

MILIEU

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after the butcher. Exhibition space for contemporary art and social issues

Spittastr. 25, 10317 Berlin

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Opening hours: Saturday, 12–5 pm

and by appointment: ina@after-the-butcher.de

Milieu [mi'ljø:]

French milieu

from: mi- < Latin medius = middle

and lieu < Latin locus = place

What about your milieu? How would you describe it? Which images, words, commodities, animals, things, and information come to mind? How do you feel, how do you move, how do you communicate with and think about your environment? And how does your environment relate to you?

The interesting thing is that a milieu is something other than a fixed context or an inevitable situation. It is an intertwining and allows forming a theory of living relationships. Living beings and milieu are linked to each other and involved in a dynamic of permanent debate leading to reciprocal adaptations and transformations. This dynamism takes place in small and big things, in biological, physical and sociological terms, and it applies as much to a single cell as it does to a movement or an entire society.

There are milieus on which everyone immediately has an opinion. They are covered in the press and discussed in talk shows, for example: The workers' milieu used to vote for the Communist Party, today it votes for the Front National—a tendency that goes beyond the borders of France, as is known. In this context, Didier Eribon writes that people have lost their historical class consciousness. But inequality is more than the criterion of being left behind. There is no milieu that can be consistently defined based on shared interests and goals, independently of time and place, especially against the background of a world of work that is undergoing constant change. The challenge, according to Eribon, therefore consists in taking the step from knowledge to action, in joining heterogeneous battles and enduring the tensions.

Theories of the environment are always also theories of possible worlds. In this sense, the term milieu describes both possibility conditions and permeabilities. It focuses on what is conceivable or inconceivable under specific conditions, thus raising questions as to the perceptibility and representability of the environment. That is indeed reminiscent of art. The view of humans to their environment is thus a view that is itself determined by this environment, it is a corporeally determined view. Milieu, then, describes the relationship between body and environment, the interpenetration of environment and that which is in the environment. Are you aware that you are simultaneously a component and viewer of a state? That sounds pretty fictive and otherworldly! You inhabit the milieu and the milieu inhabits you. Precisely the engagement with this other makes the milieu conceivable, writes Maria Muhle, thus defining the place where the norm of life develops. It is autonomy and heteronomy, determination and agency, tension and complicity, susceptibility and dissolution of boundaries. Complicated conditions and palm trees in Kreuzberg.

Here, our milieu is that of the exhibition. We are interested in the specifications of this exhibition milieu, the actions that enable it and the interrelations it produces. The relationship established between the living being and the environment is like a debate to which the living being brings its own norms of

assessment of situations, in which it dominates the environment and adapts to it, writes Georges Canguilhem. What kind of dynamism unfolds between inside and outside? Where are the boundaries and how do the mutual references of body, material and environment take effect? How are transitions between natural circumstances and artificial ones that mimic a natural process visualized? We observe ourselves in the attempt to create counter-effects, to determine the milieu and temporarily set it in motion. Nice that you can join us!

Berlin, May 2018

Mirjam Thomann and Jenni Tischer

Sources

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