

## SCHLINGENSIEF'S CONTAINERS. UNCONCOMPROMISING EXPOSURE OF THE FACE OF THE FAR RIGHT

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**Abstract:** The study deals with the re-enactment of the multimedia installation *Bitte liebt Österreich* [Please Love Austria], realised by Christoph Schlingensiefel at the Wiener Festwochen festival in 2000. The theoretical starting point of the analysis is the post-colonial theory of Achille Mbembe, who deals with the notion of nanoracism. Schlingensiefel's social sculpture on the border between actionism and installationism was a direct response to the Austrian parliamentary elections, in which the far-right party Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) attempted to enter parliament. In particular, the study examines the degree of performativity, the media structure, and the themes of racism and xenophobia. The focus of the study is on the use of compositional practices and their intersections of type, genre and media. In summarising Schlingensiefel's work, whether theatre or cinematic, the author also attempts to capture the artist's ability to use the medium within and through art forms with respect to the speed of information exchange.

**Key words:** Christoph Schlingensiefel, Wiener Festwochen, *Bitte liebt Österreich*, social sculpture, nanoracism

Christoph Schlingensiefel (1960 – 2010), German film and theatre director, performer and activist, made several provocative projects from the very beginning of his short but artistically and socially extraordinary career, which was started in the 1980s. His work crossed the boundaries of artistic genres and forms, and the characteristic feature of his signature style was intermediality. He systematically addressed racist sentiments in society and observed local political discourse from a global perspective. He did not only consider discrimination against foreigners on the basis of ethnic or religious exclusion, but also attempted at a comprehensive reflection on a society in which the concept of racism and intolerance co-shaped the identity of contemporary Europe. Against the backdrop of historical facts, he traced the rise of racism and the transformation of society from political totalitarianism to a democratic system, while simultaneously noting the process of coming to terms with the aftermath of Second World War and the experience of (post)colonialism. Schlingensiefel's clearly articulated response was the construction and realisation of the hitherto existing Operndorf Africa residential centre.<sup>1</sup> With respect to postcolonial studies, one may conclude that

<sup>1</sup> *Operndorf Afrika* is a project that Schlingensiefel implemented in 2009 with the intention of creating an international art centre. It is located in the capital of Burkina Faso, in Ouagadougou. It is currently run by Schlingensiefel's partner, set and costume designer Aino Laberenz. The uniqueness of the programme lies in its focus on and work with the local community. It is not a residency centre for visiting artists who, through the residency, get time and space to create their own work, but it is working with the community, its development and cultural exchange, which is not based on a power or cultural relationship from a European perspective of "culturalness". The distinct social aspect stems from the fundamental basis of the centre's found-

Schlingensief's work included an analysis of the rise of the far right and its process of assimilation into the mainstream, when it became an accepted political component of parliament. Parallel to this, Schlingensief pointed to the European stigma of colonialism, which was realised in his performative practice through the unmasking of nanoracism.<sup>2</sup>

As a "deus ex media,"<sup>3</sup> Schlingensief stood between film, theatre, television, performance art, actionism and activism. He began his filmmaking career with a portrait of a family *Mensch, Mami, wir dreh'n 'nen Film* [Hey Mummy, We're Making a Movie] (1977), followed by his two early short films *Phantassus muss anders werden* [Phantassus Go Home] (1983) and *What Happened to Magdalena Jung? Die Macht der Unschuld* (1983). However, the first big success came with his film *Tunguska – die Kisten sind da* [Tunguska – The Crates are Here] (1984), where in the opening sequence of the film a manifesto of Schlingensief's intentions is presented. The points of the manifesto are dominated by his position of discovering new aspects of contemporary film language, including the rediscovery of a form of hysteria that should help discover a new German film.<sup>4</sup> Following the above film project and two other films, *Menu Total* (1986) and *Mutters Maske* [Mother's Mask] (1988), there came the trilogy *Deutschlandtrilogie* [Germany Trilogy] (1989 – 1992), which explicitly rocks the overlap of Nazism into the present. The film *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler – Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker* [100 Years of Adolf Hitler – The Last Hour in the Führer's Bunker]<sup>5</sup> from 1989, "refers to the years between Hitler's birth in 1889 and the 1989 reunification of the German states. From the outset, then, the film suggests that Hitler is still with us (...)." <sup>6</sup> A year later, *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker – Die erste Stunde der Wiedervereinigung* [The German Chainsaw Massacre: The First Hour of the Reunification] saw its world premiere and the series was concluded by a grotesque and satirical *Terror 2000* (1992). It was followed by *United Trash* (1995), *Die 120 Tage von Bottrop* [The 120 Days of Bottrop] (1997) and the last film *Freakstar 3000* (2004), which also had a TV version in the form of a talent competition.<sup>7</sup>

