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Thinking Through Subversion in the Time of Its Impossibility. Moving Between Art Theory and Art Practice.

Subversion – a term with many definitions: for example, one can define it as an overthrowing or undermining action but also as a practice of shifting hegemonic meanings which may cause its transformation. What about subversion as a practice in art? Many contemporary theoreticians claim that subversion has reached the time of its impossibility in today's hyper-capitalistic societies, which constantly subvert themselves and integrate subversive elements into their commodity cultures. Is subversion thus also impossible in contemporary art? Has it ever been possible? These days artists of any art form very rarely communicate the intention to produce subversive art. My paper will discuss some of the possible reasons for the recent "subversion-apathy". I claim that when writing and speaking about subversion in art, one has to differentiate between two different forms of subversion: subversion as an intentional artistic practice by artists, and subversion as a practice of reception, which means the attribution of subversive potential to art by art scholars and art critics. In this lecture, these two different forms will be illustrated by examples from art theory (where the term subversive is often used by art scholars and art critics as a positively connotated label), and art practice in different artistic disciplines, especially artistic body-representations (in photography, performance-art and contemporary dance). Ultimately this lecture asks: Can subversion (still) have political potential for contemporary art and inspire challenges of normative perception?