

## **Doing Language: Narratives from an Activists' World in the Austrian Art World of the 1990s**

**The Art Activism of WochenKlausur, Martin Krenn, Oliver Ressler and maiz**

**Eva Fotiadi**

### **Editing and peer review managed by:**

Rudi Ekkart, Netherlands Institute for Art History, Den Haag / Regina Wenninger, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München

### **Reviewers:**

Eva Kernbauer / Second reviewer remains anonymous by request

### **Abstract**

The article refers to the political art scene in Austria during the 1990s and early 2000s. Participatory art-activism projects by the group WochenKlausur and by Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler are juxtaposed to artistic work used for political activism by the women migrants' organization maiz. All case-studies engage with issues of immigration in Austria, touching also upon official immigration policies and practices in the European Union after 1989. In the case studies the artists transfer political activism practices (giving people a voice) to art practices by means of participatory, public art projects, where, for instance, migrants are interviewed. In reverse, the activists transfer artistic practices (e.g., performance) to their political activism practices.

### **Contents**

Introduction

The Austrian Political Art Scene in the 1990s

WochenKlausur

Martin Krenn & Oliver Ressler

Maiz (Autonomous Center of and for Migrant Women)

From Politics to Art

The Articulation of Participation

### **Introduction**

[1] After the decade of the 1980s, during which the interest in social or political interventions was flagging on the Western-European art scene, the next decade saw a general turn towards engagement and activism. Brooded among artistic circles, art institutions and new social and political movements, hybrid practices of artistic and cultural activism emerged. Their focus was on social and political issues of the day. Often they were linked to political and socio-economic developments following the 1989 fall of the Berlin wall: the opening of East European borders to the West, the introduction of capitalism to national contexts previously under communism, the mobility of people and capital that followed.

[2] Around 2000 interest in engaged art practices, often with a predilection for collaborative or participatory working formats, had reached a culminating point. Such formats did not only symbolically subvert the authority of the One author, the charismatic artist also favored by the art market, in addition they also made things possible practically. Artists worked closely with activists' campaigns, with social and political NGOs, local authorities, individual specialists such as sociologists and political theorists

and, last but not least, with groups of people directly affected by the issues at stake. In short, participatory and collaborative methods made it possible for artists to directly enter the discourses, developments and people related to the issues they were interested in.

[3] There are numerous issues one can discuss concerning this phenomenon of combining activist and/or social and political work practices with artistic practices.<sup>1</sup> During the 1990s the debate in Europe turned first to the United States. There, the conservative 1980s Reagan administration had already earlier triggered off oppositional practices and discourses, including art-activism. Particularly the ideas and projects that Nina Felchlin characterized as 'the spirit of art as activism,' Arlen Raven as 'art in the public interest' and Suzanne Lacy as 'new genre public art' were of interest for the early 1990s socio-politically engaged artists in Europe, who strove for the participation of disenfranchised groups as a form of empowerment experimented with, or facilitated by means of, art.<sup>2</sup> Characteristic in US art-activism as represented by the aforementioned authors is that emphasis was laid on the artists' sociopolitical agenda and ideology. Issues of form and aesthetics were often seen with a suspicion inherited from critics of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American formalism, while participation was generally regarded as positive. This approach was questioned when the engaged art discourse expanded in Europe around the late 1990s and through writings of Nicolas Bourriaud, Jacques Rancière and others.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere<sup>4</sup> I have outlined in more detail many of the topics that surfaced in the discourse of engaged, participatory art in Europe since the 1990s. My concerns in this article lie specifically with the *narrations* of participatory art activism, an issue not much handled in the existing art literature. This neglect is somewhat surprising, considering that the process-based and thus ephemeral nature of participatory art practices renders them communicable through later narrations. Here I am concerned with the articulation of the narrations of projects and practices, narrations that transfer participatory activism to verbal, visual or other narrative forms.

---

<sup>1</sup> Here I follow the rough distinction between "activist" art and "political" art made by Lucy Lippard: "Although 'political' and 'activist' artists are often the same people, 'political' art tends to be socially *concerned* and 'activist' art tends to be socially *involved*... The former's work is a commentary or analysis, while the latter's art works *within* its context, *with* its audience." Lucy Lippard, "Trojan horses: Activist art and power," in: *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis, New York 1984, 341-358. However the work of Krenn, Ressler and the organization maiz demonstrate how blurry the boundaries are.

<sup>2</sup> Arlene Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest*, Ann Arbor 1989; Nina Felshin, ed., *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, Seattle 1995; Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Seattle 1995.

<sup>3</sup> For this shift see also Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, London 2012, 18. Bishop calls it "a 'paradigm [put] under pressure largely through the writings of Rancière." To my understanding, Bourriaud's concept of 'relational aesthetics' played earlier a crucial role in bringing aesthetics to the center of discussions, regardless whether his approach was heavily criticized.

<sup>4</sup> Eva Fotiadi, *The Game of Participation in Art and the Public Sphere*, Maastricht 2011, 1-15.

[4] Thematically the focus is on art activism that dealt with immigration into the EU during the 1990s and the early 2000s. The selected case studies are from Austria: two projects on migration by the artists' group WochenKlausur, one collaborative project by artists Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler and narrations of the artistic output of maiz, a migrant women activists organization ("Autonomes Zentrum von und für Migrantinnen"). To my understanding, the artists' groups (WochenKlausur, Krenn and Ressler) transfer political practices to art activism practices, whereas the women activists (maiz) transfer artistic practices to their political activism practices. Thus a movement back and forth between political choices informing aesthetic choices and the other way round, constantly takes place. This movement is expressed *in*, as well as *by means of*, the narrations of activist art projects and practices. By which I mean that the narrations operate in terms of their *content* (e.g., articulated intentions, actions) and *form* (e.g., the articulation of intentions, of actions). Two central analytical questions in this article refer, first, to the constitution of the subject of the narration (narrating subject) and *in* the narration (narrated subject). For the theme in question, migration, the subject at stake is the migrant as subject. The second question refers to whether and how in these narrations power structures (socio-economic, political) that lead to the marginalization of migrants in European societies – and, consequently, to the attention of activists – are eventually challenged or confirmed. In dealing with the above questions I will refer not so much to art theorists as, occasionally, to Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak for their approaches regarding the constitution of subjects in relation to power and language, as well as the performativity of speech.

[5] Art-activism projects on migration, the question of the use of language and the selection of case-studies of art-activism specifically from Austria are not randomly combined issues. Especially since the early 1990s, when various EU countries introduced very strict immigrations laws, the migration discourse evolved to an important extent into a battle over definitions.<sup>5</sup> This has been manifested on many occasions. For instance, for non-EU citizens to obtain papers (residence permit, working permit, etc.) they needed to be recognized as "asylum seekers" or "refugees." The status definition of one's identity

---

<sup>5</sup> While Western Europe was already affected by global migration, stricter regulations were introduced especially after the opening of East Europe's borders in 1989. The stricter laws affected also people who had been living in Western European countries already for many years, including second generation migrants. For immigration laws in Austria see LEFÖ (Lateinamerikanische Emigrierte Frauen in Österreich), "Rechtliche Situation der Migrantinnen," in: *Vor der Information* 7/8 (1998), special issue *Staatsarchitektur*, ed. Gabriele Marth and Jo Schmeiser, 130-149; Karin König, "Das Österreichische Migrationsregime von 1945 bis heute," in: *ibid.*, 150-161. For the case of Germany see, e.g., Klaus J. Bade and Jochen Oltmer, "Einwanderung in Deutschland seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," in: *Projekt Migration*, ed. Kölnischer Kunstverein, Köln 2005, 72-81. For the case of France see, e.g., Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality. The Migrant as Guest*, Stanford 2001, 1-22. Further, see also "Erklärung der Gesellschaft für Legalisierung. Wir sind unter Euch: Recht auf Legalisierung," in: *Allianzenbildung. Zwischen Kunst und Antirassismusbearbeitung: Annäherungen, Überschneidungen, Strategien, Reflexion*, ed. Ljubomir Bratic, Daniela Koweindl, Ula Schneider, Wien 2004, 42-43, and "Legalisierung für alle! Forderung und Diskussion im Living Room-Soho," in: *ibid.*, 44-48.

as foreigner became the A-Z prerequisite for one's definition as an "illegal" or "legal" person within the so-called Fortress Europe. On the one hand, as illegal one would be persecuted and deported or detained, regardless whether one had any criminal record or not. On the other, obtaining the wished-for definition of being a "legal" – thus accepted, thus acceptable – foreigner, meant that existence within the EU was permitted on the condition of remaining *by definition* a foreigner, before society, authorities and the law.

[6] But even before receiving one's status definition, applying for papers in the first place presupposed that one would have information and linguistic access to the host country's laws and application procedures. And that, despite the fact that a migration law in some countries officially proscribed language lessons for detained "illegal immigrants." Thus in terms of political rights, but also literally, people were rendered speech-less in the political and juridical battles over the definition of their identity and their right to speak.

[7] The prominence of the battle over definitions and the use of language was manifest in the names of the French movement of the *sans-papiers* (people without papers) and the German campaign *Kein Mensch ist illegal* (No one is illegal).<sup>6</sup> The names of both reveal the importance of the problem of language for immigrants: through the definitions of immigration laws and further also through propaganda by Western governments and media, people without papers became illegalized people, often regarded by EU citizens and treated by EU authorities as equivalent to criminals.

[8] In the case studies of this article, issues of language and interpretation are mentioned in WochenKlausur's project *Eine konkrete Intervention zur Schubhaft* (*Intervention in a deportation detention center*), and directly thematized in Ressler and Krenn's project *Border Crossing Services*. WochenKlausur touches upon connotations of the term "Schubhaft," which means detention pending deportation. Featuring the word "Haft," that means "arrest," the term "Schubhaft" brings to mind police persecution and imprisonment. Thus both in people's consciousness, but also in some detention centers, people without papers were equated with criminals, despite only small numbers of them having criminal records. Krenn and Ressler target the contingency of German terms used to describe people who bring migrants illegally over the borders: "The goal of the project *Border Crossing Services* (*Dienstleistung: Fluchthilfe*) is to redefine and highlight the positive aspects of terms such as 'smuggler' or 'trafficker' which have been given a negative connotation through the dominant medial discourse."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Wherever German titles of projects, citations, etc. are published in English translations by their authors, I adapt the English translations. All other translations are mine. Longer quotes are translated in footnotes.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.martinkrenn.net/fluchthilfe/english/Projekttext.htm> or <http://www.ressler.at/fluchthilfe/english/Projekttext.htm> (last accessed 20 November 2012; unless otherwise indicated, all web addresses referred to in this article were last accessed on 20 November 2012).

[9] A probably subjective observation I made was that the language used in mixed art-activism discourses in Austria was stronger, more literal, direct and concrete than elsewhere in Western Europe. This is reflected already in the titles of projects. WochenKlausur has actually been changing the titles of the projects, according to the impact that the artists wished for their linguistic articulations to have on their audiences. For instance, at first they emphatically used the motto "concrete intervention" to communicate direct action. As the term "intervention" was over-used in the 1990s art world, and therefore it soon sounded banal rather than provoking, today WochenKlausur has completely removed it from all (old and new) project titles on its website.<sup>8</sup> Reading through titles of WochenKlausur's and Krenn and Ressler's projects, one is often addressed with very direct and literal statements: *Medical care for homeless people*, *Shelter for drug-addicted women*, *Initiatives for unemployed people* (WochenKlausur), *Institutional Racisms* (Krenn and Ressler), *Anti-Genes Worlds. Oppositions to Genetic Engineering* (Ressler), *Power and Obedience – School Instructs* (Krenn). In these titles, big and controversial issues such as homelessness, drug addiction and institutional racism are directly thematized. Particularly in WochenKlausur's titles, there is an implication of something socially good (e.g. medical care, shelter) being done by the artists for some socially weak group of people (e.g. homeless people, drug-addicted women). While in titles of Krenn and Ressler's projects there is a sense of oppositionality or resistance to power structures. In both cases, the titles seem to be one step before defining binary relations of justice-injustice, right-wrong, weak-strong.

[10] Research following the above initial observations showed that collectivity, participation, collaboration and, indeed, the question of language were concerns expressed within the Austrian engaged and activist art scene.<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I will start with a brief overview of the Austrian political art-activism scene in the 1990s and early 2000s, followed by descriptions of the projects and practices of WochenKlausur, Martin Krenn/Oliver Ressler and maiz. Afterwards I will move to the analysis of the narrations of projects, the constitution there of subjects and their relations to power structures. Most definitely, there are numerous relevant and important issues concerning these extremely polymorphous projects, such as public space, performativity, legacies of the 1960s and 1970s political art, the transformation of artists' work to service provision in the 1990s and so on. To address them all would exceed the scope of this article.

<top>

---

<sup>8</sup> Martine Reuter (WochenKlausur member), Interview by the author, tape recording, Vienna, 25 October 2004; Zinggl, Interview by the author, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Helmut Draxler, "Über jemand reden. Ein Gespräch mit Hito Steyerl," in: *springer* III, 2 (1997), 34-38; Schmeiser, "Editorial – Staatsarchitektur," in: Marth and Schmeiser, *Staatsarchitektur*; "Einführung," in: *Dürfen Die Das? Kunst als sozialer Raum*, ed. Stella Rollig and Eva Sturm, Wien 2002, 13-25; Hito Steyerl, "The articulation of protest," in: *From Tomorrow On. Art, Activism, Technology and the Future of Independent Media*, compiled by Will Bradley, Manchester 2005, 26-35.

## The Austrian Political Art Scene in the 1990s

[11] When in 1993 WochenKlausur and in 1994-95 Krenn and Ressler appeared on the Austrian contemporary art scene, they were not the only ones concerned with socio-political issues and in search of new practices of collectivity and engagement, often at the borders between art and activism. One could name more art producers, even if they only comprised a segment of the scene.

