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Double Service

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In the gray zones between art and politics, it often occurs that the actors neither know what they are doing nor manage to achieve any effects. In these cases, "border crossing" remains a hollow phrase used to gain distinction and, paradoxically, *conceal* borders. [1] This is not true of the project Border Crossing Services, in which Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler take up strands of discussions relevant in both art and politics, and at the same time act relatively freely in both fields; art and politics.

Ressler and Krenn have created this propaganda project for the promotion of a progressive concept of migration, but above all, for the specific people and organizations which are dedicated to organizing border crossing - as a counterweight to the mainstream media's attempts to divert attention away from the intensified enclosure of Schengen Europe, and also as a counterweight against the shift of discourse from the problem of exclusive citizenship rights to the secondary theme of the individual fates of refugees and the complementary enemy images, and, concretely, against the increasing hegemonic (language) politics of denouncing border crossing services as "trafficking," and "slavery."

The project basically consists of two medial outputs which intervene in different public realms: the 51 minute video "Border

Crossing Services" and a free-of-charge mail delivery newspaper with the clever title "Neues Grenzblatt" (New Border Paper). Ressler and Krenn's approach in both cases is clearly biased, which is good, since the omnipresent headlines about the "modern slave trade" cannot be countered by a polite emotional distance.

The video, first conceived for the exhibition at the Kunstraum, Universität Lüneburg, and for a special program of the Austrian film festival, *Diagonale*, is based on the self-representations of migrants and actors from anti-racist organizations but also presents federal border patrol officers, and thereby achieves a rich level of intensity. The messages created in this context - often heterogeneously formulated, inevitably simplifying the complex connections, sometimes naive or moralistic - nonetheless deliver convincing puzzle pieces for the construction of an "other" image of concrete practices of "border crossing."

In April 2001, the informational brochure, "Neues Grenzblatt," which was also produced in cooperation with anti-racist groups and migrant organizations, with a popular format intentionally borrowed from the design of folklore-organization newspapers, was sent to 12,000 households in Styria located along the length of the outer EU border. Both in terms of content and language, low-profile articles are meant to capture the interest of a broad audience by advertising "border crossing services as quality services" and, moreover, are meant to appeal to the residents of the border region to provide border crossing services. The latter was likely to be understood as an intentionally utopian goal; yet the content of the Grenzblatt is an astoundingly good example of how minor and complex matters can be mediated in a widely understandable way. The counter-hegemonic attacks, executed boldly and simply, were successful: what is denounced as a whole in mainstream media through the term "smuggling gangs" is transformed to "Border

Crossing Services" - not only in the art field, but also in a few Styrian pubs.

Read through the magnifying glass of art discourse, Ressler and Krenn cite the phenomena of "art as service" in the title of their project. From the beginning to the mid-nineties, this label was used to once again oppose those invincible charismatic structures in the art field, which set the "service" of the artists affirmatively against work autonomy and artist genius. Opposed to this affirmative gesture, there was also a critical reference to the problematic aspects of an all too reformist/micropolitical project art, which, in the course of the nineties, was increasingly put into service for "communities" and thus lost its potential for resistance and disturbance, [2] or even became committed to multinational corporations' organizational development. All of these nuances of a multiply over-determined concept were already manifested in 1994 at the workshop "Services" at Kunstraum, Universität Lüneburg, at the exhibitions of the same name at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, the Kunstverein München, Depot Wien, etc., and in the publications which arose from them, [3] but also in the critique of these art practices. [4] Basically, that inevitable topic of political art practice was addressed over and over again: namely, that every critique of the system is integrated in the system and can therefore be misused to newly legitimate the system. The fronts between the reform-oriented and the fundamentally critical approaches nonetheless quickly became entrenched and the discussion about "services" waned - as it often does in the art field - after a short time when it was no longer hip.

