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Transversal or Terror?

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What is the image of the PTC? ... Austrian amateur theater group, transversalists, nomads, noborder activists, international street theater troupe, Alien Nation, wandering "globalization protesters", "charlatans or guerillas", Black Block, terrorists, event-hoppers, criminal association, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde?

Created and founded in 1994 in the squatted autonomous center Ernst Kirchweger Haus in Vienna, the residents of the EKH and people from the affiliated scene started out as the "PublixTheatre Favoriten" and prepared Brecht's "Three-Penny Opera" in the only theater hall in Vienna's largest district. From the beginning, the working process was defined as a collective process and was accordingly long (lasting several months) and rich in conflicts. "For what gives man life?" was one of the fundamental questions in the political and artistic process of organization. The group's self-understanding as "autonomous, radically leftist" had clear and overpowering opponents, including the state, capitalism, domination, nationalism, sexism. Agit-prop and amateur theater in a committed form drew the lines for further collective projects: plays (Penthesilea/Kleist, We won't pay!/Fo, Auftrag/Müller), chanson evenings (PublixCore), street theater (flight from Transdanubia: swimming across the Danube Canal, deportation

actions). Interests, arguments, living conditions continuously changed the composition of the group, but the initially defined principles remained: no director, collective collaboration and decision-making, no personal fees, open to interested persons. In time, experiments were conducted with new media and with electronic music in changing and heterogeneous contexts, there was a stronger focus on the treatment of the content of different themes, looking more for texts than for plays. The Austrian action operetta "Schluss mit lustig. - Ein Land dreht durch!" ["No More Funny Business. - A Country Goes Crazy!"] following the 1999 elections was the last "stage play" so far: viewers were fenced in and treated to practical resistance technologies. The PublixTheatre was consequently thrown out of the Vienna Schauspielhaus. The problem was less a matter of the content, than of the "arrogant, dilettante" [1] aesthetic form.

With the change of government in February 2000, there was an increasing shift from classical theater space to the street. Some of the PublixTheatre people worked as part of the wave of protests against the ÖVP/FPÖ [2] government. There was a boom in unconventional means used in actions, Internet protest networking and the use of video. Theatrical forms of protest (e.g. "UN missions", ritual slaughters in front of police lines, white protest drummers, official delegations, storming the Burgtheater) were specifically tested in demonstrations against the new right-wing government; the era of mobile protests in the form of caravans and networks began. The EKH tour in May 2000 was the first attempt, then under the motto "one world - no nation - anarchy instead of Austria", to take action in public space in Austrian provincial capital cities. This first caravan already showed that performing in public spaces can enable unmediated explosive forms of confrontation, since the viewers become co-players by chance,

sometimes counter-players, and the state authorities observe the political play suspiciously, intervening "if necessary". Provisionally occupying public space to temporarily put on a different play, with Publix-Kitchen, propaganda radio, street duets, hocus-pocus and pie fights, among other means, demanded from the travelers not only being able to deal with the organization of an everyday life rich in conflicts in a constantly changing large-scale collective, but also permanently flexible situation-related forms of action and overcoming the cliché boundaries in their own self-image.
The "battle cry" and thematic emphasis "no border - no nation" was brought into play in the course of growing international networks. The PublixTheatreCaravan was organized in 2001 at open plena in conjunction with the platform for a world without racism (www.no-racism.net). The aim of the caravan was to topicalize migration policies and the racist laws that inform them, which institutionally determine the inequality between persons.

"The slogan and the demand `noborder - nonation' is a focus that links the Austrian resistance formations with global protest movements. `The Right for the Freedom of Movement' is the most idealistic and radical demand for many transnational movements in the era of globalization. Anti-racist and anti-national cultural work is increasingly realized in international exchange. The Internet pushes networking. Parallel to the increasingly restrictive `harmonization' of asylum and migration policies, attempts have been launched in recent years to promote the networking of anti-racist organizations. Independent media work, networked demonstrations, direct actions are manifestos against the international project of deportation and exclusion. In collaboration and coordination with the international noborder network (www.noborder.org), noborder camps, caravans and other projects have been organized. In the past `summer of resistance',

one of them was the noborder-nonation-PublixTheatreCaravan." [3]