[12] Since the theme in focus is here immigration, one could start with Lisl Ponger for her project *Fremdes Wien* in 1992. This project consisted of a book and a series of photographs for exhibition. It dealt with the invisibility of migrant communities in Vienna. Migrants were already discussed as a "problem" in the Austrian media, but they were constantly talked about, rarely talking themselves.<sup>10</sup> The same year the artists' collective Klub Zwei was formed (Simone Bader, Jo Schmeiser). They have been working at the borders of art, film, new media and theory with a socio-political thematology.<sup>11</sup> In art works such as *Willkommen in Wien* (video, 1992) and publications, such as *Staatsarchitektur* (special issue of the journal *Vor der Information*, 1998), they have elaborated on questions of the representation of migrants and of racism. A further example is the artists' group gangart. They have been working on related themes by means of performance, video installations, architecture interventions and curating.<sup>12</sup>

[13] In 1994, Lukas Pusch installed in public space a photographic portraits series of 36 members of the Austrian parliament and government. Over the photos a text was superimposed reading: "Wir haben es gesetzlich ermöglicht, J. Jafarzadeh zu verhaften und abzuschicken! (Im Iran droht ihm die Hinrichtung.)" Below in smaller letters: "Danke für ihr Vertrauen."<sup>13</sup> Pusch re-appropriated the aesthetics of election campaign posters, with which politicians advertised the public's trust towards them.

[14] The phenomenon of art turning political during the 1990s was broadly evident in the entire German-speaking world.<sup>14</sup> This is not the place to expand on German or Swiss

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.lislponger.com>. Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler, Interview by the author, tape recording, Vienna, October 26, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.klubzwei.at>. See also Christian Kravagna, "Willkommen in Wien. Servus in Österreich. Über einige Beziehungen zwischen Kunst und Politik," in: *Du* 1 (1995).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.gangart.org>.

<sup>13</sup> "We made it legally possible to arrest and deport J. Jafarzadeh! (In Iran he is threatened with execution)." "Thank you for your trust." (My translations) The project was originally planned by Pusch in early 1994 as a "Plakataktion," but lacked adequate funding. The realized version took the form of the photographic presentation in public space described here in the main text. Kravagna, "Willkommen in Wien."

<sup>14</sup> For instance see Holger Kube Ventura, *Politische Kunst Begriffe in den 1990er Jahren im Deutschsprachigen Raum*, Wien 2002. Here I will limit myself to some examples from the German engaged art scene that were mentioned as influential for the Austrian scene in interviews I made for this study. For instance, BüroBert in Germany and their edited volume *Copyshop: Kunstpraxis & Politische Öffentlichkeit*, Berlin and Amsterdam 1993. See also Marius Babias, "Mit Theorie hat man die Praxis noch nicht in der Tasche," in: *Kunstbulletin*, May 1994, 27-31. The so-called "Frey Klasse," a self-organized program of studies at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, initiated by students. Similar "free classes" had appeared in German academies as well. The Viennese Freie



artists, only the group Schleuser.net is particularly interesting. In their own words, Schleuser.net is "a lobby organization for commercial enterprises active in the market segment of undocumented cross-border traffic in people. Schleuser.net was set up in 1998 – initially as schlepper.org – to [...] work on improving the image of the people known as traffickers and smugglers."<sup>15</sup> The coincidence with the concept of *Border Crossing Services* is remarkable. Schleuser.net have also used the example of the positive connotations of "Fluchthelfer" in the BRD (Federal Republic of Germany) before 1989, versus the negative ones of "trafficker" and "smuggler" after 1989. They have developed projects in different directions to Krenn and Ressler's aforementioned project in 2001. Yet the striking conceptual coincidence is indicative of the emphasis on migration activism in the German-speaking political art field.<sup>16</sup>

[15] Something interesting for an external observer especially about the output of the politically engaged Austrian art scene is the quantity of text produced, whether printed or published online. This tendency becomes more obvious from the late 1990s onwards, when the internet became a broadly accessible platform and tool for the presentation, networking and publicity of some significant organizations and initiatives. One could name here the Public Netbase (Institute for New Culture Technologies), basis wien, IG Kultur Österreich, and, indeed, the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp).<sup>17</sup> Their output varied from online platforms, web and printed publications, research projects, conferences in Austria and abroad, to involvement in art projects production. They played an important role for the politically engaged art scene by conceiving and trying out new forms of (self-)organization, collectivity, networking, production, communication and critique of political art.

[16] At the end of the 1990s – early 2000 the interest in collective artistic and cultural projects dealing with migration and racisms culminated. One could mention further examples such as the projects of the temporary, project-based formations of Dezentrale

---

Klasse was supported by Wolfgang Zinggl, teacher there and around that time also Federal Curator. Ute Meta Bauer was later involved. Zinggl, Interview by the author; Eva Dertschei, Carlos Toledo and Petja Dimitrova (members of Dezentrale Medien), Interview by the author, tape recording, Vienna, 28 October 2004; Susanne Habitzel, *Das Bundeskuratorenmodell und die staatliche Kulturpolitik Österreichs in den 90er Jahren* (Universität für angewandte Kunst, Lehrkanzel für Kunstgeschichte), <http://susanne-habitzel.at/Titel.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Farida Heuck, Ralf Homann and Manuela Unverdorben, "Our goal is mobility: X- The federal trade association Schleppen & Schleusen," in: Johanna Billing et al., eds., *Taking the matter into Common Hands*, London 2007, 97-101, here 97. See also Schleuser.net, "Mobilität ist unser Ziel: Was ist zu tun?," in: Bratic, Koweindl, Schneider, *Allianzenbildung*, 87-90.

<sup>16</sup> Probably the largest mixed cultural, artistic, research and discursive project on migration in Germany was *Projekt Migration*, supported by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes, 2002-06. See *Projekt Migration*, ed. Kölnischer Kunstverein, Köln 2005.

<sup>17</sup> <http://netbase.org/t0/intro>; <http://www.basis-wien.at>; <http://www.igkultur.at>; <http://eipcp.net>. E.g., Krenn's project *City Views* and Ressler's project *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* are connected to the activities of republicart, a project by eipcp.

Kunst (1999-2000) and Dezentrale Medien (2003), as well as projects in the frame of the Soho in Ottakring festival in Vienna, established in 1999.<sup>18</sup>

[17] The national parliamentary elections of October 2000 gave the nationalist FPÖ party of Jörg Haider an impressive 27%. During the months right after, people from the cultural field engaged in direct political action protesting against official policies of xenophobia and racism, for instance, by means of the so-called 'Thursday demonstration' that continued weekly for months after the elections. However, the most provocative, intensively press-covered, and in the long run probably also the most remembered project was Christoph Schlingensief's *Bitte liebt Österreich*. Schlingensief set up a Big-Brother show hosted in containers installed in front of Vienna's Staatsoper and including twelve asylum seekers. One of them was every week expelled from Austria after audience voting. Contrary to the activist-demonstrators expression of their anti-xenophobic positions, Schlingensief acted in reverse by adapting a strategy of over-identifying with xenophobia.<sup>19</sup>

[18] Xenophobic and racist policies had been promoted by the extreme right already for years.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to refer here to a view expressed by art critic Christian Kravagna back in 1995. According to Kravagna, the problems of foreigners in Austria, of refugees' rights to asylum, of (il)legal refugee status – the entire "Ausländerfrage" – was kept at the center of internal political discourses from the summer of 1993. That is, since the government had tightened the Austrian immigration laws. While these issues had preoccupied political life in most Western European countries since 1989, Kravagna maintained that the severe immigration measures in Austria primarily served agendas of internal political balances. The governing parties' coalitions saw Haider's rising popularity as a threat. In responding they let themselves be dragged into more extreme right positions and policies in order to stop voters from leaking to Haider.

[19] What one could infer from Kravagna's point is that for all the sincere engagement of art and cultural producers with anti-racist and migration issues, they were partly trapped in a vicious circle. Any public attention they could attract to those matters could unwittingly fuel a debate triggered and sustained by political opportunism, for which the "Ausländerfrage" was exploited. Eventually, if artists consciously addressed that aspect

---

<sup>18</sup> Dertschei, Toledo, Dimitrova, Interview by the author, 28 October 2004. Eva Dertschei and Ulrike Müller were also in WochenKlausur's team for the 1996 Salzburg project. See also <http://www.sohoinottakring.at>.

<sup>19</sup> See "Ausländer raus – Schlingensiefs Container," film, directed by Paul Poet, 2002; BAVO (Gideon Boie, Matthias Pauwels), *Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-Identification*, Rotterdam 2007, 32-35.

<sup>20</sup> The most known campaign was *get to attack*. In the context of reactions to the Austrian election results, see, Martin Krenn's project *Demonstrate!*, 2000. For a discussion of political resistance in a cultural context see, e.g., Meike Schmidt-Gleim für get to attack, "Get to attack now! Die Demonstration der Demokratie," in: *springerin* V, 4 (1999), 34-37; Christian Kravagna, "Österreichische (Anti-)Rassismen 1999-2004. Anmerkungen zum agitatorischen Schreiben," in: *Erlauf erinnert sich ... / Erlauf remembers ...*, ed. Hedwig Saxenhuber, Frankfurt am Main 2004.



too, the discourse could anyway lean foremost towards the problems of Austrians, rather than of foreigners.

[20] The 1990s had also seen an increasing activity from social and/or political activist initiatives and NGOs, old and new. Cultural programs and cooperations with artists constituted an ever more important part of the activities of many of them. For instance, WochenKlausur often turned to more or less broadly accepted social, humanitarian or Christian organizations (e.g. Caritas, Hoffnung Konkret). Krenn and Ressler sought their contacts mostly in self-organized and/or leftist initiatives, in some of which migrants played a central role, as for example in maiz.

[<top>](#)

### **WochenKlausur**

[21] The beginning of the 1990s seem to have left some people on the contemporary art scene of Vienna with a sense that what was presented as new, young and contemporary in exhibitions showed symptoms of conservatism, deadlock and a detachment from the social and political reality.<sup>21</sup> This triggered the art historian and curator Wolfgang Zinggl to introduce a whole new approach with a project described as *11 Wochen Klausur (11 weeks enclosure)* in the biennial exhibition "Young Szene Wien" in 1993.<sup>22</sup> Zinggl's idea was that art should cease to concern itself about problems of form and materials and engage in solving social ones.<sup>23</sup>

[22] For that first project Zinggl recruited nine artists, students of his at the Vienna Academy of Applied Arts. Most of them also had some other training such as medicine, journalism, etc., in addition to art.<sup>24</sup> They collectively decided to engage in an *Intervention to aid homeless people*. Indeed they succeeded in a double concrete outcome. Firstly, a bus was equipped with medical facilities and a doctor and was put in the service of homeless people free of charge. Secondly, it was arranged with aid organizations, day centers and shelters for a total of 200 lockers to be supplied permanently to homeless people.<sup>25</sup> Thus the artists implemented their stated goal of

---

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Kravagna, "Willkommen in Wien."

<sup>22</sup> Martin Beck, "Bemerkungen zu zwei Kuratorenprojekten in Wien. '11 Wochen Klausur'," in: *Texte zur Kunst* no. 3/2 (1993), 139-141.

<sup>23</sup> Wolfgang Zinggl, "From the object to the concrete intervention," in: *WochenKlausur. Sociopolitical Activism in Art*, ed. Wolfgang Zinggl, Wien 2001, 11-17.

<sup>24</sup> Martina Chmelarz, ed., *In Erwägung, daß ... es in Wien jährlich dreitausend Delogierungen gibt*, Wien 1993, 19-26. Wolfgang Zinggl, interview by the author, tape recording, Vienna, November 1, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> The bus was called Louise and it served hundred of patients per month for five years. In 1998 it was considered inadequate and Caritas bought a larger one, Louise II. Back in 1993 WochenKlausur had secured the sustainability of the project, for instance through sponsoring of the doctors' payment, of medication and volunteer medical assistants and drivers. As for the lockers, the success of the idea later led more institutions to make additional ones available. See Erich Steurer, "Intervention to provide healthcare to homeless people," in: Zinggl, *WochenKlausur*, 21-26.

literally improving a social problem by means of an art project and within the duration of an art exhibition. And they also made an impact on the Viennese art scene.<sup>26</sup>

[23] Already since their first project in 1993 WochenKlausur established a working formula that has characterized their projects ever since. The group has always worked upon invitation of an art institution, "which provide[s] infrastructural framework as well as cultural capital."<sup>27</sup> Especially the institutions' cultural capital was often crucial in the first projects for the recognition of WochenKlausur's social interventions as art. As their name indicates, the projects are implemented within a few weeks of intensive work, during which the members work exclusively on the project. It is mostly the group, rather than the inviting institutions, that decides which social problem to work on (e.g., problems of the homeless, women drug-addicts, etc.). According to WochenKlausur, "many people have no lobby: on their own accord they can do little to make themselves heard or improve their situation."<sup>28</sup> The group propagated an approach of concrete social interventions: in each project they set for themselves concrete goals for specific, concrete improvements. Successful outcomes are then measurable against stated goals. Central in their ways of thinking and working is the belief that artists are competent at finding creative solutions. The group uses "unorthodox approaches," "clever maneuvering" and even – as for instance in the first project described below – "loopholes" in laws, so as to make possible what seems impossible.<sup>29</sup> Besides, to consider a project completed, the sustainability of its results should also be secured.<sup>30</sup> As the group's theoretician, Wolfgang Zinggl has supported the activist art example of WochenKlausur's concrete interventions by giving it a place in a genealogy of 20<sup>th</sup> century activist art, starting with Russian Constructivism and reaching up to Krzysztof Wodiczko. At the same time, he also distinguishes the group's practice that concentrates on modest contributions, on "concrete strategies of effecting change," instead of repeating some predecessors' failed aspiration of changing the world.<sup>31</sup>

[24] Within the period concerning the present research WochenKlausur worked on the issue of immigrants in Austria in two projects. One was in Graz in 1995 and one in Salzburg in 1996.<sup>32</sup> The first one, *Eine konkrete Intervention zur Integration von Ausländern (A Concrete Intervention for the Integration of Foreigners)*, dealt with issues

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Beck, "Bemerkungen zu zwei Kuratorenprojekten" and "Kunst in Klausur," debate, Birgit Flos and Dieter Schrage, in: *Der Falter*, 25 August 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Pascale Jeannée, "WochenKlausur", in: Zinggl, *WochenKlausur*, 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> For information and citations see Jeannée, "WochenKlausur," in: Zinggl, *WochenKlausur*, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>29</sup> For "loopholes" in laws see Stefania Pitscheider, "Intervention in immigrant labour issues," in: Zinggl, *WochenKlausur*, 45-52, here 46.