Several years after the theme already dried up in the art discussion, Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler have taken it up with a very surprising twist, lending it new relevance. In the context of border crossing services, the concept of service no longer correlates with

the trend of depoliticizing art, but, rather, with a de-criminalization of commercial, humanitarian, and political border crossing services. Politically charged, it gives way to the concretization of that outgrown buzzword of the nineties: border crossing. [5] From the vague utopia of somehow crossing the border from art into the social or another field, "border crossing" becomes first, in terms of content, a radically intensified variant of crossing borders - namely, the concrete crossing of the Schengen border. Secondly, both formally and in terms of overcoming abstract field borders, a concrete *transversal* cooperation with the actors whose specific competencies connect to others is developed: In the project migrants are the protagonists of the video, the anti-racist activists deliver the content of "Neues Grenzblatt" and the artists are, in the end, creating publicity for the marginalized theme.

This not only maintains the axis of continuity of earlier collaborations between Ressler and Krenn, such as "Learned Homeland" (Graz, 1996) and "Institutional Racism" (Vienna, 1997), but also a far more general association with new forms of transversal cooperation, especially those which have arisen in the context of anti-globalization. In (and coming from) Austria, this double (transnational and transdisciplinary) transversality has developed intensely in the framework of resistance against the reactionary right-wing government since the beginning of 2000. In platforms such as *gettoattack*, *Performing Resistance* and *Volkstanz*, [6] in temporary, nomadic invasions such as the *Kärntner Kulturkarawane* or the *VolxTheaterKarawane* [7] and in the mobilization of migrants by the *Wiener Wahl Partie*, [8] artists constructively work with activists from the political field as if there had never been a dichotomy between the cultural left and the political left.

Border Crossing Services can also be interpreted as an output of this productive and concrete development of transversality, [9] already promoted as a theory in the seventies by Guattari and Foucault. Artists such as Krenn and Ressler have learned not to inflate their self-importance as universal intellectuals, but, rather, in temporary collaborations with political activists, to work on a new form of the service of counter-publicity.

[1] See: Günther Jacob, Effekte von Grenzüberschreitungen. Kulturelle Politik & soziale Distinktion, in: Gerald Raunig (ed.), Kunsteingriffe. Möglichkeiten politischer Kulturarbeit, Vienna: IG Kultur Austria 1998, pp.192-206; Gerald Raunig, Charon. Eine Ästhetik der Grenzüberschreitung, Vienna: Passagen 1999, pp. 17-19, pp.93-101.
[2] See: Gerald Raunig, Spacing the Lines. Konflikt statt Harmonie. Differenz statt Identität. Struktur statt Hilfe, in: Eva Sturm/Stella Rollig (ed.), Dürfen die das? Kunst als sozialer Raum, Vienna: Turia+Kant 2001; Stella Rollig, Das wahre Leben, in: Marius Babias/Achim Könneke, Die Kunst des Öffentlichen, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst 1998, pp.12-27; Christian Kravagna, Arbeit an der Gemeinschaft, in: Marius Babias/Achim Könneke, Die Kunst des Öffentlichen, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst 1998, pp. 28-47.
[3] Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, Ulf Wuggenig (eds.), Games, Fights, Collaborations. Das Spiel von Grenze und Überschreitung, Stuttgart: Cantz 1996.
[4] a.o. Alice Creischer/Andreas Siekmann, Reformmodelle, in: springer III 2, pp.17-23.
[5] See: Gerald Raunig, Charon. Eine Ästhetik der Grenzüberschreitung, Vienna: Passagen 1999.
[6] See: Gerald Raunig, Wien Feber Null. Eine Ästhetik des

Widerstands, Vienna: Turia+Kant 2000.

[7] See: http://www.no-racism.net/nobordertour/.

[8] See: http://www.wwp.at/.

[9] See: Michel Foucault, Die politische Funktion des Intellektuellen, in: Ibid., Botschaften der Macht, Stuttgart: DVA 1999, pp.22-29; Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1992, p.38: "... a particular form of precise local battle whose relationship and necessary unity can no longer arise from a process of totalization and centralization, but, rather, as Guattari said, from transversality."

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