Parallel to his film production, Schlingensief realised his theatre projects mainly in the German-speaking environment. He was particularly closely associated with

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ing, namely Schlingensief's idea that Africa is not as we see it from the safety of Europe's shores. For more see <https://www.operndorf-afrika.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Achille Mbembe uses the term nanoracism to refer to a part of the human condition and the associated concept of racism. The latter dates back to the 18th century and Mbembe analyses the transformation, development and current form of racism through the concept of nanoracism. For more see MBEMBE, A. *Necropolitics (Theory in Forms)*. Durham : DUKE University Press, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The term was used by the writer and Schlingensief's close collaborator Jörk van der Horst in the publication *Christoph Schlingensief*. See *Christoph Schlingensief*. (Eds. K. Biesenbach, A.-C. Gebbers, A. Laberenz, S. Pfeffer). London : MoMA, 2014, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> For more about the film *Tunguska – die Kisten sind da* see <https://www.schlingensief.com/projekt.php?id=f020>.

<sup>5</sup> The feature film was shot in record time of 16 hours. More info available online: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096735/>.

<sup>6</sup> VANDER LUGT, K. T. An Obscene Reckoning: History and Memory in Schlingensief's DEUTSCHLANDTRILOGIE. In FORREST, T. – SCHEER, A. T. (eds.). *Christoph Schlingensief. Art without Borders*. Bristol : Intellect Ltd, 2010, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> *Freakstars 3000* was a show format in which mentally and physically disabled people performed together with Schlingensief. The intent of the format was to equalise the excluded members of society, whether mentally or physically challenged citizens. For more see <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0397431/>.

the Berlin Volksbühne theatre, which had been run by director Frank Castorf since the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup> The latter gave Schlingensiefel space,<sup>9</sup> including actors and actresses of the local drama ensemble company, who then were engaged in most of Schlingensiefel's projects, happenings and films. In addition to the Volksbühne, Schlingensiefel staged productions at the Schauspielhaus Zürich, where he staged Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, subtitled *This is Your Family*,<sup>10</sup> and at the Burgtheater in Vienna.<sup>11</sup> Here he also performed his extremely personal project *Mea Culpa – A ReadyMade Opera* (2009). Together with the co-production project *Via Intoleranza II*, these were also his last theatre accomplishments; in 2010, he succumbed to lung cancer.

To provide a comprehensive view of Schlingensiefel's artistic legacy, his opera direction deserves mention. This is considerably more modest in scope, however, one should at least mention his direction of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* (Bayreuther Festspiele, 2004) or the opera by Walter Braunfels *Jeanne d'Arc – Szenen aus dem Leben der Heiligen Johanna* [Jeanne d'Arc. Scenes from the life of St Joan] (Deutsche Oper Berlin, 2008), in which he came to terms with his own death, interpreting Joan of Arc not only as a virginal warrior in men's clothes, but also as an ordinary man who works and suffers, loves and dies.<sup>12</sup>

### Performance Art in the Form of Actionism

In summarising Schlingensiefel's work, whether theatre or cinematic, we will attempt to outline his ability to use the medium (i.e., the carrier and mediator of information to the recipient) within and through art forms, with respect to the speed of information exchange, focusing in more detail on the analysis of his multimedia installation *Bitte liebt Österreich (BLÖ)* [Please Love Austria].

The installation itself, in addition to Schlingensiefel's experience as a director, had been preceded by his work in the field of performance art in the form of actionism.<sup>13</sup> Within the art historical and artistic understanding, actionism was most prominent in the artistic epoch of the neo-avant-garde, specifically in connection with the FLUXUS

<sup>8</sup> Frank Castorf became artistic director of the Berlin Volksbühne in 1992, the chief dramaturg at the time was Matthias Lilienthal, who was dramaturgically involved in most of Schlingensiefel's projects. For more information see a masterclass with Mathias Lilienthal: < [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lx-r13QIZ6o&ab\\_channel=BAKbasisvooractuelekunst](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lx-r13QIZ6o&ab_channel=BAKbasisvooractuelekunst)>.