<sup>30</sup> The sustainability of results is one of the reasons why WochenKlausur as an association opened an office in Vienna. Jeannée, "WochenKlausur."

<sup>31</sup> Zinggl, "From the object," 11-17, and <http://www.wochenklausur.at/kunst.php?lang=de>.

<sup>32</sup> Later in 2006 another project related to immigrants in Limerick, Ireland.

of integrating refugees in Austria. The second one, *Eine konkrete Intervention zur Schubhaft (Intervention in a deportation detention center)*, focused on improving the living conditions of inmates of a detention center pending deportation.



1-3 WochenKlausur, *A Concrete Intervention for the Integration of Foreigners*, Graz, 1995 (© WochenKlausur)

[25] The first project was commissioned by the annual festival Steirischer Herbst in 1995 and was presented during the following year's festival, in 1996.<sup>33</sup> (Fig. 1-3) The

<sup>33</sup> WochenKlausur was to develop a project on the basis of a sociological study called "Echt Gries!," commissioned by the festival Steirischer Herbst and implemented under guidance of a sociologist from the Institut für Rechts- und Kriminalsoziologie, Vienna. Monika Pessler (Steirischer Herbst) and Univ. Doz. Dr. Günther Burkert, correspondence, Graz, 9 May 1995, unpublished data, archive Steirischer Herbst.

project's short description on both WochenKlausur's general book and their website (2008) reads as follows:

As a means of circumventing strict legislation concerning foreigners, seven immigrants were commissioned in Graz to produce Social Plastics. The project assured the participants' legal residency in Austria.<sup>34</sup>

[26] WochenKlausur engaged with problematic situations that Austrian immigration policy caused by separating residency and working rights.<sup>35</sup> On the one hand, being granted a residence permit depended upon one's showing proof of one's means of subsistence. Nonetheless, the labor laws allowed for only up to a certain percentage of gainfully employed workers in Austria to be foreign, thus excluding everyone else regardless of any other criteria. On the other hand, "the right to pursue gainful employment depended upon the possession of a residency permit and a work permit with the latter being extremely difficult to obtain." Therefore WochenKlausur decided to "loo[k] for loopholes in these extremely restrictive laws that could let us create new employment opportunities."

[27] Two possibilities were found. The one was based on the fact that the law did not cover freelance work. WochenKlausur's idea was to set up an agency for self-employed foreigners. The idea was designed for unskilled workers' jobs, such as cleaners, for which there was shortage in the market. Everything was planned and prepared down to detail by WochenKlausur, but eventually they failed in receiving all three necessary official authorizations for establishing the agency. The second idea was based on the exception that the immigration law made for artists: artists were free to live and work in Austria, as long as they could show proof of adequate income in Austria solely from their artistic profession.<sup>36</sup> WochenKlausur succeeded in presenting seven refugees as artists creating "social sculptures" based on Joseph Beuys's related concept. The social sculptures were actually projects that produced aid such as baby food, children's clothing, toys and bicycles to be shipped to areas in urgent need such as Bosnia and Kurdistan. The idea's realization relied on the official acceptance of the refugees as professional artists by established art institutions. These arranged commissions and exhibitions of the "social sculptures." Additionally, several cultural, social, humanitarian or educational institutions and organizations undertook either the sponsoring, or the delivery of the "social sculptures" to their final recipients abroad.

---

<sup>34</sup> Zinggl, *WochenKlausur*, 45 and [http://www.wochenklausur.at/projekte/04p\\_kurz\\_en.htm](http://www.wochenklausur.at/projekte/04p_kurz_en.htm).

<sup>35</sup> For information and quotations here see Pitscheider, "Intervention in Immigration Labour Issues," 45-46.

<sup>36</sup> For the original text of the law see "Aufenthaltsgesetz § 1 Abs. 3 in der Fassung vom 19.5.1995." Reprinted also in Katharina Lenz, "Projektverlauf," in: *9 WochenKlausur. Eine konkrete Intervention zur Integration von Ausländern*, ed. Horst Gerhard Haberl, Graz 1996, 28-49, here 30. On the same law see also LEFÖ, "Rechtliche Situation von Migrantinnen," in: Marth and Schmeiser *Staatsarchitektur*.





4-5 WochenKlausur, *A Concrete Intervention in Deportation Detention*, Salzburg, 1996 (© WochenKlausur)

[28] The second project (Fig. 4-5) was realized upon the invitation of the Kunstverein Salzburg in 1996. It is summed up in the following lines in the group's 2001 publication:

A coordinating agency was created to provide social services to inmates detained pending deportation at the Salzburg Police Detention Center. It ensures basic standards of humane treatment.<sup>37</sup>

[29] WochenKlausur addressed themselves to the detention conditions in Salzburg Police Detention Center, which were particularly degrading.

<sup>37</sup> For the citation and all information about the project see (unless otherwise noted) Andreas Leikauf, "Intervention to improve conditions in deportation detention," in: Zingg, *WochenKlausur*, 63-69, here 63. I use past tense in the text also with reference to Austrian laws that may still be valid, in order to emphasize that I refer to the situation in 1996.

[30] Austrian law was among the most restrictive in the EU towards refugees. Any foreigner without a valid residence permit or visa was subject to being put in detention. Detention was imposed even in cases of refugees who could or should not be deported according to law. Actually, for foreigners arriving to Austria by land, the Austrian refugee law that theoretically enabled them to apply for refugee status, was in practice made redundant by the so-called "third country clause" of the Alien Law, because Austria was surrounded by so-called "safe third countries."<sup>38</sup>

[31] Beyond the above and many more complexities of the legal status of foreigners in Austria, the living conditions for detainees in the Police Detention Center in Salzburg were distinctly disgraceful. For instance, inmates were often not informed of their rights in time to apply for papers or in a language they could understand. Basic living needs and standards were either insufficient, dependent upon the judgment of guards, or often non-existent. That was the case with access to contact with relief organizations, basic hygiene, medical care, physical movement, open-air activities, contact with other inmates and with external agents, access to clothing, personal belongings, television or radio. WochenKlausur made contact with relief organizations, pastoral workers, attorneys, former guards and detainees, officers from the detention center, as well as with the initiative Hoffnung Konkret, an organization that showed substantial commitment to improving the conditions in Salzburg Police Detention Center.<sup>39</sup> The intervention of WochenKlausur led to the establishment of a network of social services for the inmates, which was coordinated by a new agency set up for this purpose. WochenKlausur succeeded in securing financial and administrative support for the agency, in raising some media attention, in propagating against the broadly held assumption by locals that the detention was related to criminal activity. Most importantly, it succeeded in substantially improving detention conditions, with regard to the inmates' access to information, external legal advice, as well as the quality of everyday life.

[32] During the 1990s WochenKlausur gained broad visibility within the Austrian and international contemporary art world. They developed interventions in Austria and abroad and worked on issues of migration, drug policy, schools, community development, the labor market and more. However, and as I will argue in more detail later, their methodologies and vision often raised skepticism.<sup>40</sup> For instance, their political activism relied fully on commissions by art institutions. Besides, the strategy of not challenging ideological, political, social, cultural and economical structures that led people to

---

<sup>38</sup> "The Alien Law's 'third country clause' states that refugees who were already safe from persecution in another country are barred from being granted asylum in Austria." Ibid., 64. The same law applies in various countries. For Germany see, e.g., Bade and Oltmer, "Einwanderung in Deutschland seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg."

<sup>39</sup> Initiative Hoffnung Konkret was an umbrella organization including Amnesty International, Caritas, the association Brücke, pastoral workers and attorneys.

<sup>40</sup> J.J. Charlesworth, "Art's Agency," in: *Art Monthly* 261 (2002), 7-10, here 10.



marginalization, but searching for their 'loopholes,' eventually led authorities in covering those loopholes themselves.

[<top>](#)

### **Martin Krenn & Oliver Ressler**

[33] Let me herewith turn to the second case study, the artists Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler and, as example, their collaborative project *Border Crossing Services* from 2001. Both artists started working in the mid 1990s. Each has been following an individual career, but with an accentuated interest in collaborations mostly with other artists or activists. Together they have collaborated in numerous projects that focused primarily on issues of racism and migration.<sup>41</sup> While in WochenKlausur's case it seems that the specificity of the group's approach is what distinguishes their work, for Krenn and Ressler it is rather the specificity of the issues and the artists' political position towards them. Almost always in their works verbal communication is at least as important as visual in conveying information, opinions, political messages, etc.<sup>42</sup> Quite often, as also in *Border Crossing Services* – at least as important as the produced video, book or exhibition are also the various types of participatory or collaborative processes of producing them in cooperation with students, migrants' organizations, etc. Significant is also the reception by the public that the artists often monitor. Besides, many projects have more than one parts or outcomes, so that their structure facilitates the staging of multiple approaches or angles of the same theme. Exemplary for the above characteristics is the project *Border Crossing Services*.<sup>43</sup> The statement of the project's goals reads:

The goal of the project *Border Crossing Services (Dienstleistung: Fluchthilfe)* is to redefine and highlight the positive aspects of terms such as "smuggler" or "trafficker," which have been given a negative connotation through the dominant medial discourse. In contrast to the widespread model for representation, the actual act of "smuggling" is not presented as a criminal exploitation of asylum seekers. Instead, we highlight the service character of this business made necessary by European policies of exclusion.

---

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.ressler.at>, <http://www.martinkrenn.net>. For collaborative projects see *The New Right: Materials for the Dismantling* (1995), *Learned Homeland* (1996), *Institutional Racisms* (1997), *War Zones* (1999), *Border Crossing Services* (2001), *European Corrections Corporation* (2003-04), *Posters for Aarhus Festival Copenhagen* (2004).

<sup>42</sup> For instance, *The New Right: Materials for the Dismantling* was a bill poster series in public spaces containing exclusively text. *Learned Homeland*, was a poster object in public space, reproducing two school book pages expanded with blocks of text and an announcement of the exhibition. The exhibition included a video with reactions from people passing by the installation, a video with interviews with theorists from Austria and Germany on racism and homeland, various materials providing further information on schoolbooks. *Institutional Racisms*, 1997, an installation in public space, providing extensive information for remand pending deportation in Austria. It was printed against a background of the façade of a detention center. *War Zones* were five montages of photographs and text. For *Border Crossing Services* see details in the main text here. The public installation *European Corrections Corporation* and the Posters for Aarhus Festival Copenhagen were primarily text-based. – For the primacy of text in Ressler's work, see, e.g., "Counter-globalization manuals. Interview by Marina Grzanic," <http://www.ressler.at/counter-globalization-manuals>.

<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.martinkrenn.net/fluchthilfe/english/indexengl.html> and <http://www.ressler.at/fluchthilfe> for all citations and information about the project used here, unless otherwise indicated.

[34] In order to show the diverse, and especially the positive approaches and definitions of offering "Fluchthilfe," the structure of the project's multiple forms of implementation functioned as stages for a multitude of voices. The first part was an information brochure/magazine titled *Neues Grenzblatt* to which anti-racist groups and migrant organizations were invited to contribute. In these texts, the contributors inform the reader about conditions of contemporary migration and their own involvement in improving them. The brochure was distributed by direct mailing to households in Styria and in diverse events in cooperation with leftist groups. It can also be found on the project's website. The second part of the project was the bilingual (German/English) video *Border Crossing Services. A four-part video on borders, migration and border crossing services*, which features long fragments of interviews. The video's four parts are entitled: "Who is allowed to migrate?," "Celebrating and excluding," "About border crossing services" and "Against racism." The interviews feature several immigrants and persons involved in migrant activism, as well as three individuals working for the army and a border patrol officer who represent the state and its anti-immigration policies and practices (Fig. 6).



6 Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler, *Border Crossing Services. A four-part video on borders, migration and border crossing services*, 2001, video stills (courtesy of the artists)

[35] Upon each interviewee's first appearance large letters on the screen give their names and the capacities for which they were approached for this video. The interviews show an approach to art activism in which art, conventionally the domain of representations authored by artists, is turned into a podium for (self-)presentations

staged by the artists. The artists themselves are heard or shown very few times as they ask questions and hold the microphone for the interviewees. Transcribed extracts are available on the project's website. The third part of *Border Crossing Services* was an exhibition of the same title in the Kunstraum of the University of Lüneburg in Germany. It was put together collaboratively by Krenn, Ressler and students of the university, based on a seminar carried out by the artists. To counteract hierarchical relations between artists and students, the exhibition included some displays that were co-produced by everyone, some independently by the artists, and some by the students. The latter included a video, *Antiracist Perspectives*, based on interviews and conversations with German students and with representatives of migrant organizations in Germany.<sup>44</sup> The exhibition included also a wall installation with texts, direct-mailings and flyers referring to the groups who wrote the articles in the *Neues Grenzblatt*. Quotes from literature used in a university seminar about racism were also added there.