On their tour, the PublixTheatreCaravan traveled through Austria, Slovenia and Italy, traveling to places, where border regimes could be problematized and attacked. Props and costumes included orange overalls and helmets, inner tubes, squirt guns, UN soldier equipment, etc. At the start of the tour, the memorial at the Austrian-Hungarian border commemorating the heroic deed of "cutting through the fence", carried out by the former Foreign Minister Alois Mock, and thus the victory over communism, was shot by U-no soldiers "artists learn to shoot" in a theatrical act. The caravan subsequently traveled to Salzburg for the WEF summit to penetrate into the red zone with the inner tube WEF Monster. In conjunction with the noborder camp at the Slovenian-Hungarian-Croatian border, noborder passes were distributed by U-no soldiers in no-man's land on the international noborder action day. The passes were intended to permit crossing the border without a passport. In Ljubljana, the caravan organized a demonstration in front of a deportation prison together with Slovenian groups; in Carinthia they visited the partisan museum and discussed minority rights. The climax of the noborder tour was their participation in the demonstration for migrant rights on July 19, 2001 in Genoa, where the caravan formed the theatrical Alien Nation Block together with other groups.

The Transversality of the PublixTheatreCaravan

Idealistically, romantically, positively, unrealistically, the PublixTheatreCaravan demands: *noborder - no one is illegal - For the right to freedom of movement: the term migration can be valued differently … Resistance against the deportation policies of the Fortress*

Europe and proliferating neoliberalism is growing internationally … Social movements are beginning to organize at the grassroots level, including migrants from the start …

In contrast with this idealist thinking, the reality is often frighteningly sobering, complicated, banal and schizophrenic. The participation of migrants in the PublixTheatreCaravan proved difficult, if not impossible, due to the circumstances of the project. It is not possible for asylum seekers in Austria to legally leave the country, even for a limited period of time. The Caravan 2001, just like the noborderZONE 2002 with regards to the participants, was to leave national borders behind. Yet in terms of real politics, for people with an unsecured residence status in Austria, it is hardly possible to travel even to other EU countries. Consequently, only people with Austrian, German, US American, Australian and Slovakian passports took part in the projects. Crossing borders would have been too dangerous for people seeking asylum. In addition, applicants for asylum in Austria are prohibited from engaging in political activity - that could jeopardize the "peace and safety" of the country. What remains is the self-critical insight that joint work needs more time and a continuous rethinking of organization. Networking with others and working together means overcoming the mired borders in our minds and taking not only idealistic goals, but also migrant reality into consideration.

With regards to the traveling conditions of the noborder tour, every border-crossing of the caravan was a strategic action and strenuous game. It was never clear how long the caravan would be stopped, who would be controlled and observed, who or what would not be allowed across the border. The caravan languages alternated fluently and stutteringly from German to English, Spanish, Slovakian. The intensive experience of living together resulted in group dynamics that the members first had to learn to

cope with, and dangers and repression threatened the travel process from the outside. Experiments usually start with enthusiasm, but then come - as certain as the amen at the end of a prayer - the power games. Experiences in practice often describe the process as sobering; repressive mechanisms are often rigid in structure, hard and wearing. Yet heterogeneous memories seek moments that give meaning, that analyze the process and its content, in order to further imagine the capability for political action and organization.

Lines of flight? Why not draw a transversal - locally and globally - or an attempt at "becoming-minority"? … / - HM - / … Then this means - as you can read from the rhizomists Deleuze and Guattari - undermining logocentrisms, in order to be able to draw "lines of flight" and impel the creation of revolutionary nomadic war machines … / WOW!! / … This would irritatingly question social divisions and systems of order by moving affects and intensities; theorists replace the battle panorama of a "major" revolution with a mosaic of "minor wish-revolutionary" changes … / YEAH!!! -

For me, a theory and theater enthusiast, the terms "empire" and "multitude" that Negri Hardt sound in the new analysis hit sparkle with hope, just like Deleuze/Guattari's transversal lines, but also a certain desirable theatrical pathos, which is certainly capable of *grooving*. Although good music/analysis by itself is not a guideline for action, it changes the tone and makes us more conscious of what is being played. Of course, Negri and Hardt's theories are messianic, to a certain extent, almost Christian, but nevertheless: theory with *spirit* is what disillusioned souls need from time to time. For many of the PublixTheatre activists, though, theory grumbles leave them completely cold; know-it-all theory just creates hierarchies. Maybe the term "empire" is attractive, because it has something to do with Star Wars, Yoda and the Rebels. The rhetoric of intellectualist debates plays no role in it. Peculiar class

structures and prejudices naturally permeate the left-wing battlefield as well. Reservations that are partly justified are consolidated in properly separated discussion forums. Different worlds of term and image production collide all too often or bounce off one another. Separation is basically important, isolation altogether modern, solidarity in critique is usually a secondary matter. And the question is posed often enough: is that the multitude? Who even wants to keep seeking forms of action and appropriate representations and to think about possibilities of agency, sitting at meetings for hours?