<sup>9</sup> Schlingensiefel mounted several productions at the Volksbühne: *100 Jahre CDU* (1993), *Kühnen '94* (1994), *Rocky Dutschke '68* (1996), *Schlach um Europa* (1997), *RATLOS* (1998), *Berliner Republik* (2001), *Erster Imageniteur Führer* (2001), *Rosebud* (2002), *QUIZ 3000* (2002), *ATTA-ATTA* (2003), *Kaprow City* (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Schlingensiefel's production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (2001) was in the spirit of provocation, despite its imaginary tribute to the classic. The main theme of the production was neo-Nazism, its strategies of adaptation and assimilation.

<sup>11</sup> He mounted several productions for the Burgtheater, one of which was Elfriede Jelinek's play *Bambild* (2003). The Austrian playwright, novelist and Nobel Prize winner explicitly asked Schlingensiefel to direct her play, which reflected the then war conflict in Iraq against the backdrop of ancient myths.

<sup>12</sup> For more information see <https://www.schlingensiefel.com/projekt.php?id=t063>.

<sup>13</sup> Actionism is seen here as part of the neo-avant-garde. Its meaning is conceived in two directions. One is the liberation of art from the grip of the economisation of art that took place due to existence of the art market. The second direction is set by the ontological question, stemming from the first avant-garde and it deals with the comprehensive relationship between art and its existence in society. For more see, e.g., BÜRGER, P. *Teorie avantgardy. Stárnutí modern* [Theory of the Avant-garde. The Aging of Modernism]. Praha : Akadémia výtvarných umění, 2015.

movement.<sup>14</sup> Schlingensief was fond of quoting, paraphrasing or attempting at an authorial remake of the actions, happenings and installations from the fifties, sixties and seventies in the form of re-enactment,<sup>15</sup> as was the case, for example, with his radical tribute to the German performer, educator and sculptor Joseph Beuys. Schlingensief developed Beuys' concept of social sculpture at the DOCUMENTA X festival,<sup>16</sup> where the very title of the event from the last documentary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *My Felt, My Fat, My Hare!* (1997) referred to Joseph Beuys.<sup>17</sup> Schlingensief was part of the German pavilion, where he introduced the radical concept of a 48-hour performance, during which the director and a group of actors and non-actors invited the audience to participate directly, asking them whether they could imagine Germany as a theatre ruled by Helmut Kohl, the then Chancellor of Germany. At the same time, he urged the audience to remove the sandbags that separated the actors from the spectators, clearly indicating the removal of the boundary between art and reality. The action's outcome was a provocation by making his audience shout: "Kill Helmut Kohl!" Once the appeal was uttered, the performance was discontinued and Schlingensief was arrested.

### **Action! Action! Vote for Yourself!**<sup>18</sup>

An inclination toward extensive and convoluted projects in Schlingensief's creation appears to be megalomaniac. Obsession with big opuses or big numbers<sup>19</sup> meant creating the Universe for him.<sup>20</sup> In 1998, when parliamentary elections were held in Germany, he directed a series of guerrilla happenings entitled *Chance 2000*,<sup>21</sup> which by its content, intention and realisation immediately preceded the Austrian multimedia installation *BLÖ*. The content of the series *Chance 2000* was clearly politically oriented and it appealed to viewers, or, better to say, citizens, to actively participate in the elections. The most notable of the happenings was *Baden im Wolfgangsee* [Bathing in Lake Wolfgang], which took place on the lake, to which Schlingensief had invited all the unemployed in Germany. Bathing together was again a reaction to populist statements of the then German Chancellor Helmut Kohl that Germany was thriving

<sup>14</sup> The FLUXUS art movement was founded in the 1950s. Its members were nowadays cult personalities of art – John Cage, George Maucianas, Herman Nitsch, Otto Muehl, Joseph Beuys, Bazon Brock, Nam June Paik, Wolf Vostell and others.