[36] The various parts of the project (brochure, magazine, video, exhibitions) operated as democratic podium and open structure that the invited participants could quite freely fill up with content. Thus the project staged a multiplicity of voices and approaches to the issues of borders, migration and border crossings to EU states. The outcome of all three parts was a compilation of primarily text- and speech-based narrations. Visual aspects such as the layout of *Neues Grenzblatt* or the mostly fixed middle portraits of the interviewees in the video seem to facilitate reading or listening. However, as I will argue later on, they sometimes could have contradictory results to those intended by the artists.

<top>

### **Maiz (Autonomous Center of and for Migrant Women)**

[37] Maiz is an organization formed by and for migrant women in Linz.<sup>45</sup> It started in 1994-95 on the initiative of three Brazilian women: Tania Araujo, a feminist theologian, Luzemir Caixeta, philosopher and feminist theologian, and Rubia Salgado, with an academic background in languages and literature.<sup>46</sup> As determining conditions that led them to organized action they mention their own personal experiences and positions as migrant women in Europe, and – particularly in Austria – the migrant women's confrontation with racism and the exceptionally degrading living and working conditions.<sup>47</sup> Many of them cleaners, sex-workers, babysitters or housewives, they seemed to have no better future prospects. Such restricted horizons originated in their limited rights whether

<sup>44</sup> Students were interviewed in Frankfurt an der Oder, the organizations' representatives were from the migrant group Kanak Attak in Hamburg and Netzwerk gegen Rechts in Lüneburg.

<sup>45</sup> [http://maiz.at/en/maiz\\_is](http://maiz.at/en/maiz_is).

<sup>46</sup> Marth and Schneider, *Vor der Information*, 329.

<sup>47</sup> [http://maiz.at/en/maiz\\_is](http://maiz.at/en/maiz_is). Further see also Rubia Salgado, "Zusammenarbeit: wenn Migrantinnen Voraussetzungen nennen," and Luzemir Caixeta, "Haushalt, caretaking, Grenzen...," in: Bratic, Koweindl, Schneider, *Allianzenbildung*, 10-13 and 30-34.

as legal or illegal migrants, dependency on employers or spouses, and often poor education. As women of colour, many of these reasons linked to sexual and racial discrimination they experienced, both in their countries of origin and in Europe. Particularly the sex-workers faced social discrimination and taboos around their work, which force them into social marginalization and invisibility.

[38] Maiz started with informal meetings of Latin American women and soon paid special attention to migrant sex workers. Within a few years their initiative expanded significantly, offering literacy and German language courses, legal advice and support, publicity work, workshops and courses including professional orientation and self-defence, activities for the second generation, research projects, lectures, discussions, networking and, very importantly, cultural work. Within Austria maiz has evolved into a vocal and vibrant autonomous activist organization for migration and feminism. As an organization, and members individually, have cooperated or contributed in the production and/or presentation of projects by Martin Krenn (e.g., *Border Crossing Services, City Views*), Klub Zwei (*Kartographische Eingriffe*), Dezentrale Medien (presentation of *herein.at*, 2001) and by other artists or artists-activists from various disciplines.

[39] The term "cultural work" (Kulturarbeit) in maiz also encompasses art projects. It includes performances, exhibitions, a shop-window gallery in the old city of Linz and various collaborations with artists. In maiz cultural work is intended to contribute to political work. As Luzenir Caixeta writes:

Unsere Experimente verfolgen anti-rassistische und anti-sexistische Wirkungen und Ziele: Kulturarbeit bietet uns dabei eine "Vermittlungsform" von politischen Forderungen. Letztendlich wollen wir die politischen und auch kulturpolitischen Rahmenbedingungen verändern: rechtliche Gleichstellung, Selbstvertretung statt Stellvertretung. Politische Bildungsarbeit steht in engem Zusammenhang mit unseren Tätigkeiten im Kulturbereich, *denn im Rahmen dieser Arbeit entwickeln wir die Konzepte und Prozesse, die wiederum als Kulturarbeit realisiert werden.*<sup>48</sup>  
[My emphasis]

[40] In maiz, participation of migrant women from the conceptualization down to the presentation of cultural projects is indispensable. A concept of "anthropophagischer Protagonismus" ("cannibalistic protagonism," my translation) encapsulates the perception and importance of participation in maiz's cultural work. It combines legacies of Latin American literary and artistic traditions surrounding cultural "anthropophagism," with the demands for equal social and political rights for foreign women in Europe. Further down in the article I will refer in more detail to this concept and its origins. Projects in which art

---

<sup>48</sup> Luzenir Caixeta, "Migrantische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit als Kulturarbeit," Konferenz TRANSVERSAL, IG Kultur Österreich, 2002, online: [http://www.forum-interkultur.net/uploads/tx\\_textdb/25.pdf](http://www.forum-interkultur.net/uploads/tx_textdb/25.pdf) ("Our experiments pursue anti-racist and anti-sexist effects and aims: political educational work is closely linked to our activities in the cultural sector. Our ultimate will is to change political as well as cultural-political frameworks: equality in front of the law, self-presentation instead of representation. The political education work is closely linked to our cultural work, *because within the former's framework we develop concepts and processes that we realize in turn as cultural projects.*" [emphasis added; this and all following translations from this text are mine.]

was employed for publicity and political education included, for instance, the exhibition-performance *PEEP-SHOW einmal anders* (Linz, 1996-97), which confronted visitors with the situation of migrant sex workers in Austria. MAIZ AIRLINES in 1996-97 was an exhibition designed as an interactive installation on the themes of international sex tourism, trafficking and forced prostitution of women.<sup>49</sup> A project in which the participation of migrant women was more explicitly visible in the production process and the presented outcomes was *Kartographische Eingriffe* in 2001, in collaboration with Klub Zwei. It included workshops, an exhibition and public discussions. It dealt with migrant women in public spaces and more specifically with possibilities of, and impediments to, the participation, visibility, and transgression of barriers in public spaces, as well as, eventually, with the making of urban spaces one's own. Fictional city-plans were produced during workshops. The plans visualized the participants' conceptions, desires and wishes, and were presented in the exhibition. The project was repeated with new participants in other Austrian cities and in Italy and Spain.

[41] Interestingly, there is little, if any, visual documentation and limited descriptive detail about individual projects on the organization's website and in the numerous texts written by the organization's three initiators. However, in those texts, where ideas, principles, practices and goals of maiz are narrated, one can sometimes see how the authors get their accounts to enact, by their narrative and textual means, the "anthropophagischer Protagonismus" that the concepts and practices of participatory cultural work in maiz stand for. As an example of the above, I will later analyze the text "Anthropophagischer Protagonismus" by Salgado and Caixeta.

<top>

## From Politics to Art

[42] In the introduction I mentioned that two major aspects in the "problem" of migrants in Austria (and other EU countries at the time to various manners and degrees) were, firstly, that migrants were not given access to social and political rights preserved for native Austrian citizens. Secondly, that they were denied the right to speak for themselves and present their cases in front of authorities, and in political and public debates.<sup>50</sup> In that sense, the participatory or collaborative forms of activist art projects seemed to render possible in the domain of art or by means of art, what was not allowed to be possible in political life. For the discussion of art activism on migration in this article

---

<sup>49</sup> For *PEEP-SHOW einmal anders* see <http://www.maiz.at/de/preise> and Marty Huber, "MAIZ. Wir lieben dich!", <http://kulturrisse.at/ausgaben/032004/kunstpraxen/maiz.-wir-lieben-dich>. For MAIZ AIRLINES see <http://www.maiz.at/de/publikation/1998/thank-you-flying-maiz-airlines> and <http://www.maiz.at/de/publikation/1999/wenig-licht-am-ende-des-tunnels-frauenmigration-maiz-airlines-im-kolpinghaus-bozen>.

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Draxler, "Über jemand reden"; Boris Buden, "Die leere Mitte und ihre einsamen BewohnerInnen," in: *springerin* V, 4 (1999), 37; Liubomir Bratic, "Soziopolitische Organisationen der MigrantInnen in Österreich," [http://www.beigewum.at/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/006\\_liubomir\\_bratic1.pdf](http://www.beigewum.at/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/006_liubomir_bratic1.pdf); Schmeiser, "Editorial."



a central question regarding the narrative form of projects refers to the formation of subjects: subjects articulating the project's narrations, but also subjects formed in, and/or by means of, the narrated projects. In other words, who, in what capacity and by what means becomes an acting and speaking subject? Who is talking and who is talked about in projects? Eventually, these questions go part and parcel with the object of enquiry: is it about the problem of foreigners ("Ausländerfrage") or about the foreigners' problems? How are participation and collaboration processes articulated in the structure of art projects, and how are the participatory/collaborative projects of art activism articulated in their narrations? Do the structures of participation and/or collaboration proposed by activist art projects produce concepts and narratives in which power structures of political life are challenged and reinterpreted?<sup>51</sup>

[43] In the last question stakes and priorities from political life are transferred to art. By which I mean that the demand for the participation of migrant subjects in political discourses was transferred to art, in the form of the migrants' participation as subjects both in production processes and resulting presentations and representations of art projects. Stakes and criteria from political life became regulatory criteria for both artists structuring their projects, as well as for art critics and theorists. Consequently, a certain activist "political correctness" (participation as the manifestation of inclusion), was emphasized as a criterion for re-presentations produced in art projects. A "political correctness" that was counter or compensatory to the unjust or missing re-presentations of migrant minorities in political life.

[44] This transfer of priorities and practices from the domain of politics to that of art brings to mind the criticism of Gayatri Spivak against Western intellectual discourse (Foucault and Deleuze in Spivak's example) in her seminal text "Can the subaltern speak?". Spivak's criticism targeted the merging of two understandings of the "term representation": the first is of representation as proxy or speaking for as in politics ("vertreten"), and the second is re-presentation as in art and philosophy ("darstellen").<sup>52</sup> This conflation is problematic for Spivak, as the two understandings neither coincide, nor entail one another. For instance, a descriptive definition that may represent people of a similar economic situation as a class in the second understanding ("darstellen"), does not entail that within that group there exists also a shared political intention. Further on, the conflation entails that if oppressed subjects, whether as individuals or class can represent themselves, they can also speak for themselves in a language that can be heard by the oppressor. Spivak's analysis, in the context of post-colonial critique, aimed at showing

---

<sup>51</sup> For the same question see also Sylvia Riedmann, "Community art *oder* Gesellschaftliche Veränderung?," in: Bratic, Koweindl, Schneider, *Allianzenbildung*, 67-70. Riedman also uses WochenKlausur as example, but concludes her text with rather general conclusions/propositions to artists.

<sup>52</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?," in: Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Basingstoke 1988, 271-313.



that the entire Western theoretical discourse around oppressed subjects, with its problematic conflation of understandings of "representation," failed to acknowledge firstly the incapacity (or lack of interest) of the Western leftist intellectual (usually male) to represent ("darstellen") himself to himself and to the Other, before elaborating on the representation ("Darstellung" and "Vertretung") of the Other. In Spivak's vocabulary, "the intellectuals representing themselves as transparent."<sup>53</sup> Secondly, it failed to acknowledge that the oppressed subject may not share the same conception of reality or discursive context as the Western intellectual. So even if the former acquires access to self-representation ("sich darstellen"), one may not be able to speak for oneself ("sich vertreten") in the Western discourse. As a consequence, Spivak practically accuses Western leftist intellectuals for complicity with Western imperialism, capitalism, etc. She also concludes that some oppressed subjects – in her example the female colonized subaltern, cannot ultimately represent themselves in Western discourse and may, indeed, need somebody else to speak for them. All these points from Spivak's critique will appear in questions raised by the case-studies of this article.

[45] Nonetheless, the movement from the political to the artistic, with reference mostly to how subject positions are formed and power structures addressed, had an important impact on the field of activist art theory and critique. It has opened a great terrain of discourse, where political and philosophical ideas by theorists such as Hardt and Negri, Deleuze and Guattari, Spivak, Mouffe, Laclau, Ranciere and others have been processed and reworked.<sup>54</sup> In this context it sometimes seemed – occasionally against the point of the authors referred to – that priority of political questions in the analysis of artistic projects pushed aside the consideration that form operates in its own ways on the audience's perception. So an artistic decision that might appear as politically just – and in that sense "politically correct" – may not really operate as intended when rendered into visual, verbal or other forms in projects. Or it may not resonate with other meanings that the same, selected form itself might produce. In what follows, I will approach the three case studies by examining the formation of subject positions and confrontation with power structures, as I see them derived from the structure of projects as represented in their narrations, and especially from textual and visual articulations of the projects' narrations. Eventually, the discussion will conclude with using aesthetic criteria or, to put it differently, aesthetic effects as criteria to consider the effects of political art activism.

[<top>](#)

### **The Articulation of Participation**

[46] As mentioned earlier in the description of WochenKlausur's work the group emphatically calls artists to shift attention away from formalist, self-absorbed aesthetics

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> See here also various texts on the various online platforms of eipcp.net.

and autonomous art, towards a socio-political arena. Artists can play an important role there due to their creative thinking, especially when they work together. WochenKlausur's approach to art activism lies in the idea that the artists' skills in finding new and unorthodox ways to deal with problems is a response to dead ends to which the orthodox, professional approaches of social workers and politicians often come up against.

[47] This approach to the role of the artists entails that the protagonists in their collaborative interventions are above all else the artists themselves. Indeed, they are the central acting subjects in the projects' conception and implementation. As for target groups worked for and about, they are also chosen by the artists' team. In Graz these were the refugees seeking legal work and in Salzburg the foreigners in the deportation-detention center. WochenKlausur persistently lobbied for them and effectively helped them within the framework of each project's planned interventions. During the Salzburg project WochenKlausur's decisions about what improvements should be targeted regarding the detention conditions were based primarily on past and present inmates' recommendations. However, in the projects' published narrations, members of the target groups themselves hardly ever appear as team participants or anyhow as acting subjects beyond activities delegated to them by WochenKlausur, such as the production of "social sculptures" in Graz. In WochenKlausur's general methodology and practice of art activism the target groups are implicitly positioned as de facto socially weak and politically dependant upon help from Austrians.

