Academy Schloss Solitude
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Academy Schloss Solitude is not an academy similar to the academies we have discussed this morning. It is an academy in the sense of the Renaissance, thus, a place where artists share knowledge, experience and innovation which may spread to other parts of society. The institution was founded fourteen years ago and I am in the lucky position to be its founder.

To begin with, I would like to give a trivial description of what kind of place the academy is. First of all, we are not part of an educational system, we have no teachers, we are not a museum, and we are not directly producing work. So, that is different from most cultural institutions. Academy Schloss Solitude is a residential art center, with 45 free studios hosting artists for six to eighteen months. The program is flexible enough to extend the stay of the people invited. We provide our young, professional artists - they are between thirty and forty years old - with grants of 1000 euro per month and we support projects they realize during their stay with us. Among the landscape of residential art centers in Europe, we are probably the only one with its own building, its own budget, and its own promotion and selection system.

Let’s say a few words about the selection system, which distinguishes our academy from other art institutions. Generally, we have only one jury member for each field every year. The art fields represented in Solitude are literature, music and sound, visual art, theater and performing arts, architecture and urbanism, design and visual communication, new media, video and film, and all the metadisciplines belonging to them. So, we consider the academy a construct of seven disciplines where each discipline has one jury member deciding whom to select while attaching their good name to the artists chosen. Right now, the artists in Solitude have been selected by Corine Disirens, the Swiss curator. Next year Hans Ulrich Obrist and Federico Nicolao will make the selection for literature, Carsten Höller and Akiko Miyake will make the selection for visual arts.

For several months now, we have begun a new program with interdisciplinary work including scientists from all the disciplines and young managers. If this program turns out to be a success, we will open the house as well for young representatives of NGO’s, trade unions and political parties. So, there is a real opportunity for what I call an elite. To me an elite is connected with people who accept to take responsibility in society. As you are probably aware, there is not only a crisis of public
space, but also a crisis of public responsibility of state: people no longer want to be part of the elite. This poses a major problem for cultural institutions as well as how they will function within the frame of the public state and the public organization.

After fourteen years of activities, we have housed more than 600 artists. The main rule of Solitude is that the time artists spend in Solitude belongs to them, not to the institution. What the artists do with that time is think, talk, and reflect, so it is a normal life albeit with better conditions for research. In Solitude, we have neither obligations of result nor of production, although at some point the people involved in the program like to participate in a public event or to be visible to an audience. I believe that, on the one hand, artistic research should not be the victim of the pressure of production, but, on the other hand, artistic research also needs an audience to recognize its own existence. The time of research cannot be compressed like the time of production: the time of research is undefined. That is why the stays of artists in Solitude lie between six and eighteen months depending on the research and the decision of the jury.

It is difficult to have politicians and public administrators accept that public events and audience statistics are not the main purpose of a cultural institution. To me, reflection on the relationship between artistic research and cultural institution is necessary in order to remind oneself that cultural institutions are more than sites of cultural production. Cultural institutions are the very places in society where reflection and critique of society are possible. A public institution chooses between cultural production and social critique, between institutional power and public power. That is the game we have to deal with and that is also the tension which makes art possible. When Academy Schloss Solitude was established in 1990, the former prime minister of Baden-Würtenberg wanted to create a research institute for young artists comparable to the Max Planck Institut. That was quite a naive idea although he thought that creativity would be important in a leisure society, and that well-educated artists could play a role in this. At least we got the space to start working. We transformed the academy’s social task for Baden-Würtenberg and now define it as follows: Academy Schloss Solitude is the passage through which this part of Germany will be linked to the best elements of the artistic scene worldwide. That is an offer of to not lose contact to what is happening in the world.

For a couple of years, terms like research and laboratory have been commonly used to describe the development of contemporary art and the space where it all takes place. I myself favor the term “atelier” to laboratory. L’atelier de Courbet, as you know, is a place of production, of meeting, of reflection on the most progressive tendencies of society. I am