<sup>15</sup> Reenactment, or Re-enactment, could be described as the re-experiencing or realisation of facts or events. This term is mostly associated with historical reconstructions, although its content in contemporary art is more oriented towards the "re-enactment" of events. Currently, the term is most often applied in connection with the work of Milo Rau (*The Moscow Trials*, *The Kongo Tribunal*, *Hate Radio* and others).

<sup>16</sup> The DOCUMENTA X festival was traditionally held in Kassel, Germany, in 1997. The main programme curator was the French Cathrine David, who in her manifesto emphasised the importance and meaning of contemporary art, referring to the work of Joseph Beuys. For more see *Christoph Schlingensief*. (Eds. K. Biesenbach, A.-C. Gebbers, A. Laberenz, S. Pfeffer), pp. 33 – 34.

<sup>17</sup> When it comes to materials, Joseph Beuys used heat-accumulating materials. The most common were felt, honey, gold, wood, and fat. The hare or rabbit, which is in the very name of Schlingensief's action, refers to one of Beuys' most famous actions *How to Explain Picture to a Dead Hare?* realised at the Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf, in 1965.

<sup>18</sup> The entire series of the actions of *Chance 2000* was held in this spirit.

<sup>19</sup> *Chance 2000*, *U 3000*, *Quiz 3000*, *Talk 2000*, *Terror 2000*, *Freakstars 3000*.

<sup>20</sup> The full interview is available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze68ig7e8nM&ab\\_channel=Filmgalerie451](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze68ig7e8nM&ab_channel=Filmgalerie451).

<sup>21</sup> The full name is *Chance 2000 – The Party of Last Chance*. Schlingensief realised a series of happenings in collaboration with the Volksbühne in Berlin.

and that unemployment was not an issue.<sup>22</sup> Schlingensief estimated some six million people to be out of work then and had they all come to take a swim in the lake which was in the immediate neighbourhood of Kohl's cottage, the lake's surface would have risen by two metres, flooding the chancellor's summer residence. The actionist performance took place in the spirit of Monty Python humour which turns into a deadly weapon.<sup>23</sup>

### Containers of Fear or *Bitte liebt Österreich*

The basic structure of the *BLÖ* project comprised several parallel activities and synchronous live streams, commenting on one another, providing additions and shaping it into a rather homogenous whole.<sup>24</sup> The essential elements were shipping containers placed in the historic city centre next to the Wiener Staatsoper, whereby this literally material, i.e., "architectural" basis created a distinctive contrast to the location. Formally, there was a dialogue going on between the Neo-Renaissance opera house and cold, anonymous ship containers. Contentwise, a dialogue between high and low arts was about to start which might have greatly confounded passers-by and tourists. If one realises the omnipresent pretentiousness and pomposity associated with every Vienna opera first night epitomising high and noble art, then Schlingensief's containers materialised the basic counterpoint. The dialogue surfaced Schlingensief's sceptical vision of Europe and of its humaneness. The latter was represented by the content of the containers accommodating twelve asylum-seekers from Iran, Iraq, China, Zimbabwe, Kosovo, Kurdistan, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Cameroon, and Albania.

Schlingensief opted for a format with an explicit reference to the so-called human zoos,<sup>25</sup> which used to be an attraction in Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until discontinued in the 1930s, in which the Africans were put on display by European colonialists as exotic artifacts in a circus-like pervert way. Given technological advancement, Schlingensief transposed this perception into online space via the Internet platform [www.webreetv.com](http://www.webreetv.com). It facilitated online voting of the Austrians as to which of the asylum-seekers would be voted-out of the containers. The domain enabled the viewers to watch 24/7 what was going on in the containers. Changing the perspective in the manner of perception accentuated the stigma of colonialism which markedly disqualified Europe in its claim for a cultured and educated continent.<sup>26</sup> Schlingen-

<sup>22</sup> Helmut Kohl was German Chancellor and leader of the CDU party at the time.

<sup>23</sup> The paraphrase is taken from an essay by Klaas Tindemans. See TINDEMANS, K. *Radical Failure. The Reinvention of German Identity in the Films of Christian Schlingensief*. XVI Jornadas Interescuelas/Departamentos de Historia. Departamento de Historia. Facultad Humanidades. Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Mar del Plata, 2017. Available at: <https://cdsa.aacademica.org/000-019/621.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to the multimedia installation *Bitte liebt Österreich – Erste Österreichische Koalitions Woche* [Please Love Austria – First Austrian Coalition Week], the project also included the film *Ausländer raus!* (directed by Paul Poet) documenting not only the event itself, but also parts of the preparations, discussions and reactions.