[48] The above approach to the constitution of subject positions and subsequent relations between the artists-activists and their target groups, is represented also in the structure of the projects' narrations. Actually, the immaterial service character of the projects makes them accessible for a general public *only* through their narrations, as in publications, reviews, interviews, etc. Here I will take WochenKlausur's publications as representative narration of their approach. The content of both projects publications follows a similar logic. The editors and authors of texts are members of WochenKlausur and some external contributors, nobody from the target groups. Accordingly, the publications' content focuses primarily on WochenKlausur and their approach to art-activism and migration, rather than the approach of the migrants themselves. Browsing through the book *9WochenKlausur. Eine konkrete Intervention zur Integration von Ausländer*, the first texts on pages 4-17 are about the group's position towards social strategies in art and about its earlier projects. From page 21 the project in Graz is presented in more detail. But even then, on pages 20-27, Wolfgang Zinggl discusses ideas of the freedom and the definition of art – including also the freedom to define anything as art work – from Western-European arthistorical, critical and legal points of view. Pages 29-51 present the Graz project. On pages 35-47 the refugees are presented

in the form of their individual information files that include personal details (name, country of origin, gender, photograph), and details of each one's social sculpture project including a photograph. This presentation of people as files is representative of WochenKlausur's tactical use of the bureaucracy of Austrian law against itself. The law produces the categories that enable or disable access of foreign immigrants to residence and labor rights of citizens. WochenKlausur tactically used the category "artists" both for themselves and the immigrants. So, in total, in the project's narrative representations, the refugees as subjects are fully represented and framed by the artists.

[49] Further on, there is a strong predilection for text over images. This predilection is supported by the simple, black and white graphic design, with variety only in typeface style and size that facilitate reading and emphasize certain passages. Photographs appear only on the immigrants' information files. Accordingly, in WochenKlausur's general publication from 2001, entitled *WochenKlausur. Sociopolitical Activism in Art*, the Graz project illustrations show members of the group around a table full of folders and papers, thus represented as researching, thinking, collaborating. Two images of refugees at work show them alone, kneeling on the floor and surrounded by objects that relate mainly to manual work. The latter representations of manual work are practically the outcome of the creative, intellectual work of the former. Considering the entire presentation of the projects as in their publications, it is practically the various aspects of the artists' group approach to art activism and to issue of foreigners in Austria, rather than the foreigners issues that are represented.

[50] This approach sometimes leads to paradoxical situations. For instance in the Salzburg project, amongst the most crucial improvements for inmates was that contact possibilities with external social services and relief organizations were made possible. Inmates could hence receive adequate information about their legal and political rights, and in a language they could understand. In that sense, the intervention provided detainees with the means to communicate their positions to external organizations and authorities, as well as tackle the language barrier problem. This means that, while the project enabled the detainees' official speech in "real" life practices, members of the target group are nowhere mentioned as having symbolically or practically an active role or voice in the enabling process.<sup>55</sup> The projects' practical outcomes indeed focus on

---

<sup>55</sup> Actually one even finds members of WochenKlausur not challenging at all stereotypes about the social groups they worked for. E.g. in an interview for *Kunstforum*, responding to a comment that the drug addicted women prostitutes in WochenKlausur's second project in Zürich did not at all come actively to the foreground in the project's events, Matthias Schellenberg from WochenKlausur said: "Ich kenne nicht so viele Junkies, und ich denke, die, die da waren, hätten das Medienbild von Junkies, der so verwahrlost ist, und einem die falsche Antwort gibt, hier bestätigt. Das schießt am Ziel vorbei." ("I have not met many junkies and I think, the ones who were there, would only had confirmed the media-image of a junkie – somebody shabby, giving wrong answers. It would lead to missing the target." [My translation]) It is interesting to consider this example in juxtaposition to the approach of, e.g., female sex workers in maiz. Jochen Becker, "Am politischen Spiel teilnehmen," in: *Kunstforum* 132 (1996), 317-322.

representing ("vertreten") and even expanding the rights of foreigners towards Austrian authorities, but as understood by the artists. And further, the projects' narrations represent ("darstellen") mainly the group WochenKlausur speaking as Austrian art-activists within the Western art discourse. More generally, they represent ("darstellen" and "vertreten") an approach of the role of Western art-activism in Western society and politics.

[51] In order to speedily achieve the projects' target, WochenKlausur's approach to art activism strategies has been to exploit systematically, but in that way also *to confirm*, the status and hierarchies of existing structures.<sup>56</sup> The latter varied from the cultural capital of art institutions, the established status of Christian or social relief organizations, to the government's law- and decision-making power and the media's pressure power. Thus the hierarchies and conditions under which socio-political deficiencies and the marginalization of social groups have come about in the first place are neither questioned, nor re-imagined. Therefore, also, the success of some interventions as single cases – such as the creation of work possibilities in Graz for seven out of thousands of migrants – are likely to operate as exceptions again confirming the rule. They might even facilitate the political and legal authorities in closing their loopholes, rather than setting examples for possible alternatives. The above critique WochenKlausur has heard before,<sup>57</sup> and they have responded through their website's F.A.Q. Firstly, they argue that in essence it is the state that enables the improvements, since the art institutions that invite WochenKlausur are state funded. Secondly, that it is better to do a little something instead of nothing, with the excuse of one's powerlessness against the deep and complicated roots of socio-political problems.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, these responses acknowledge the criticism and almost sell as ideology the inherent ideological contradictions of their practice.<sup>59</sup>

[52] From the mid-1990s critical (self-)reflections were spreading among new groupings and networks of artists and activists. Not surprisingly, their perspectives and practices responded not only to state policies, but also to what was considered by some

---

<sup>56</sup> See also Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*, London, New York and Calcutta 2007.

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., Charlesworth, "Art's Agency." Scepticism has been publicly expressed also by members of WochenKlausur's projects. E.g., Ulrike Müller wrote her reflections on an event organized by the Christian organization efdö for the first anniversary of the Salzburg project's implementation. Efdö (Evangelischer Flüchtlingsdienst Österreich) had undertaken the sustainability of the project's outcomes in the long term. Müller's scepticism touched upon questions of whether the political interests and structures supporting the practices of detention and deportation were anyhow challenged by the Salzburg project. Her case evolved around WochenKlausur's strategy of employing a humanitarian argumentation to promote the project goals, circumventing the political questions of deportation detention. Müller, "Was heißt hier menschenwürdig?."

<sup>58</sup> [http://www.wochenklausur.at/texte/faq\\_dt.html](http://www.wochenklausur.at/texte/faq_dt.html); Zinggl, WochenKlausur, 135.

<sup>59</sup> For critical and self-critical voices in the discourse of engagement and especially of the issue of migrants being spoken on behalf of by Austrian or German citizens, see, e.g., Ljubomir Bratić, "Soziopolitische Organisationen der MigrantInnen in Österreich," in: *Kurswechsel* 1 (2000), [http://www.beigewum.at/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/006\\_ljubomir\\_bratic1.pdf](http://www.beigewum.at/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/006_ljubomir_bratic1.pdf), Draxler, "Über jemand retten," as well as Schmeiser, "Editorial."

as problematic aspects within existing art-activist approaches. Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler, with their project *Border Crossing Services*, could be considered as examples here. In publications, websites, brochures and other information resources, where Krenn and Ressler present their projects, one is addressed with the social or political issue at stake, rather than the artists' personal approaches or general art-activist considerations. Presentations or explanations of the latter are provided separately, for instance, in interviews. Their projects tend to address huge issues such as capitalism, state ideology, globalization. In other words, issues that underlie the socio-economic and political interests and structures that lead, amongst others, to the marginalization of minorities such as migrants.<sup>60</sup> The artists appear also conscious about hierarchies produced during the process of making participatory/collaborative art projects, as well as in the representations of such projects' outcomes.<sup>61</sup> This can be traced in the project *Border Crossing Services*.

[53] As the project aimed at opening up terms such as "smuggler" or "trafficker" to positive interpretations, the various forms in which it was realized staged the voices – and hence interpretations – of individuals or organizations on the theme of crossing the EU borders – German and Austrian in particular. As I mentioned earlier, this is evident in the juxtaposition of opinions by various agents, the participatory or collaborative approach during the production process and in the project's concrete outcomes – brochure, video and exhibition. The artists operate largely as editors and microphone holders. They set the theme and decide on the format that would serve best to stage invited contributors. For example, the video *Border Crossing Services* is structured by alternating extracts from interviews from both "camps": representatives of migrant and German activists, as well as of military and border police forces. The former are clearly favored in terms of the number and duration allocated to them, yet extensive pieces from all interviews are featured. For the exhibition in Lüneburg, the intention was that the artists' and the students' contributions should be as horizontally structured as possible. Further on, the organizations and initiatives approached and staged are mostly autonomous, "alternative" ones to those featured in WochenKlausur's Graz and Salzburg interventions. They are not the established social or Christian relief organizations like Caritas. Rather they are the smaller, self-organized and mostly leftist activist formations that made their presence more strongly felt from the mid-1990s onwards. Hence, the selection of participants and/or collaborators also expressed the intention of organizing oneself on "alternative" terrains to those provided by existing social and political

---

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g., Krenn and Ressler's collaborative projects *The New Right – Materials for the Dismantling* (1995); *Learned Homeland* (1996); *Institutional Racism* (1997). Ressler's projects, *The Global 500* (1999); *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* (2003-ongoing).

<sup>61</sup> For Krenn see, *ibid.* For Ressler see, e.g., his explanation of how activists are staged as speakers in his videos *This is what democracy looks like (Liberalitas Bavariae)* and *Disobbedienti*, and in Oliver Ressler, "Protesting Capitalist Globalization," [http://republicart.net/disc/representations/ressler01\\_en.htm](http://republicart.net/disc/representations/ressler01_en.htm).

institutions.<sup>62</sup> While in *Neues Grenzblatt* the narrations contained collective perspectives and goals, in the video it is the narrations of personal experiences and perspectives of individuals, who are connected to related activist groupings. So, in total, one can say that the project's participatory/collaborative structure brought members of various parties concerned in juxtaposition to one another. They are all presented as speaking and acting subjects, with an emphasis on providing a platform mainly for those usually not heard and seen in public discourses. At the same time, social and political organizations that were invited to contribute represented an alternative to mainstream socio-political institutions.

[54] Let me discuss here the interviews in the video with some more detail. The first interview is with Hirut Kiesel and Karim Duarte, free-lance journalists in Vienna. Their names and faces indicate a migrant background. They initially talk about who has the right to migrate. The second interviewee is Grace Latigo, artist and political activist. She talks about her experience of being illegal until the point when a public statement she made during an activists' gathering brought her case to media attention. Thanks to the media, she and her brother were given papers within a week. The third interview is with Jean Jacques Effson Effa, activist of the self-organized refugee organization THE VOICE. Effa talks about the restrictions imposed by German law on foreigners who can neither obtain full residence and working permits, nor are they deported. They are allowed to live in specific areas, are given very little money and are prohibited from working, learning German, or leave their administrative district without a special entitlement certificate.

[55] The next interview is staged at Vienna's Heldenplatz during the festivities of a national day celebration in which Austrian government members are participating and the national anthem is heard. Letters on the screen read: "Publicity for separation: on the national holiday the Austrian military advertises its newest war machinery and willingly distributes information." A helicopter pilot from the border security control forces is interviewed by the artists about high-tech detection systems. A man presented in a room with video screens of detection cameras adds more details. A second helicopter pilot specifies further that their hunting target are the "smugglers" of people rather than the "illegals" themselves. A German Federal border patrol officer interviewed in his office is asked to explain the meaning of "traffickers," "smugglers" and "Fluchthelfer." He distinguishes between "traffickers," who illegally and by risking people's lives, "capitalize on other people's misery," and "Fluchthelfer," which is not a term applicable to the same matter, as it has positive connotations, historically referring to those who "at the time of

---

<sup>62</sup> Whether acknowledged or not, this operates mainly as symbolic expression. Since a basic condition for the emergence of an "alternative" is the existence of an established order or system, in opposition to which the "alternative" realizes itself and forms the articulations of its self-conceptualization and -organization. See here, Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipations*, London 1996. At the time Laclau was one of the political theorists referred to in the Austrian engaged art scene. See, e.g., "Die unabschliessbaren Widerspruchsketten des Sozialen. Christian Höller im Interview mit Ernesto Laclau und Chantal Mouffe," in: *springer* II, 1 (1996), 42-48.



the 'iron curtain' brought people from the East to the West." Asked whether there is a difference between those "Fluchthelfer" and today's "traffickers" in terms of placing refugees – that is, human lives – in danger, he refuses to comment on the matter. Altogether, the staging of these interviewees is rather unflattering: the pilots talk in the middle of war machinery, describing its operational systems in a rather detached professional manner. The patrol officer sits in a discussion in which his arguments are easily brought to a dead-end, in strong contradiction to the eloquence of the interviewed migrants and activists.

[56] Let me remind us here of the departure point of this discussion: namely the transfer of models of participation and representation from political practices to art activist practices, so as to render possible in the domain of art or by using art, something barred in the domain of political life. Remembering Spivak's subaltern, Krenn and Ressler's art-activist work shows confidence in that the refugees are perfectly capable of representing themselves in both senses of the word towards Europe: to present and to speak for themselves in political discourse. But speaking now from within Europe, the issue of representation becomes more complex in a way illustrated well in a more recent discussion between Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak about the relation between citizenship, power and the politics of belonging in the Western nation state.<sup>63</sup> To be more precise, in the video of Krenn and Ressler, Effa's description of the "state" of being in which the German state puts the people it declares as not part of its state, is a vivid illustration of Butler's elaboration on the jettisoned life of stateless people. A "status that confers statelessness to any number of people becomes the means by which they are at once discursively constituted [as stateless] and juridically deprived [of rights, freedom]. The jettisoned life is thus [juridically] saturated in power without for that reason having rights."<sup>64</sup> Indeed, one could say that the detainees in Effa's narration are saturated in the power of the German state that refuses to include them into the nation-state, and thus places them in the margins of both any constitutional rights of citizenship, and often also universal human rights. So the moment the state deprives them of citizenship, placing them at its margins, the state starts also controlling any aspect of their existence. In that sense, their jettisoned life of stateless status is one saturated in state power.<sup>65</sup> The less rights of representation ("vertreten") in the state, the more enforced and detailed their re-presentation ("Darstellung") by the state. By staging Effa's description of the daily life of detainees, the artists make manifest these problematic aspects of the state's exercise of power.

