

Artistic mandate on the prognosis of the future - a plea for the performance of prognosis

Abstract by Sibylle Peters

In the first year of the past century the scholar G. Tarde published an article in the *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale* about the counterpart of tardiness. The text was titled "L'Action des Faits Future", which translated is "The effect of future facts", and outlined a thought experiment which posed the following question: What would it be like if causality had two directions, if some things could only be understood correctly if recognised as caused by a future fact? Maybe this text brings to light the considerations which have had a crucial role to play in physics in this subsequent century. But at the same time this thought experiment by G. Tarde also anticipates a societal phenomenon whose full seminal influence has evolved today, a century later: Today many things appear as caused by future facts. Whatever wants to stand its ground at the present time must be staged as an implementation of a future fact. How the current value and consequently the existence of a venture is measured, depends on its prognoses for the future; and this also applies to institutions, people, social constellations, discourse etc.: they are present as long as they are able to take advantage of a claimed future potential. In the course of this development the future alters its character significantly: it is no longer, or is now only in the second instance, a clear area of possibility which opens up the present to change. Since it is so fundamentally involved in the constitution of the present, the future appears much more as a factor which restricts the spectrum of possibilities effectively becoming an inherent necessity. Making the future accessible as potential has become an inescapable imperative to exist in the present.

What consequences does this change in 'character' of the future have for the future reference of art? For two to three hundred years (one could say that Schiller's poem "Die Künstler" [*The Artist*] was the point in time where this understanding became dominant), art was ahead of its time, was seen as anticipation of the future in the sense of what is possible, what is better, what is not yet quite visible, and was therefore connected with concepts such as utopia and avant-garde. The affinity of this being ahead and the need for innovation in economic systems is not new. Nevertheless, the temporal state of art today seems more than ever before to be embodied in a qualitatively changed relationship to the economy. For instance, since the start of the 1990s the art market has exploded to such an extent that large state institutions can no longer keep up with the acquisition of new works. In this change in market leadership art is now immediately regarded as an investment in a future, which is no longer thought of in

historical or political terms, but rather in intrinsically economic terms. In the same train of thought, the artist is stylised as the archetypal self-employed person par excellence, whereupon the posited role model of artistic self-responsibility is completely and fundamentally aimed at the now ubiquitous and therein simultaneously apolitical mode of 'being ahead of time'. It is hardly any wonder then that in view of these contexts in the past few years numerous attempts to reactivate the utopian moment of artistic activities have been ineffective. A simple return to that situation where artistic 'being ahead of time' was still effective, in a genuinely political way, cannot be successful, if this mode has already become an economic state of the art.

In the quest for alternatives, for other artistic/cultural forms of the reference to the future, one could also say: looking for another use of time, the project "Prognoses on movements" suggests turning prognoses into a form of cultural/artistic production. There are questions arising from this project about which my article will go into in detail:

What could be the specific form of an artistic mandate to forecasting the future in the form of prognoses? How does it differ from the established mandate of natural and social sciences, the economy or, on the other side, from the self-proclaimed commercial oracle? Which methods could be associated with the artistic and cultural theoretical production of prognoses?

Foucault wrote in "The order of discourse ": "True discourse [...] was discourse which has been announced by the authority on it, in accordance to the necessary ritual; it was the discourse of law and each was allocated its part; it was the discourse, which in heralding the future not only predicted what would happen, but also contributed to its realization, [...] one day the truth moved away from ritualised, effective and justified act of declaration and to the declaration as such: its sense, its form, its present, its referential reference. A division was established between Hesiod and Plato which separated true and false discourse ... This historical demarcation has doubtless given our will to know its general form."