<sup>25</sup> For more see, e.g.: [https://www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/history\\_articles/the\\_human\\_zoo\\_of\\_tervuren\\_1897](https://www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/history_articles/the_human_zoo_of_tervuren_1897).

<sup>26</sup> I am referring to the tendency of Europe to impose its way of being on the African continent, from religion to education, down to diet. This tendency towards the superiority of Europe and its cultural heritage is analysed in detail by the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe. For more see MBEMBE, A. *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham : Duke University Press, pp. 38 – 78.

sief employed a rather harsh metaphor for the practice of the colonialists. He used an internet web site to achieve massive effect, and he succeeded. When the performance was half-way through, i.e., after three days it had been on, ANTIFA supporters stormed the containers.

Activating the viewer – the voter, the citizen – took place by infuriating and provoking both extreme poles of the political spectrum. While ANTIFA was ready to demolish the containers, the members, proponents and supporters of Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) engaged in heated discussions with Schlingensief on the containers. The concept of the multimedia installation shows Schlingensief's intention to benefit from Hegelian spirit of criticism using means that were peculiar to him (i.e., criticism does not need to comment, because it makes do with pure quotations, which must be placed in the right place at the right time – then a pure quotation of what one is criticizing, without commentary, disarms the criticized).<sup>27</sup> An evidence of that was the film's ironizing title *Ausländer raus!* [Foreigners Out!], which became an iconic motto of the action and the creative professionals sought inspiration in FPÖ pre-election campaign. This film was made in parallel with the multimedia installation and the documentary footage was interspersed with the monologues of the project's implementers. The activation of the audience turned into the activation of society and resembled applied sociological research rather than an artistic exhibition. Schlingensief put emphasis on "(...) the process of exchange between audience and the ideas and concerns raised by the performance"<sup>28</sup>, i.e., it did not primarily reflect an artistic message, but demonstrated the state of Austrian society. The installation responded to the outcome of the Austrian parliamentary elections, in which the far-right FPÖ party, led by Jörg Heider, was elected to parliament.<sup>29</sup>

The multimedia installation *BLÖ* indirectly answered the questions of Theodor W. Adorno, who in the 1950s and later in the 1960s addressed two questions to the people of Germany. The first of these was to what extent they felt complicit in the cataclysm of the Second World War; the second asked them to compare their social situation during and after the Second World War.<sup>30</sup> Half a century after Adorno had uttered them, Schlingensief applied them through containers that showed the face of a racist and xenophobic Austria on live television. The word *applied* is used here deliberately, with an ambition to point to the fact that Schlingensief's multimedia installation was an applied performance. We could define it directly through the etymological meaning of the Latin term *applicare* – to make mutual contact, to connect, to join,<sup>31</sup> at the same time the root of the word *care* is implicitly present.

Performativity was presented in *BLÖ* as a fundamental interaction, not primarily at the level of artistic but rather social communication. The question of art, its meaning and existence in society was answered, with Schlingensief using the concept of the art installation as a basis for a discussion concerning values, which logically pro-

<sup>27</sup> For more see ŠVARC, R. *NON EXIT. Sociálna plastika Josepha Beuysa a nesubstančná ontológia Egona Bondyho* [Social Plastique of Joseph Beuys and Non Substantial Ontology of Egon Bondy]. Bratislava : Asociácia Corpus/GAFFA, 2021, pp. 56 – 62.

<sup>28</sup> See FORREST, T. *Realism as Protest*. Berlin : Transcript-Verlag, p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> It was the first far-right party in the Austrian parliament since World War II.

<sup>30</sup> For more see ADORNO, T. W. *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1998, pp. 89 – 103.