---

<sup>63</sup> Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*, London 2007, 21-22.

<sup>64</sup> Butler and Spivak, *Who sings the Nation-State?*, 31-32.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-33 and 40-12.

[57] Comparing the two case studies so far, WochenKlausur and Krenn and Ressler, one could still argue for an important positive outcome of the latter's general approach: on the one hand, WochenKlausur opted for taking advantage of the capital and status of established hierarchies and capitals, as it found them already constituted in cultural, social and political institutions and the media. In this way, it managed to make possible specific practical improvements that otherwise seemed impossible. On the other hand, Krenn and Ressler did not render possible any practical changes previously regarded as impossible. However, by staging the marginalized voices and self-organized groupings, they rendered possible *the thinking of the possibility* of another process, other institutions, other structures and hierarchies. Ideally, they rendered possible the thought of rendering possible today's impossibilities as a rule, rather than as exception.

[58] Nevertheless, if one takes a closer look at the migrant subjects, as they are presented to be presenting themselves, the aesthetic articulations of Krenn and Ressler's political intentions may lead to further representations, sometimes with an impact diverging from that most likely intended by the artists. I take here as example particularly the video of *Border Crossing Services*. The artists invited representatives of those people usually not heard in mainstream political and public discourses on migration. These people are given subject positions, they speak for themselves and present how they act for themselves in public life. The story of Grace Latigo summarizes a central point that seems to underlie some important decisions of the artists about the presentation of narratives in the video. Latigo recounts how in a gathering of the campaign *Kein Mensch ist illegal*, run back then by the Evangelical diocese, someone came to her and said: "we will speak for you." She was sitting there and thought, "you don 't have to speak for me, I can speak for myself, but you simply don 't let me speak." So she stood up and said, "Good evening, my name is Grace Latigo and I can speak for myself! I have been illegal for seven years." And further she explains, "naturally that set off a huge chaos and I had to explain to the people why it was important that they let me speak. So first I did it for myself, but when I make my case public then I am thinking of others who are affected, as I can better relate to their position." Watching Latigo speaking to the camera, she definitely seems capable of speaking. She is dynamic, eloquent and fluent in German. What's more, the event of her speech in the gathering reminds of Butler's approach to unexpected speech acts by disenfranchised subjects, who seize the language of enfranchisement in situations where and when it is not expected, and by doing so they set in motion a performative contradiction that challenges conventional expectations.<sup>66</sup> So, in Latigo's case, by saying *I am illegal* and *you don't let me speak* in a situation where it was not anticipated, she managed to have the opposite

---

<sup>66</sup> Judith Butler, 'Sovereign performatives in the contemporary scene of utterance', in: *Critical Inquiry* 23, no.2 (1997), 350-377, here 367.

effect to that conventionally expected: instead of arrest, her public disclosure led to freedom and the right to speak.

[59] However this event, and her narration of the event as staged within Krenn and Ressler's project, comprise two different situations of speech acts with very different aesthetics and subsequent effects. The artists present individuals like Grace Latigo by their name and the capacity in which they are interviewed – thus participate – in the video. Their private names, real stories, real fears, experiences, claims and struggles are made public. On the one hand, this is a "politically corrective," almost compensatory movement for official Austrian politics. The politics that leave foreigners invisible and voiceless, through policies that illegalize them, keep them financially weak and bar them from German language classes. These are the very policies that consequently feed the public's prejudice against foreigners, as the latter hide from the police, look poor and uneducated. But on the other hand, in the video, by standing up as private subjects for their social and political rights in a public discourse, they are brought to a position that exposes and renders them vulnerable, lacking the surprise-effect factor of the public event. This remains the case, even if the artists may wish to show processes of individual empowerment (Latigo, Effson Effa) and to address the partial interpretation of "traffickers" as criminals. By bringing the private individuals to the foreground regarding a collective, social problem, they turn them into representative figures on the issue (migrants' legal, social, political condition in the EU). While the persons talk about private facts, they become examples for a broad socio-political issue and, thus, operate as public symbols. Indeed, the interviewers are most likely conscious of that, as Latigo's words quoted earlier demonstrate. Anyhow, brought to this position, the private individual that becomes a public symbol, becomes something that exceeds itself, the private self. Thus it is once again submitted to the same public, socio-political discourse.

[60] Now let me return again to the transfer of participation models from political practices to artistic practices, and the formation of subject positions. The political activists' "politically correct" movement seemed to grant the members of the disenfranchised minority visibility and a voice to speak for themselves, so as to turn external representation ("Darstellung" and "Vertretung") to self-representation and self-empowerment. Nonetheless, following the aforementioned track of thought, the presentation of the self might easily slip into the exposition of private individuals' operating as symbols. This serves a larger cause. But as private persons renders them vulnerable, not least because they appear as individuals to oppose something as enormous as governments and state apparatuses, elected and run by the local majorities.

[61] Still, these individuals do not stand for helplessness. They embody and represent self-empowerment. They are also associated with organized activist groups represented

in *Neues Grenzblatt* and in printed materials available in the Lüneburg exhibition. As the artists' framework hosts the narratives of their real stories of migration, real facts and figures, real claims, the language used is direct and literal. Like the language conventionally expected from official political discourse about public issues, rather than from the realm of metaphors, fiction and symbolic language conventionally attributed to artists. This is actually quite interesting, as at the center of *Border Crossing Services* stand the various positive and negative connotations of the terms "Fluchthelfer," "trafficker" and "smuggler," for which the artists maintain that the state cultivates prejudices through partiality and undeclared interests.

[62] Regardless whether one subscribes fullheartedly to the content of the artists' criticism against state authorities, state policies and ways of treating people, there is yet another problematic aspect in the means, in the aesthetics of fact and fiction, and how the critique is performed in the narrative formats of *Border Crossing Services*. Namely, the artists seem to mobilize fact to counter fiction – or narratives of facts to counter fictional narratives. To be more precise, they mobilize factual narratives – such as people with their real names, witnesses of their own lives, real stories, real problems. And they employ a language drawing heavily from documentary (in the video), and from political news and protest media (direct mailing, flyers and brochures distributed in public spaces) – thus a language standing for the pursuing of truth. They do that to counter partial narratives cultivated in real-time politics – most notably the constructed negative image of illegalized migrants and their helpers. Even more, it becomes manifest how partial, contingent and manipulative institutional interpretations can be, thus very close to fictionally constructed (e.g., "Fluchthelfer" vs. "trafficker"). However, in this way they risk rendering their own argumentation and position problematic in a twofold manner.

[63] On the one hand, a vicious circle is created: if the narrative formats and language of fact from a depository of political and news media are mobilized by the artists to demonstrate that politicians in real-time politics and media are in fact cultivating partial narratives, then the artists put their own argumentation at the risk of being turned on its head. This is because they employ in their argumentation the very narrative means and ways of those – politicians, news media – whose argumentational content they have proven unreliable. In doing so, they undermine, in turn, the reliability of their own argumentation. On the other hand, there seems to be an underlying identification and equalization of a series of binary oppositions: fact and fiction, with truth and lie, with justice and injustice. It runs through the narrative construction of the entire *Border Crossing Services* project. The binary oppositions are given articulation in a narrative context and the language of activism in the 1990s. The speaking and acting migrant subject is identified as an "activist." Processes of self-empowerment, understood as processes of assuming control over one's being as a self-presented in speech and act

subject, are channeled into political protests formatted in schemata of an alternative political scene – Western leftist activism. After 1989, the political Left urgently needed to re-conceptualize and reorganize itself, its causes and targets. In laying down some common transnational causes, leftist activists in EU countries derived the argumentation, inter alia, from supporting the rights of the new classes of the socio-politically suppressed and disenfranchised. That was a very important step, as left politics stand for social justice. However, at the level of the representation ("Darstellung") of socio-political struggle, which in a wide sense is what art activism does, they often ignored the danger of formatting "other" people's struggles to fit "local" people's political thinking, reminding one of Spivak's criticism on Western leftist intellectuals. In *Border Crossing Services* the conceptualization schemata and aesthetics of resistance and oppositionality – into which the struggles of migrant subjects are inserted – appear somewhat narrowly formatted to the local leftist alternatives. These subjects are different in many ways to the migrant subjects. This is not least because for some migrants Western states were not necessarily ideological political opponents from the outset. For many they represented the wished-for lands of economic opportunity or political shelter.

[64] As a consequence, while the intention might be to nuance the local political activist movement, in order to adjust their causes to the representation of new subjects, a danger lies in unwittingly adjusting the represented subject instead. By which I mean leaving unattended cultural and conceptual nuances within what becomes a generalized migrant (activist) subject. Such nuances, as I will further down try to show in the example of maiz, might produce different articulations of protest, as well as of individual participations in protest. Articulations that may express an-Other logic of existence, Other subject positions and ways of assuming these positions. To my understanding, activism and participation in maiz re-present such a fundamentally different perspective on protest and self-empowerment, articulated in, and by means of, artistic projects and narrations.

[65] Let me still remain briefly at *Border Crossing Services*, and particularly at the artists as subjects-authors and their central goal of rethinking the terms "smuggler" and "trafficker." Juxtaposing them to the positive connotations of "Fluchthelfer," they proved the official state interpretations that legitimize or il-legitimize the same activity to be dependent upon governments' interests.<sup>67</sup> I would view this issue as belonging to the issue of foreigners in a Western-European state, an issue perceived by the authorities as a problem, leading to strict policies and institutional racisms that cause, in turn, problems to foreigners. The decision to pose as the project's central goal a question, i.e. the "Ausländerfrage," which represents the Austrian majority's problem rather than the

<sup>67</sup> These were interests of political ideology, since during the cold war smuggling people from DDR into BRD was considered by the latter as a liberating act. While especially during the 1950s and 1960s the massive migration of "Gastarbeiter" from East and South was facilitated, for as long as it served economic development.

migrants' problems, can in a certain sense be regarded as "politically correct" and "corrective." It could be viewed as "politically correct" in terms of political art-activism, because the representation of minorities and their problems by members of the dominant majority and on the latter's initiative, could lead to patronizing representation politics. It would be "politically corrective" for Austrian/EU internal state policies, compensating for unjust and discriminatory, immigration policies.<sup>68</sup>

[66] Now, if one combines the above point regarding which subject's problem (the Austrian majority/the migrants' minorities) is represented in the art project's goal, with the point made earlier about dangers lurking in formatting the migrant protests into the local leftist movements' oppositionality protest, one might come to some disconcerting thoughts. Namely, that the political activists' practices, as presented in the art projects' choices and aesthetics of representations, may unwittingly be enacting a parallel operation to that described by Christian Kravagna in 1995 with respect to Austrian politicians and the internal political reasons underlying the great emphasis and strictness that the government was showing in the "Ausländerfrage."<sup>69</sup> To be more precise, to some extent, the strategies and handling of the problem of immigration both by the government and leftist activists operated partly as a catalyst or a vehicle for addressing their own internal political and organizational needs. In the first case, by adjusting Austrian immigration policies, politicians tried to keep voters from leaking into Jörg Haider's nationalist party. In the second case, by adjusting their programs and targets to the existence and needs of new suppressed classes – amongst which, the precariat of the sans papiers – the leftist activists tried to reinvent the causes, justification and argumentation of leftist ideologies in post-1989 Europe.

[67] To my understanding, this redirection of the leftist movement was only to be applauded. Yet the produced narratives of an activist world in the art world of the 1990s could easily run the risk of turning on its head the aesthetics of their politics, when transferring political practices to art activism practices. By which I mean that participation, presentation, and relations of fact and fiction, do not operate in the same or equivalent ways in the domains of art and of political life. Rather, their impact on subjects, objects, audiences and "left-overs" of the produced narratives in art and in politics might prove to operate in importantly different ways. Having said that, let me now turn to maiz:

---

<sup>68</sup> See here also the project *Institutional Racisms* by Krenn and Ressler that focuses on remand pending deportation

<sup>69</sup> Kravagna does not use the term "Ausländerfrage" regarding the discussion's theme. He speaks of "Ausländerquoten, Asylrecht, Flüchtlingstatus," which I sum up here in "Ausländerfrage" as umbrella term. Kravagna, "Willkommen in Wien," 72.



