.e. art-as-strike, situationist methods and practices of dérive, plagiarism and pranks.

think of artistic communication guerilla activities like i.e. shop-dropping, maniac mimicking, clowning (here not to confused with the street dance recently developed in the slums of l.a.? who knows...).

there is a considerably wide variety of possible practices at hand. however, any "pata autonomous practice" should be quite clear about what is not the golden goal.

be the better politician? save the world? or the art wold at least? well, from the para point of view we'd have to say: we prefer not to.

remember, pataphysics is a science devoted to imaginary solutions. let us learn from this for the practice. art always was and is at its best when buying into the imaginary. this does not mean to wave goodbye to reality, whatever kind of you prefer.

also imaginary solutions may have real ends. wherever you can imagine.

miss.gunst
miss.gunst@gmx.net