

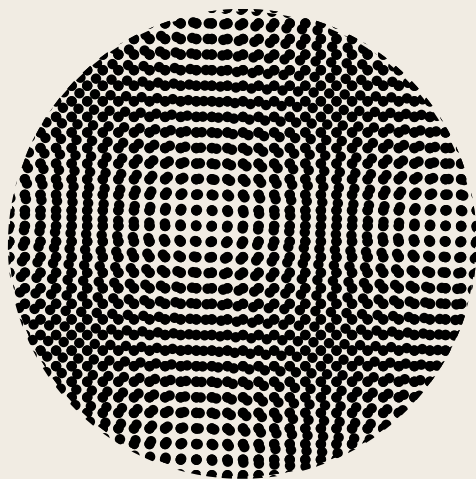
Friday
15 February 2013
7:30 pm
In English

Time and again one hears and reads that we need change, that our goal – also in art – should be to change the status quo. But permanent change is our status quo. To change the status quo we have to change change – to escape from the prison of change. True materialism presupposes the belief that there is no metaphysical or spiritual space that could serve as a repository immune to change and destruction in the material world. Thus, the question arises: what can survive this work of permanent destruction and escape the materialist apocalypse that leaves no image intact because it leaves no soul intact? However, materialism also presupposes the impossibility of total destruction. Something always survives even the most radical historical catastrophe. God can destroy the world without leaving a trace because he created the world out of nothingness. But if God is dead then an act of destruction without a visible trace is impossible. Destruction cannot destroy its own image. And through the act of radical artistic reduction this image of coming destruction can be anticipated here and now – an (anti-) messianic image because it demonstrates that the end of time will never come, that the material forces will never be stopped by any divine, metaphysical power. Death of God means that no image can be infinitely stabilized – but it also means that no image can be totally destroyed.

Boris Groys is Senior Fellow at the IKKM in Weimar, professor of Russian and Slavic studies at the New York University, and senior research fellow at the Karlsruhe University of Art and Design. He is an internationally acclaimed expert on late Soviet postmodern art and literature, as well as on the Russian avant-garde. Groys is a permanent member of the Association internationale des critiques d'art (AICA) and served as the curator and organizer of various international art exhibitions, such as the Russian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011. His recent publications include *The Communist Postscript* (2010); *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (2010); *Going Public* (2010); *An Introduction to Antiphilosophy* (translated from German by David Fernbach, 2012); and *Under Suspicion: A Phenomenology of Media* (2012).

Constituting Wholes

Wholes are said to be more than the sum of their parts. This 'more' contains both a promise and a threat. When different elements – disciplines, methods, cultures, individuals – form a whole, they not only join forces, but also generate effects of synergy and a surplus from which also the parts can benefit. Being part of a whole is a way to acquire meaning and to extend oneself beyond one's limited existence; and having a part in the whole is to have an enlarged agency. But wholes are also more powerful than the sum of their parts. Wholes constitute their parts, determining what is a part and what is apart, what has a part and what is deprived of agency. Becoming a part requires submission and although parts may not pre-exist the whole, there may still be something in the elements that exceeds being a part – even if only the possibility of being part of a different whole. While a desire for being whole or part of a whole seems all-too-natural, organic metaphors, which are often used to think part-whole relationships, have been criticized precisely for naturalizing relations of hierarchy and power. Yet, entirely abandoning the whole in favour of the part(icular) is also problematic. After the disenchantments of the postmodern post-cold-war period and in the face of global crises – be they financial, economic, political, or ecological – the critical need to include a holistic perspective is felt with renewed urgency, as is the concern that the situatedness of any such perspective and the multiple, incommensurable ways of constituting wholes may be forgotten.



Boris Groys

Negative
Totality

The lecture is part of the **ICI Lecture Series Constituting Wholes**, which explores the double, both active and passive, aspect of "Constituting Wholes" within the framework of the multi-disciplinary ICI Research Focus **Complementarity and Wholes Which Are Not One**.