<sup>31</sup> See SHAUGNESSY, N. *Applying Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 14 – 28.

voked passions. An orthodox anti-fascist, Schlingensiefel did not moralise society by pointing out a malignant tumour, but let the tumour speak itself. He created a multimedia installation that opened up a space to reveal the strategy behind the rise of the far right. By identifying the transformation of Nazi ideas in the rhetoric of the FPÖ, the values it presented were themselves disqualified by the revelation of their origin. Performativity as one of the starting points of the social sculpture operated on the basis of direct and indirect communication, from which it can be concluded that its very concept, as presented by Schlingensiefel, highlighted the relationship between the past and the present. The performativity of authenticity, as presented by FPÖ politicians, supporters, Schlingensiefel or asylum-seekers, showed the inherent power of performative act, in which there are no characters, no types, but masks at the very most, which belong to political debates. The choice of compositional means employed went beyond the purely aesthetic framework, i.e., the framework only played a formal role.<sup>32</sup> The purpose of the event was not to provide a sheer aesthetic experience, but rather create an artistically engaged situation at the festival.

The elements of engagement could be characterised on the basis of the course of *BLÖ*. The basic premise of the performative act was presence, which Schlingensiefel extended to include a web portal and a gateway facilitating web-voting. The latter was not charged, which can be interpreted as a form of openness towards citizens, who at the same time did not have to be direct spectators of the performance, but the performance itself had a direct impact on their reality. Schlingensiefel's intention appeared to be engaged – it was a deliberated provocation in the form of an attack on values (i.e., on the far-right FPÖ Party) and at the same time in the form of raising an objection following Schlingensiefel's detection of the elements of Nazism in Jörg Heider's political career. Engagement, i.e., concerning society, is presented in *BLÖ* as something that is natural and valid in democracy – it is the right to be heard. The voice was represented by debaters and protesters in the Vienna square, an extremely heterogeneous group of supporters from different parts of the political spectrum. Part of the voice was the aforementioned web-voting gateway, which did not compel or call on people to vote. Its sophisticated nature reflected what we are currently experiencing on a daily basis. Here, the anonymous votes of the supporters of the far right had a real impact on voting out a foreigner, which worked both as a metaphor and a mirror of Austrian society. The idea of the arts as a potential instrument of change appeared as a possible way in justifying one's own existence.

Thanks to the multimedia nature of the project, Schlingensiefel was able to activate a great number of Austrians, whose attention was attracted by the containers of their own fear. The distribution of information, uncontrollable operations (who will vote for whom, who watches CCTV and when, how many FPÖ supporters will show up in front of the Vienna Opera House, ANTIFA reaction and more) confirm the postulation that once a situation is artificially (in this case, artistically) brought about, creating space for the viewer and for his/her activation, whether in a positive or negative

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<sup>32</sup> Performativity, or rather its basic premises of "encounter" and presentness, is used here to a large extent as a tool of communication. By the term tool, the author means the nature of communication, which is the exchange of information in interactions involving a myriad of variables. For example, spatial design, the subjectivity of the recipient, linguistic, visual, auditory, bodily, and other means of communication. Interpretation is a highly individual activity.

way, it becomes a social event. However, *BLÖ* had “only” a framework that regulated itself, so that most of the operations and interactions happened without Schlingensief’s control. The framework of the social sculpture formed a clear structure, one could almost speak of a concept, with the basic framework of the performative situation being determined by the author, who in this way prepared potential for the spectator.<sup>33</sup> The main role was assigned to stimulation, clearly targeted provocation and irritation of the final form which can be considered the social sculpture, which was not only the installation per se, but also the documentary *Auslandär raus!*, which autonomously observed the entire process.

The pathology to which Schlingensief pointed stemmed from historical facts. Only its form – its rhetoric – was changed. Jörg Heider tried to enter the Austrian parliament with ideas already prefabricated by the Nazi ideologue and propagandist Joseph Goebbels. The experience of two world wars and the stigma of colonialism live(d) on. However, Schlingensief’s concept of the social sculpture of the *BLÖ* installation did not in the least blame FPÖ supporters, it rather observed the human inclination to evil, which crystallises into outright xenophobia.