The Caravan moves on ...

The media's image production made the caravan manifest and ground it down. In the wake of the arrests following the G8 protests in Genoa, the project attained previously unimaginable renown. In this way, the image of the PTC was grabbed away from the image producers. The question of whether the line of flight is transversal or terrorist was to be judged by the molar tribunal. The club of terror threatened to shatter the theater concept, the transversal intentions and the intractable bodies. Although the verdict of the trial is still undecided, many want the project to go on. Yet in reflecting on the members' own political actions, in the assessment and self-critique, in terms of concrete objectives, the different views are often widely divergent; the group continues to develop and change. Focal points of the on-going work are still the continuing collaboration with the platform for a world without racism, the international noborder network, their own media work, and the search for "artivistic" forms of expression.

From February to May 2002, the campaign "Where is Marcus Omofuma?" was conducted collectively with migrant groups in

conjunction with the trial of the three alien registration police officers, who bound and gagged the Nigerian Marcus Omofuma during a deportation flight in May 1999, until he died after a long struggle with death. (The police officers were given a suspended sentence of eight months and now continue to work for the police.) The spectrum of action ranged from observation of the trial to press work to theatrical actions in front of the courthouse. [4] As a network and organization forum of different anti-racist groups and migrants, the "platform" has a tremendously important function in the development, introduction and discussion of collaboration and forms of political organization.

The current project of the PublixTheatreCaravan is called: noborderZONE. The project is shifting in the direction of expanding the possibilities of virtual networking and independent media production.

"People move across borders physically and virtually. Through digital and physical communication, artivists call electronic borders into question. State and multinational organizations increasingly control these two flows and movements. Yet information technology is also part of a culture of resistance that moves freely and a tool for working on a society without controls." [5]

The idea of noborderZONE is a networked installation in public spaces as a forum for public debate, providing information on the topics of migration, globalization and resistance (info-point, videoteque, audio archive), but also marking a place, from which physical and virtual resistance proceeds and independent media work is carried out.

In March 2002, in conjunction with the Austrian film festival Diagonale in Graz, the culture-political collective noborder (this

time including the PublixTheatreCaravan, The Art of the Hour is Resistance, www.no-racism.net, wr, mayday 2000, indymedia, no one is illegal) organized and produced the video series "noborder - nonation" 1-3) and the independent media project noborderZONE as a trial run in public space. [6]

An old English double-decker bus was converted in spring 2002 into a mobile media center with computers, server, radio station and lounge bar, including a videoteque on the roof. With this, the PublixTheatreCaravan first traveled to the international noborder camp in Strasbourg and then spontaneously to the Documenta 11 in Kassel. The main theme of the transversal train this time was the politics of the "Fortress Europe" and especially the Schengen Information System (SIS).

zone.noborder.org

At the noborder action camp in Strasbourg (July 19 - 28, 2002), the PublixTheatreCaravan installed a noborderZONE/media lounge in front of the train station. The bus drove every day from the camp at the German-French border to the camp auxiliary station installed in the city center, where there were live radio streams and up-to-date Internet reports on all the actions going on in and around the camp. On Radio Orange (an independent radio station in Vienna), for instance, there were daily reports and interviews to be heard in the noborderZONE program slot. The mobile media bus was available for use by activists, tourists and interested persons and was the starting point for theater interventions in the area.

"Strasbourg was explored according to criteria of `biopolitical systems', spaces were measured, and valuable data on the composition of the bio-

police and electronic substitutes was gathered using biological scans. The data was subsequently linked with the Schengen Information System (SIS), thus making the system generally accessible." [7]

Equipped with network plans and cartographies of the Strasbourg *"syndicat potentiel"*, camera and interview troupes, research teams and scientists from the Institute of Biopolitical Systems investigated the conjunctions of social, virtual and physical control. Targets of the research included the SIS, hotel chains, public order forces, the train station, a Lufthansa bus, demonstration routes and surveillance zones in the city center.

Strasbourg was the first international noborder camp organized by the noborder network, with up to 2000 participants, and it promised to be a "10-day laboratory for creative resistance and civil disobedience." [8] The PublixTheatreCaravan was organized together with other groups in the "media barrio" to conduct information and media work and interviews and form networks for concrete actions. After four days, the police prohibited all noborder activities in the city and moved from the initial de-escalation strategy to a repressive offensive. The mayor of Strasbourg, the police and the media saw a danger for public order in the camp and vilified the "violence-prone globalization opponents".

