Brand-New-Life
Magazin für Kunstkritik

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At Long Last, the Supercommunity

All the World's Futures. The 56th Venice Biennale in the Fall

Barbara Preisig

Venice is pretty during the fall vacation. The weather is mild and the city has returned to its everyday touristic routine. We seize the opportunity and amidst the art we discover the magic word of this year's Biennale: supercommunity. What follows is an acoustic tour of the exhibition and an attempt to circumscribe a new concept of community.

«We are simply stuck together, like a bad group exhibition.» [http://supercommunity.e-flux.com]

Nothing is left anymore of the much-noted jetset that pushed itself through the pavilions at the opening. The Giardini are now populated by Swiss families that are picnicking in the park. Green, algae-like residue is gradually forming around the edges of Pamela Rosenkranz's ‹Pool› (Simulation). Some national pavilions in the city close earlier in the evening. We look in vain for Saâdane Afif's Speakers Corner.

Impossible to ignore, on the other hand, is the blue wooden billboard under the trees of the Giardini. In large letters we read «e-flux journal no. 65». A sloppily taped, partly weather-torn poster bears the title «Supercommunity September 4th, Closing Editorial». Understood as an artistic contribution, e-flux journal released a total of 88 pieces of writing during the Biennale. Every day starting with the opening, a new text was posted on the billboard and at the same time sent out as a newsletter. The articles reached us at such high frequency that all we remember of the supercommunity texts is just a hodgepodge of illustrious names. This excess production is programmatic, as the closing editorial acknowledges: «Supercommunity is now finished. You won't get any more texts delivered to your mailbox. We survived. You survived. Looking back, there is just one question lingering: What is the supercommunity?» These introductory words are followed by seemingly random quotes from the 88 articles. At times poetic, the text doesn't really make any sense — except, perhaps, that is doesn't matter what those 88 pieces of writing intended to say at one point. We, too, ask ourselves: What is the supercommunity? A random accumulation of data; excess of meaning; too much of everything; or simply a nice coinage? One passage is still clear and readable: «The supercommunity does not propose a new form of togetherness. (...) It knows things will not be better when we come together.»

Right behind the billboard, which we leave behind somewhat puzzled, the exhibition Allthe World's Futures is on view in the central pavilion. Art is literally ringing in our ears, when we enter the building. A dense array of several video works awaits us, in cramped black boxes, nested spaces and stairways. Loud and subtle voices spread like a carpet over the exhibition. Seemingly silent, the protagonist of Fatou Kandé Senghor's delicate film Giving Birth moves her lips to the sounds of Christian Boltanski's L'Homme qui tousse. The works are stuck together; due to the apparently intended density they are connected, regardless of whether they care about one another or not. A polyphonic murmur. Too soft and too loud to recognize individual voices. And then we suddenly ask ourselves: Is this the sound of the supercommunity we are hearing just now?

An excerpt from the soundtrack of the 56th Venice Biennale:

Naeem Mohaiemen, Last Man in Dhaka Central (The Young Man Was, Part 3), 2015 / Christian Boltanski, L'Homme qui tousse, 1969 / Fatou Kandé Senghor, Giving Birth, 2015 / Robert Smithson, video related to Dead Tree, 1969/2015 / Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Je veux voir, 2008 (Arena Film Program)

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Barbara Preisig is an art historian and art critic whose research focuses on contemporary artistic practices and their social and political contexts. In exploring translocal, transdisciplinary, and nonacademic ways of writing and thinking, she addresses a range of subjects including artistic research, feminism, institutional studies, and the politics of authorship. Barbara Preisig is co-editor of Brand-New-Life.