CC: The Akademie der Künste der Welt (Academy of the Arts of the World, ADKDW) envisions itself as a trans-locational organization of artists, researchers and cultural workers rather than an educational institution in the traditional sense. It wants to initiate reflection processes, interventions and collaborations that promote a critical understanding of the arts and rethink the current conditions of cultural production.

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Editorial

Text: Madhusree Dutta, Artistic Director

TIME AND SPACE

2020 is a distinct year, and that is not only because of the unique combination of its digits. In the middle of the year, our perception of both time and space got cracked, and we fell into zones. The diameter of the respective zones, marked by the logic of medical security, varies depending on one's social, economic, national, durational (age) and citizenship status. For someone it is a room, for some it is a dwelling, for others it is a camp; it can be within the neighborhood, city limits, nation-state borders, or any other kind of territorial lines. For someone it is lonely exile, for someone else it is the security of home, for others it is precarity of livelihood or loss of relevance, for some others a violation of rights; some fled, some stayed put, some got trapped – yet for everyone it is vulnerability and uncertainty, though for a very few it is also an opportunity. Time, due to its mutual dependence on space, now sits tentatively on our days. Time in front of a screen, time at the window, time in isolation, times of wakefulness, leisure time, work time, social time, spare time due to joblessness – these are no longer distinct from one another, and often overlap.

This is not just another year, but a phenomenon.

FEAR AND ANGER

Art survives on the public – an entity in a particular space at a particular time with a memory to draw sustenance from and a future to speculate on and struggle for; in short, art needs a constellation in which to anchor itself. Can solitary, cautious, alarmist, distanced individuals be part of an art ecology? Could it be that the overwhelming fear of mortality overrides the assertion of agency and thus blunts the sense of a collective? Are we lonely in our fear but somewhat more social in our anger? To put it another way, does fear make us melancholic whilst anger makes us defiant? Or perhaps fears have different manifestations. Fear for survival calls for collective action and thus it connects people with the others under the same social milieu. But fear of mortality makes us submissive to the system, and thus isolates an individual from her peers. In the former case, the call is to float together, and in the latter it is to save oneself from sinking.

The recent uprisings under Black Lives Matter, right in the middle of this fragile time of corona scare, can be perceived as a pointed example of communal fear for survival overtaking individual fear of mortality and then escalating into a collective action. But Iranian women still subvert the patriarchy, Kashmir still gets crushed, Brazil still resists, Kurdistan still remains under siege, Zimbabwe still gets robbed, environment continues to get severely abused, Romanian wage workers are still flocked for harvesting crops in Germany and Palestine still bleeds – yet not all of them make it to the global news. The already deeply divided world is now fragmenting even more along the lines of 'grievable' and 'ungrievable' lives, as Judith Butler puts it in *Capitalism has its Limits* (Verso, March 2020).

There are recent instances of people who believe they are entitled to be grievable consolidating their power and demanding freedom from corona-related restrictions as their right. The underlying implication is: control (i.e. get rid of) carriers of the virus who belong to other biospheres, other communities, other age groups and so on, but do not interfere with the privileges of the hegemonic people. Medical vulnerability is now the new area for contesting citizenship.

TACTILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In the days of agitprop, manifestos reached the masses via stages, libraries, printing presses, darkrooms, cinema halls etc. – on wheels. Art traveled, propaganda spread, stories of resistance were exchanged, strategies shared, solidarity built… and in all of this, infrastructure and mobility played an important role. Agitprop was never minimalist or agile: it played on scale, volume and replications. It required a kind of infrastructure that only a very motivated state or organized politics could provide.

Art also functioned in opposition to infrastructure, and thus in opposition to institutions, dominant ideologies and the market. Such actions are often grouped together under the generic term 'avant-garde'. By way of a detour from the oft-cited North American and Western European examples, I want to talk about an avant-garde phenomenon in China. Chinese-born British author Xiaolu Guo affectionately recalls certain avant-garde moments in the last decade of the 20th century China as her early inspiration. Performance artists performed nude on top of the Great Wall – not because it made for a fantastic stage (which it certainly did) but because the police were generally slow to reach that spot. Yet in order to challenge institutionalized art, a different way of imagining infrastructure and space was required.

The emergency of the pandemic has ushered in an era of austerity. Both the space and the body that produce goods, art and services are now restricted to the smallest of units, but they are also mapped out, under medical surveillance, in great detail. Wheels, walls and undergrounds are now threatened.

Art practices and cultural initiatives need yet another strategy in the contemporary context of threatened spaces and isolated bodies. This may well be a sign that the time has come not to reach out, as in agitprop, nor to lead ahead, as in the avant-garde, but to stay in the middle, with our ears to the ground: to be 'post-garde'. An occasion to change the rhythm of art productions and intellectual discourses from restless projections to a state of latent stillness – to remain, to persist, to incubate like indigenous knowledge systems, feminine instincts, collective memories, working-class experiences, the tactics of those who have opted out. Like breath control training for singers.

ADKDW's new season opens with an interdisciplinary, multi-chapter project, titled *Ghosts, Traces, Echoes: Works in Shifts*. In response to the current situation, the program is a mixture of analogue and digital events, crisscrossing through the memories of work and related cultural productions within the organized sector towards the end of the 20th century and the anxieties of the emerging precarious labor. The program will unfold in shifts, in layer after layer – echoing the pattern of the industrial production of the yesteryear – from September 2020 to March 2021.

This project is dedicated to Sankofa, a bird popular in Ghanaian mythology, which flies forwards with its head turned backwards to take an egg from its back.