Ja. Und wir nehmen immer mehr Platz in Anspruch. [...] Zwischen Vernunft und einer anthropophagischen, lachenden Haltung schaffen wir uns Räume der Bewegung und des Widerstandes.<sup>70</sup>

Während das System unsere Sprache einnimmt und die Ästhetik (Form) von der Ethik (Inhalt) und den inhaltlichen Strategien trennt, integrieren wir und machen den Zusammenhang zwischen Ästhetik, Ethik und Strategien sichtbar. Wir durchbrechen Stereotype, bringen das Element des Grotesken ein, der Provokation, des Ungehorsams, des Aus-dem-Rahmen-Fallens, des konstanten Bruchs. Als Mittel verwenden wir Performance, Ironie, Parodie, Satire und Fiktion. Ästhetik und Sprache, die sich permanent außerhalb des Rahmens und der Vorgaben stellen.<sup>71</sup>

[68] Art, politics, anthropophagism. What kind of logic brings these three together? Art in maiz is used for political work. As part of their cultural work it provides a space within which concepts and processes for the transgression of political and social barriers can be refined and tried out in projects.<sup>72</sup> For instance in *Kartographische Eingriffe* ideas and processes concerning the conception and occupation of public spaces by migrant women were developed during workshops and given visual form for the exhibition. Through the exhibition presentation of their fictional city maps in several gallery spaces, the women symbolically also occupied these public spaces of culture.<sup>73</sup> According to performance theorist Marty Huber, sceptical critics who characterized the women's works "artistically uninteresting" were missing the point: "[G]eht es in diesem Fall überhaupt um Kunst, oder handelt es nicht vielmehr um eine Penetration des Kunstraumes?"<sup>74</sup>

[69] Various forms of artistic expression are employed, whether performative, visual or literary. As Caixeta writes in the second quote used above here as epigraph, they apply "irony, parody, satire, fiction." As, for example, when in 2000 the maiz Samba School

---

<sup>70</sup> Rubia Salgado and Luzenir Caixeta, "Anthropophagischer Protagonismus," in: *transversal* 1 (2001), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0101/cs/de>. ("Yes. And we occupy more and more space. [...]. Between reason and an anthropophagic, laughing position, we create for ourselves spaces for movement and emancipation." [This and all following translations from Salgado's and Luzenir's text are mine.]) In putting this text together Caixeta and Salgado have cited and/or processed extracts from earlier texts by them, namely, "Über das Menschenwerden... Notizen über Affen, Migrantinnen und Kulturarbeit," in: *Kupf Zeitung* 86/2 (2000); "Anthropofagie und Akkulturation: eine Begegnung beim Ficken," in: *Kupf Zeitung* 80/1 (1999); "MAIZ: eine Praxis zwischen Vernunft und Lachen," in: *Kulturrisse* 6/00; "Aus dem Punkt wollen wir einen Beistrich machen," in: *Der Apfel Zeitschrift* 55/00. It is interesting to juxtapose the anthropophagic laughter of Salgado and Caixeta's feminism as rendered in the above texts with the the concept of women's laughter in the book of Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contermporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, London and New York 1996.

<sup>71</sup> Caixeta, "Migrantische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit als Kulturarbeit." ("While the system takes our voice and separates the aesthetics (form) from the ethics (content) and from strategies expressed in the content, we integrate and make visible the connections between the aesthetics, the ethics and the strategies. We break through the stereotypes, we introduce elements of the grotesque, the provocative, the disobedient, of that what-falls-outside-the-frame, of the constant break. We use performance, irony, parody, satire and fiction as our media. It is aesthetics and a language constantly placed outside of frames and guidelines.")

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.maiz.at>.

<sup>74</sup> Huber, "MAIZ. Wir lieben dich!". ("[I]s this case about art anyway? Is it not rather about the penetration of the artistic domain?" [My translation])

demonstrated against the Austrian government. The women were marching, drumming and dancing, wearing grotesque pink hearts on their chests reading: "Österreich wir lieben dich!" And on their backs: "Und wir werden dich nie verlassen!" ("Austria, we love you!"; "We will never leave you!")<sup>75</sup> Or like in the cooking performances they made in the project space Transpublic and in the old market of Linz.<sup>76</sup> The women cooked under the motto of anthropophagism. Metaphor and parody are chosen over factual information, when the migrant women themselves participate in such public manifestations. A justification given for this choice sounds close to what I maintained earlier regarding the vulnerable positions that persons are brought into, when they expose themselves as private individuals exemplifying political, public issues:

Die Ergebnisse [i.e. of maiz's cultural work], die nicht als Endprodukte, sondern als Teil eines Prozesses gesehen werden, können dann in der Öffentlichkeit präsentiert werden. Hier können auch wir auftreten. Nicht als einzelne Personen, sondern als Figuren, als "Personae" einer fiktionalen Darstellung. Hier können wir unsere Anliegen thematisieren [...] *Es ist eine Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, die als kulturelle Betätigung realisiert wird und die aus der politischen Bildungsarbeit entspringt. Eine Arbeit, die uns sichtbar macht, ohne uns persönlich zu exponieren.*<sup>77</sup>

[70] Participation and "protagonism" of migrant women in artistic and cultural projects are central concepts in maiz. According to Rubia Salgado, process-based, participatory work serves in twofold ways: "[...] we are convinced that within this type of process we can also carry out work on political education. On the other hand, we want to position ourselves as creative subjects in the field of symbolisms."<sup>78</sup> "Protagonism" means that the women – be they cleaners, sex-workers, housewives or academics – are not given a stand by "members of the dominant society" to express themselves.<sup>79</sup> Rather, they find the ways to conceptualize and construct their own subject position, and strategically select collaborations with artists, provided they can co-determine their roles.

---

<sup>75</sup> See Hito Steyerl, "Europa's Traum. Ein Dokumentarfilmprojekt," in: *springerin* VII, 2 (2001), 48-51, <http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft.php?id=8&pos=1&textid=176&lang=de>.

<sup>76</sup> Transpublic is a project space in the city of Linz that brings together theorie, art and interdisciplinary work. <http://www.transpublic.at>.

<sup>77</sup> Salgado and Caixeta, "Anthropophagischer Protagonismus." ("The outcomes [i.e. of maiz's cultural work] are not seen as end-products but as part of a process, and they can afterwards be presented in public. Here we can also appear ourselves. Not as individual persons, but as figures, as 'Personae' of a fictional representation. Here we can thematize our wishes [...] *It is public relations work that is realized as cultural activity and derives from the political education work. It is a work that makes us visible, without exposing us personally.*" [My emphasis]) One should add here that since a significant number of the women of maiz work in the sex industry and/or may have no full residence or working permit for Austria, public exposure may place them in real danger of persecution and exposure to harassment whether by authorities or civilians.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Krenn and Rubia Salgado, "Art and Anti-Racism. Areas of Conflict," in: *Moving On. Border Activism – Strategies for Anti-Racist Actions*, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst e.V., ed., Berlin 2005, 102-105, here 103.

<sup>79</sup> The terms "members of the dominant society" and "Austrians of the majority" ("MehrheitsösterreicherInnen") are used repeatedly by maiz. For their origins see Krenn and Salgado, "Art and Anti-Racism."

[71] Following all the above, maiz's approach to the use of participatory practices in political art activism enacts a reverse movement to the approach of WochenKlausur and Krenn and Ressler. While the latter transferred forms of participation from political practices to art-activism practices (e.g., the migrants' active participation in public discourses about their rights), maiz transfer forms of participation from artistic and cultural practices to their political activism practices. This is done through both content *and form*, and in this respect brings to mind Caixeta's earlier cited words. To paraphrase her sayings, the dominant "system" that they find themselves both within, and confronted with, as migrant women, weakens them by taking their language and disintegrating the coherence of aesthetics, ethics and strategies expressed in the content. Indeed, in maiz the point seems to be not only to express their demands and to find an appropriate stand to express them from. More than that, the aesthetics of performing the claims' utterance, the use of language in which the claim is articulated, all these seem to be consciously and culturally integrated. The aforementioned understanding of an incompatibility between the migrant women's aesthetics, ethics and strategies and the language of the dominant "system" they are expected to talk in, seems to me close to Spivak's claim that the subaltern women may not share the same perception of reality, let alone respective discursive formations as either the colonizer or the sympathetic leftist intellectual. In the following I will try to show how indeed also *in the narrative* of protagonist participation in cultural work, one can see how by means of artistic representations a distinct coherence is being created between aesthetics, ethics and strategies. Thus "in the field of symbolism," they create a language of protest that has their own distinct aesthetics corresponding to their political work. In doing that, they follow a logic close to Butler's perception of possible uses of language and speech. The concept of "anthropophagischer Protagonismus" ("cannibalistic protagonism") encapsulates their strategy:

Wir fressen euch schon seit sehr langer Zeit. Jetzt bist du dran. Schon meine indianischen Vorfahren haben euch verspeist, nicht viele von euch, aber doch einige: die braven kämpferischen bewundernswerten unter euch. Anthropophagie. Ja, das Fressen von Menschen. Der bewundernswerten Eigenschaften wegen. Um sich das Bewunderte anzueignen.<sup>80</sup>

[72] The concept of cannibalistic protagonism is taken from the so-called Movimento Antropofágo (Anthropophagic Movement) and the Anthropophagic Manifesto written by the Brazilian author Oswald de Andrade in 1928. Andrade thought of the adaptations of African and Polynesian art by Picasso and other European artists as a distortion of the "exotic."<sup>81</sup> He confronted this distortion by his own "anthropophagic" concept. He proposed the absorption of various influences of European modernism by Brazilian

---

<sup>80</sup> Salgado and Caixeta, "Anthropophagischer Protagonismus." ("We have been eating you for a long time now. Now it is your turn. Already my Indian ancestors have been eating you, not many of you, just some: those admirable, brave fighters among you. Anthropophagy. Yes, the eating of humans. [...] In order to appropriate what one admires." [My translation])

culture, incorporating their strengths and resulting in a mixture that would correspond to a Brazilian hybrid culture. This concept was inspired by Francis Picabia, temporary editor of the French magazine *Cannibale*. While the term "cannibale" had been used before with reference to the European avant-gardes, for example to describe that "Surrealism ha[d] eaten Dada and ha[d] digested it" and "the qualities of the devoured had entered into the strengthened body of the survivor."<sup>82</sup>

[73] Andrade's anthropophagic concept has been taken up by the Brazilian initiators of maiz and transformed into "anthropophagischer Protagonismus." This is not the first time that Andrade's concept resurfaces in Brazilian culture. Most notably in the 1960s it was taken as conceptual departure point in Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica's work.<sup>83</sup> By turning to Andrade the maiz women draw from the depository of their own culture. Not, however, in search of distinct, non-Western cultural elements. Rather, in search of a way of assimilating Western elements as their own. Producing a synthesis that is "ethically" based on strategically returning to the West what the latter had made out of the aesthetics and politics of the "exotic." Thus cultural assimilation, which is a permanent expectation of migrants in Europe whether officially admitted or not – not, when it sounds "politically incorrect" for those Western societies that propagate multiculturalism – is acted out in reverse. It is not the other's culture that gets absorbed by the dominant. To the contrary, reading Salgado and Caixeta: "Diesmal haben *wir* jedoch die Rolle der Protagonistinnen übernommen: *wir* assimilieren euch, *wir* drohen euch, *wir* fressen euch."<sup>84</sup> And elsewhere: "Migrantinnen als Protagonistinnen bedeutet eine ethisch-politische Positionierung, die sich in einer angemessenen, aber dissonanten Ethik ausdrückt."<sup>85</sup>

[74] In the production process and the performative events of participatory projects, the ethics and aesthetics of cannibalistic protagonism are expressed in the structure of participation, when, for instance, migrant women remap the city. And simultaneously they are expressed visually and performatively, for instance, in the satire and parody of

---

<sup>81</sup> Michael Korfmann and Marcelo Nogueira, "Avant-Garde in Brazil," in: *Dialectical Anthropology* 28/1 (2004), 125-145, here 129.

<sup>82</sup> Hans Richter, *DADA – Kunst und Antikunst*, Köln 1978, 21. Cited in Korfman and Nogueira, "Avant-Garde in Brazil," 131. For a more skeptical post-colonial approach to the anthropophagic movement and its ideas about cultural appropriations not only of modernist European art, but also of technology, see Henryk Siewierski, "Utopia and Anthropophagy," in: *Third Text* 21/5 (2007), 499-508.

<sup>83</sup> More recently, the concept of anthropophagy was used as a link for a series of shows comprising the XXIV Sao Paulo Biennial in 1998, curated by Paulo Herkenhoff and Andriano Pedrosa. In 2006 the concept is met again in the exhibition of Brazilian art and culture "Tropicalia: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture" at the Barbican Art Gallery, London, curated by Carlos Basualdo. See here also Michael Abury, "Made in Brazil," exhibition review, in: *Art History* 31/1 (2008), 103-113.

<sup>84</sup> Salgado and Caixeta, "Anthropophagischer Protagonismus." ("However this time we have taken the role of the protagonists: we assimilate you, we threaten you, we eat you up.")

<sup>85</sup> Caixeta, "Migrantische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit als Kulturarbeit." ("Migrant women as protagonists means an ethical positioning that expresses an appropriate, but dissonant ethic.")

the visuals of sex- and housework as in the demonstration and cooking events. Nonetheless, as already mentioned earlier, in the narrations of their cultural work the maiz authors do not usually describe verbally or provide visual documentation of projects. Instead, the ethics, aesthetics and strategies of "cannibalistic protagonism" are transferred and enacted on the page by literary, narrative and linguistic means.

[75] A most pertinent example for this is the text "Anthropophagischer Protagonismus" by Rubia Salgado and Luzenir Caixeta.<sup>86</sup> The concept and strategies of cannibalistic protagonism are presented by Salgado and Caixeta both *in the text*, as well as *by means of the text*. Throughout, the authors enact their "cannibalistic protagonism" on the reader in multiple ways. Let me start with some literary means and then move to textual and linguistic ones. They explicitly declare Andrade's "Manifesto Antropofágo" as their source of inspiration. What this cultural anthropophagism is all about, they do not only explain, but they enact it in the ways in which they appropriate Kafka and his literature. Their text opens with a brothel scene, where men meet women. One woman is of colour. She is referred to as "Äffin" (female ape) and initially dismissed by a client. Hovering around him more than the others, she eventually convinces him to take her into a separee. Seducing him like this, she seems to confirm his racist and sexist stereotypes of exotic females: a cycle of degradation and fascination is set forth. The non-human creature of the Äffin is not Salgado or Caixeta's literary construction. They appropriated the male ape from Kafka's text "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie" ("A Report for an Academy").<sup>87</sup> Thus they did not construct their own original parable. Rather, they appropriate a European one, the story, the characters, the words of it, but also the cultural weight of the author as both a classic and an "other" in European culture. They take all that and turn it into their own device.