Where this desire for knowledge now reverts to prediction, prognoses are also considered fundamentally as statements which are true or false, whereby this can of course only be verified in the future. However, complications always arose from this approach, since the characteristic performative effect of prognoses, and in the extreme, the self-fulfilling prophecy, cannot be adequately considered from this perspective. It seems secondary, indeed,

with regard to the examination of the statement as a sort of trick, a manipulation, which limits the referential status of prognosis. Against this backdrop it could be suggested, that an artistic mandate to the prognosis of the future has to find a more open and productive way to deal with the performative character of the prognosis.

This has consequences for the positioning of such a mandate in relation to the difference upon which the consideration of prognoses has basically been oriented since Plato, namely the difference between scientific and non-scientific, popular forms of future prognoses. The understanding of prognosis as an accurate or inaccurate assessment of future facts constitutes this difference: scientific forms of prognosis can thereby be approximately defined, that they are systematically confounded by the eventual falsity of their statements and with regard to the aim to specify true statements, are able to be optimised; whereas occult and also popular stated forms of the prognosis are unaware of this type of irritation. In view of this carefree fallibility, prognoses of the latter type have often been classified as performances in a pejorative sense – as pure show. However, the relevant oracle-practices themselves do not follow this interpretation, i.e. do not just affirm primarily their performance character in one way or the other. On the contrary it is actually an important part of their self-presentation to make plausible on which hidden grounds they are able and authorised to make true statements about the world. Even if this self-legitimation serves in the first instance to engender so much respectability that a play of the construction of meaning can be staged and started, that in many respects – not least commercial – will be productive.

In regard to the performative character of the prognosis the artistic way to do forecasts would probably have to question, to circumvent or undermine this classical difference between scientific and popular prognosis. In this process, the affiliation of the popular play to the construction of meaning at first sight seems to be closer: to assess this play in the sense of its performance is to understand prognoses quite generally as markers, which create complexity, in so far as they – independent of the prognostic competence – create feedback that causes a diminution of contingency and significance. In the horizon of prognoses it can be argued in view of the otherwise contingent events, to what extent they deviate from prognosis and why; meanings and analysis are established. Evidently this play of prognosis is closer to those processes which constitute the reception of art. In one as in the other case, here an 'as if' (it is/ will become true) is in play, that initiates the play as such.

However, this affinity also refers to a crucial problem, as, does a meeting of artistic means with prognoses then not necessarily imply exactly this: underlining the 'as if'? And does this explication then not inevitably disconnect the prognosis from its real reference, turning it into a void game that is ultimately is nothing more than fiction?

When in the popular prognosis the implicit 'as if', is explained by the use of an artistic agenda, it needs a counterbalance for the binding of prognosis to the real, a loan therefore contrariwise to the scientific prognosis, which is irritated by the truth or falsity of its statements, in order in the course of this irritation to make the prognosis to a scenario of gaining knowledge, research. However, in the course of this loan, irritability and correctability must be conferred: from the level of the statement in the sense of the true or the false reference to the level of the performance. The irritability of scientific prognosis exists between the statement and its referential content, which can prove to be applicable or inapplicable. Conclusions can be drawn from the fact of the arrival or non-arrival of a prognosis and can help to optimise the procedure of prognosis creation. This irritability, which is constitutive for scientific prognosis (even there where it is perhaps not always stated: namely in experimental science), because the double-sided character of prognosis being a product and an instrument of gaining knowledge depends on it, has necessarily to neglect and suppress the performative effects of prognosis to remain stable as a relation. In contrast an almost inverted irritability is conceivable, which is based on the relation between the procedures, creating the prognosis as such and the processes, which are to be generated from the prognosis.

Understanding the prognosis of the future as performance and not only analysing it in this context, but also operating in the sense of an artistic mandate, cannot lead back to a pure performance of a truth-ritual and cannot be reduced to the play of the production of meaning in the sense of an explicit 'as if'. It can however cling to the concept of a critical self-reference in claiming the relationship between the performance of the prognosis production and the performance of the prognosis execution as a sphere of a completely own competence; a competence of prognosis which is derived genuinely from the performance.