The use of tear-gas against activists, arrests and encirclement were the response from the state authorities; trials followed and continue to follow.

With regard to collaboration in the organization and the participation of migrants in the noborder camp in Strasbourg, the migrants' organization The Voice [9] was strongly involved in the preparation meetings and at the camp, and the group MIB [10] in Strasbourg itself. The Voice focused on the demand for the repeal

of the residence obligation in Germany. From the noborder camp in Jena, where The Voice was founded, a caravan traveled directly to Strasbourg. The main action was a demonstration march to the European Court of Justice to demand the right to freedom of movement and the repeal of the residence obligation. On the whole, the participation of migrants in the camp was conspicuously low, which has to do with several factors: real dangers of repression, criticism of representationist politics, alibi function, time, etc. The laboratory for creative resistance became embroiled in fears of repression, debates on organization, actions and media work. Many participants, including the few migrants that had come, had the feeling that the issues had once again been drowned out in the repression apparatus and that the camp only had a limited impact. Networking and collaboration with migrants are important, but the ideal can only be realized slowly and with much patience in reality. It is to be presumed that these networking endeavors are still just at the start.

Documenta 11 - Platform6: Realizing Freedom of Movement

Following the noborder camp in Strasbourg, the caravan traveled with international "reinforcements" directly "on invitation" to Documenta 11 - Platform5 in Kassel to spontaneously set up a noborderZONE there. (At Platform1 in Vienna in spring 2001, the PublixTheatreCaravan project noborder-nonation had already been presented.)

"Linking spaces (virtual and physical) and networking political and artistic systems are essential subjects of the project noborderZONE. For this reason as well, we are pleased to portray the connection between political and artistic spaces and their practices in Kassel, and to visit and

explore the Documenta. Platform6 calls attention to the precarious situation of people who could be deported at any moment."

At first, the PublixTheatreCaravan failed in its initial attempt to occupy the space in front of the Documenta building as a temporary noborderZONE, and was treated as a threat by the security speaker and police and banned from the area. However, with support from the co-curator Ute Meta Bauer and in intensive three-day collaboration with various groups (from Kassel, from the Roma Caravan Düsseldorf, and with noborder activists from Italy, Ireland, France), they succeeded in setting up a 24-hour noborder camp installation in the main square of Kassel in front of the Fridericianum again, and proclaimed Platform6 of the Documenta 11 - noborderZONE. The main topic was the impending deportation of Roma families from Germany. A delegation of Roma from Düsseldorf had come to Kassel and set up a small exhibition, providing information and holding discussions with many interested visitors, who were standing in line to see the largest exhibition of contemporary art, about their living conditions in Germany and the impending deportation. [11] "Realizing Freedom of Movement" was printed as the motto for discussion on folders for visitors in a fake Documenta 11 layout. The camp participants' passes were Documenta staff and press passes. Everyone involved was satisfied with the collaboration and the effect, and the project triggered internal discussions within the institution of Documenta 11 about understandings of art and politics.

Creating counter-public spheres through media projects, discussions and Publix-Theater means, not least of all, that making images and portraying processes is integrated in taking action, in political projects with concrete demands and goals. Many attempts fail and confirm the prejudices of well intentioned enlightenment

or additive image production. Nevertheless, with the value of experience and experiments, of exchange and dispute, forms of organization are tried out in practice, the degree of quality is palpably raised, romantic theories and practical chaos are made partly more comprehensible. And at the end of a project, the necessary questions of meaning are raised again and again: What do our own acts mean? How can networking, collaboration and political organization be improved? How can representationist politics be prevented? How effective is it to act as a political theater group, raising demands outside the realm of capital and state and generating an itch, at best, as an effect in the system? Is change possible without permanently running into the wall and being regularly knocked on the head by state authorities? And in the disciplinary society of a capitalist multiculturalism, how does one become a "transversal bastard"?

[1] Quote from Hans Gratzer, director of the Schauspielhaus at that time.

[2] Translator's note: coalition between the conservative "Austrian People's Party" and the right-wing "Freedom Party of Austria".

[3] For documentation, see: http://www.no-racism.net/nobordertour

[4] http://www.no-racism.net/racismkills

[5] http://www.dsec.info

[6] http://www.no-racism.net/noborderzone

[7] http://zone.noborder.org

[8] http://www.noborder.org

[9] http://www.humanrights.de/voice

[10] http://www.mibmib.free.fr

[11] http://www.krit.de/roma