[76] Kafka is amongst the classics of German literature. But he himself was a Jew living in Prague, where German was the dominant language under the Austro-Hungarian empire. Thus Kafka was bilingual and basically wrote in German. Actually a characteristic of his literary style is that he sometimes used German words in equivocal ways, puzzling translators who have later tried to transfer his meanings to other languages. Thus he plays with and within the dominance of German language.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, according to one interpretation of "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie" the ape is a symbol for Jewish people feeling like the "others" of Europe. Though not a confirmed interpretation, an argument employed for it is that Kafka's text was first published in the German monthly *Der Jude (The Jew)*, along with another story, "Schakale und Araber" ("Jackals and

---

<sup>86</sup> <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0101/cs/de>, see Fn. 70.

<sup>87</sup> Franz Kafka, "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie," in: Roger Hermes, ed., *Die Erzählungen und Andere Ausgewählte Prosa*, Frankfurt am Main 1998.

<sup>88</sup> Further, see also Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. D. Polan, Minneapolis 1986.

Arabs"), which can also be given interpretations relating to prejudices.<sup>89</sup> Whereas according to another interpretation, the ape shows that "identity is performance," a constantly re-enacted self-presentation.<sup>90</sup> Both interpretations of the parable, whether about European racism and the "other" as the other side of the self (Jewish-Christian traditions), or about identity being constructed in performance, fit into the cultural activism concepts and strategies of maiz's women migrants in Europe.

[77] To leave the potential interpretations of the author's cultural identity and literary intentions, the ape in Kafka's story is an animal caught in an exotic African country and brought to Europe. His report to an academy is about his transformation to human-being. To survive in Europe as "free ape," he saw two possibilities: "Zoologischer Garten oder Varieté" ("Zoo or vaudeville").<sup>91</sup> As Salgado and Caixeta put it: "Exotisches Tier oder bewundernswert assimiliertes und angepasstes Tier."<sup>92</sup> The ape learned to imitate humans so well that he claims to have forgotten what it had been like to be an ape. Nonetheless, it is for his "äffisches Vorleben" ("past life as an ape") and his admirable assimilation into human culture that he has been invited by the academy to talk. His speech perfectly imitates an academic style. Salgado and Caixeta appropriate his speech, his subject-voice, his protagonist character, his talk's meanings and wording (direct citation). Most significantly, Salgado and Caixeta draw the parallel between the ape's parable and the exotic migrant woman's reality: "Anpassung und Prädestinierung, Stereotypen zu entsprechen [...] Rassismus und Exotismus [...] Degradation und Faszination [...] exotisches Tier oder bewundernswert assimiliertes und angepasstes Tier." This way or the other, "[d]as Prädikat ändert sich je nach Situation. Das Subjekt bleibt jedoch gleich: ein Wesen nicht menschlicher Natur." For the exotic animal or woman, the dominant criteria remain the same: "Hier herrschen zwei Maximen: Anpassung und Prädestinierung, Stereotypen zu entsprechen."<sup>93</sup>

[78] One could extract two key words here: "stereotypes" and "assimilation." But in Salgado and Caixeta's text these concepts do not work in the ways of Kafka and his ape. Rather, Kafka's classic status in Western literature, and the meanings and ways of his text are eaten up and digested by the maiz women ("Wir fressen euch [...] Der bewundernswerten Eigenschaften wegen. Um sich das Bewunderte anzueignen"<sup>94</sup>). Just

---

<sup>89</sup> For this interpretation see Kafka's biography by Nicholas Murray, *Kafka*, New Haven 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Walter Herbert Sokel, *The Myth of Power and the Self: Essays on Franz Kafka*, Detroit 2002.

<sup>91</sup> Franz Kafka, "Bericht für eine Akademie," in: Hermes, *Die Erzählungen und andere ausgewählte Prosa*, quoted from Salgado and Caixeta, "Anthropophagischer Protagonismus."

<sup>92</sup> "Zoo or vaudeville. Exotic animal or admirably assimilated and adapted animal."

<sup>93</sup> "Adaptation and the predetermination to meet stereotypes [...] Racism und Exoticism [...] Degradation und Fascination [...] exotic animal or admirably assimilated and adapted animal"; "The labeling changes according to the situation. The subject remains nonetheless the same: a being of not human nature"; "Two imperatives rule here: adaptation and the predetermination to meet stereotypes."

<sup>94</sup> See Fn. 80.



as in Andrade's cannibalistic concept: after European avant-garde art had adapted and distorted the "Exotic" of African and Polynesian art, Brazilian hybrid culture in turn absorbed the thereof derived European cultural constructions. It incorporated their strengths and resulted into a mixed art tailored to Brazilian hybrid culture. So also in Salgado and Caixeta's digestion of Kafka, "the qualities of the devoured ente[r] the body of the survivor."<sup>95</sup>

[79] Now let me leave Kafka and the cannibalistic literary appropriations of him that are quite performatively enacted in Salgado and Caixeta's text. Furthermore, there are also textual tricks and constructions. The authors start abruptly with the place, laid bare to its absolute basics: "Ein Bordell, nichts besonders, ein Bordell eben. Im Bordell einige Frauen. Einige Männer, Gäste."<sup>96</sup> At first they use short and simple phrases with nouns, verbs, adverbs, without any adjectives or attributive adjectives. No nuanced characters or detailed descriptions are offered, apart from one particular elaboration that lasts some 8-9 lines: the distinction between people we know, with whom we feel more or less familiar, and guests in a brothel paying for services. Additionally, there are no good and bad characters in this story. No victimizers and victims as there seemed to be from the start in the art activism narratives of *WochenKlausur* or Krenn and Ressler. And no clear-cut, universal conceptions of humanitarian or socio-political justice.<sup>97</sup>

[80] But this is where the point lies in Caixeta and Salgado's story. In situations like this, things are given expression in reverse formulations. Which is what the ape's story manifests. The woman who is different, the ape, is not wanted. So she has to try for the client more than the others ("Alle versuchen, den Kunden zu beeindrucken. Nichts Besonderes: Wettbewerb ist überall. [...] Doch nach dem (wahrscheinlich) anstrengenden Umherrennen, geht er mit der von ihm als Äffin bezeichneten Frau ins Separee. Eine Schwarze Frau."<sup>98</sup> However, the hierarchies of dominance operate in reverse ways to their appearance. Degradation and fascination operate in supplementary rather than antithetical ways. When the authors explain this, the articulation of their text becomes more complex than before, with longer and compound words and syntax: "Die Verkörperung der nur schein-bar wider-sprüchlichen Ver-bindung zwischen De-gradation und Faszination wird fort-gesetzt."<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Richter, *DADA*.

<sup>96</sup> "A bordello, nothing particular, just a bordello. In the bordello a few women. A few men, guests."

<sup>97</sup> See here also Butler and Spivak's critique of universalism, *Who sings the Nation-State?*.

<sup>98</sup> "They all try to impress the customer. Nothing exceptional: competition exists everywhere. [...] However after the (probably) exhausting running about, he takes the woman that he had called *Äffin* along with him to the private room. A black woman." ("Äffin" = female ape. In the English translation I keep the German word "Äffin" (-nen), because the English word ape does not define gender.)

<sup>99</sup> "The embodiment of the seemingly contradictory connection between degradation and fascination is continued."

[81] And then without any introduction Kafka's extract is inserted. A free ape presents himself ("ich, freier Affe" ["I, a free ape"]), revealing his secret ("fügte mich fügte mich diesem Joch" ["bowed to this yoke"]) in front of a public of male academics. First person, direct speech, an un-introduced new context, and the previous object of degradation and desire ("die von ihm als Äffin bezeichneten Frau" ["The woman that he had called Äffin"<sup>100</sup>]) the only link with the present speaking subject ("ich, freier Affe"). From the "Separee" to the "Akademie." In the next three paragraphs ("*Rassismus und Exotismus*," "*Möglichkeiten*," "*Überraschung!*" ["Racism and Exoticism," "Possibilities," "Surprise!"]) the authors introduce the binary pairs that appear contradictory, but in essence constitute mutually complimentary conditions of existence in Kafka's sarcastic parable and the migrants' real situation: "Anpassung und Prädestinierung Stereotypen zu entsprechen [...] Rassismus und Exotismus [...] Degradation und Faszination [...] exotisches Tier oder bewundernswert assimiliertes und angepasstes Tier."<sup>101</sup> The text simultaneously confuses and enlightens the reader. Towards the end, the binary pairs boil down to their common denominator, the subject ("Das Subjekt bleibt jedoch gleich" ["The subject remains nonetheless the same"]), and its survival strategy – "anthropophagy."

[82] The following two paragraphs ("*Feststellungen*," "*Strategien*" ["Observations," "Strategies"]) operate as a kind of illocutionary speech. As direct speech ("wir fressen euch [...]") that in a certain way enacts performatively on the reader what it says at the moment of saying it.<sup>102</sup> By which I mean that the authors seem to want to linguistically affect on their addressees the unpleasant and discomforting feeling of being aggressively and degradingly treated, threatened and hitting back. This is performed by means of the direct address ("wir fressen euch [...] Jetzt bist du dran [...]"<sup>103</sup>), the parading terminology of sex, pain, violence and bodily parts ("Die Schmerzen, die Verwaltungen, die vorgespilten Orgasmen"), even by the metaphoric mix of the migrant women's penetrated bodily parts with geographical terms ("Und der Boden unter meinen Füßen, alle Böden, die sie schon berührt haben, alle Wege und Stürze, Kurven und Berge").<sup>104</sup> Besides, the use of direct speech ("wir/euch" ["we/you"]) unjustifiedly and irritatingly identifies the reader and the women's addressee.

[83] Judith Butler's analysis of the performativity and contingency of speech acts and of language, and her statement that we do language and we do it on others, while

<sup>100</sup> "Äffin" = female ape (cf. Fn. 98 above).

<sup>101</sup> "Adaptation and the predetermination to meet stereotypes. [...] Racism und Exoticism [...] Degradation und Fascination [...] exotic animal or admirably assimilated and adapted animal." (Cf. Fn. 94 above)

<sup>102</sup> Here I refer to illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts as used by Judith Butler drawing herself from J.L. Austin. See Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 2-3; J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Cambridge, Mass. 1962, 52.

<sup>103</sup> "We have been eating you [...] Now it is your turn." (Cf. Fn. 80 above)

<sup>104</sup> "The pains, the rapes, the pretended orgasms"; "and the ground under my feet, all the grounds that they have touched, all the roads and torrents, curves and mountains."

language is also the thing that we do,<sup>105</sup> seems to coincide with these ways that Salgado and Caixeta make use of language. For instance, the ape as the Other, the disenfranchised from human-being, which nonetheless seizes the language of enfranchisement becoming himself as he speaks a performative contradiction, exposing the limits of what is conventionally perceivable or acceptable. The authors demonstrate also the contingency of meanings and values in words (e.g., the contingency of contradiction in the pairs of binary terms), which entails the contingency of their meaning altogether. Further, they make use of tactics of surprising the reader, for example by unexpectedly interpellating him or her as the Äffin's addressee, in a way doubling the violence effect of their speech content (e.g. "wir fressen euch"), or by means of illocutionary speech. One could go on explaining ways in which, paragraph by paragraph, they play with and attack their reader. The reader who is invariably addressed in the second person ("euch") as the "dominant," male, Western subject. Somewhere between parody, irony and self-sarcasm, they demonstrate the "anthropophagic" strategy with which they symbolically subvert hierarchies of cultural dominance by performing their identities: who is "eating" whom, who is hosting and who is hosted, white men, black women in the EU's brothels.

[84] Now, after doing all that, after having snared the reader with narrative and textual means and tricks, the style of the text becomes more and more sober, literal rather than literary in referring to the situation of migrant women in Europe. They describe their organization's character, aims and practices. In the very last paragraph ("*Kämpferischer Schluss*" [Militant End]), when they conclude with the claim for subject positions in the own struggles ("als Protagonistinnen unserer eigenen Geschichte"), and for the removal of social prejudices, racism and exploitative structures, they come quite close to the ethical principles and political claims of Krenn and Ressler ("der ethischen Notwendigkeit, sich gegenüber ungerechten Strukturen zu empören").<sup>106</sup> However, until then, the text has manifested by means of content and form, the important differentiations between their approaches to art-activism. The concepts and forms of their participatory art practices have been transferred to a performative practice of narration and speech. Thus, they have articulated a strategy and simultaneously constructed an aesthetics that nuance and empower the subject of political protest, by making it its own. This is something that the politics of protest articulated as aesthetic strategies in the projects and narratives of the artists' participatory activism ran the risk of missing (e.g., the activist "political correctness" of the migrant subject presenting its real self). Tending, rather, towards a cultural generalization and political narrowness of the migrant subject as political activist.

---

<sup>105</sup> Butler, "Introduction" and "Sovereign performatives."

<sup>106</sup> "as protagonists of our own story"; "the ethical necessity to be revolt against unfair structures."

[85] In concluding, in this article I have tried to investigate visual and verbal forms of narrations in art-activism projects. This was an investigation in the articulations by means of which, as well as in which, the projects communicate their message. First I examined the constitution of the migrant as subject of the narration (narrating subject) and in the narration (narrated subject). Afterwards I looked at the question of whether and how in these narrations power structures that lead to the marginalization of migrant minorities are challenged or confirmed. Each case study represents a different approach. Each appears to be critical and challenging not only of EU and national immigration policies, but also to one another. Indeed, all case-studies were constituted in discourse. The one articulation has directly or indirectly been informing the other. In this way the one renders visible or legible for the other the elements that differentiate their positions and approaches, and thus provide them with the tools to articulate this differentiation. Something that is also, in essence, an aesthetic process of nuancing cultural and political subjects' identities.

[<top>](#)