Social sculpture represents thinking as a plastic process and a formulating principle<sup>34</sup> that is exposed to the highest possible degree and at the same time is transformed into an ideological starting point along the “action-sculpture-thinking” axis, or simply, actionism. The very process of thinking, which is an integral part of art as well as of society, makes social sculpture a phenomenon on the borderline between artistic and social discourse. How we think has a direct reflection on reality. In *BLÖ* case with its many interactions, the outcome was a never-ending process of people meeting and communicating with each other, generating a circulation of ideas. Presentness, an essential element of performative art, is contained in the performative feature of the encounter. According to Joseph Beuys, thinking as a form<sup>35</sup> cumulates completely opposed attitudes – on the one hand, towards traditionally understood art and its outcomes, while on the other, thinking is presented as a fundamental communicative unit. As Beuys notes: “How we mould and shape the world in which we live (...). Everything is in a state of change.”<sup>36</sup>

Thinking is an individual activity, but, as the German philosopher Axel Honneth argues, “the orientation towards the idea of cooperative self-realisation implies that subjects cannot reach a successful end in society unless they have recognised behind their interests, which are always individual interests, the core of social value beliefs.”<sup>37</sup> Heider’s political influence was often created by populist statements, moreover, from the position of a superior subject. His own form of thinking differentiated between “us” and “them”. Identification with “we” stems from several factors, but in most cases

<sup>33</sup> *BLÖ* gave the audience plenty of opportunities to express themselves. Especially frequent were the inputs of “spectators” who declared their positive or negative attitude to the action via a megaphone, gateway [www.webfreetv.com](http://www.webfreetv.com), to facilitate web-voting, or the reactions of the ANTIFA movement.

<sup>34</sup> ŠVARC, R. *NON EXIT, Sociálna plastika Josepha Beuysa a nesubstančná ontológia Egona Bondyho* [Social Plasticity of Joseph Beuys and Non Substantial Ontology of Egon Bondy], p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> *Thinking is a Form* is the title of a monograph on the work of Joseph Beuys. ROSE, B. – TEMKIN, A. *Thinking is a Form: the drawings of Joseph Beuys*. London: MoMA, 1993. Available online: [https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_catalogue\\_387\\_300063076.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_387_300063076.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> BEUYS, J. – HARLAN, V. *What is Art?: Conversation with Joseph Beuys*. Clairview Books, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Citation according to Czech translation: HONNETH, A. *Patologie rozumu* [Pathology of Reason]. Praha: Filosofia, 2011, p. 44.



it is an imaginary claim to be dominant in relation to others.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the position of “we” becomes the majority, which clearly identifies the enemy (“they”), a definition applied directly from Goebbels’ propaganda manifesto: “Propaganda must be precisely timed. Communication must reach the audience before the competing propaganda (...). Propaganda must facilitate the displacement of aggression by setting the targets of hatred.”<sup>39</sup> This asymmetrical relationship excludes the set of “they” and thus the dialogue disappears; it was precisely the latter that was the main set of inputs in the form of the interactions in the *BLÖ* installation. In the dialogue that took place directly on the containers above the heads of the asylum-seekers, Schlingensiefel, as an imaginary delegate representing the “they” group, initiated a confrontation with the “we”.

The seven-day time frame of the *BLÖ* installation refers, though not without irony, to the biblical creation of the world. Just as God created the world in seven days, so Schlingensiefel gave the Austrians a week to create the new world they wanted to live in. The difference was that Schlingensiefel did not usurp the position of an omnipotent and omnipresent God. He left the shape of the world to the citizens themselves. In a democracy, the majority decide in the interests of their own needs, desires and certainties. Schlingensiefel thus actually drew attention to the politically deliberately created asymmetry of the public debate on values, which democratically should concern all and not only some at the expense of others, and at the same time should not contradict each other and speak of a cultural and mature community.

Schlingensiefel’s *BLÖ* was a revision of values. From a sociological point of view, it was an applied research of the current sentiments in society, from a post-colonial point of view, it was a demonstration of nanoracism, i.e. racism at the level of DNA. It is at this point that Schlingensiefel’s work intersects with the reflections of the contemporary Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, who built much of his critique on the quotations from European intellectual elites who, in the context of postcolonialism, create a highly distorted image of Europe. One of them is undoubtedly Victor Hugo, whose work is considered the pinnacle of Romanticism, but whose position on the African continent, as Mbembe quotes him in his *Critique of Black Reason*, is frightening: “Africa. Oh what a land is Africa! Asia has its history, America has its history, even Australia has its history dating back to its beginnings in human memory. Africa has no history. There is a kind of vast and obscure legend enveloping it. (...) To make old Africa fit for civilization that is the problem. Europe will solve it. Go, peoples, take this land! Who owns it? No one! Take this land that is God’s land. God gives land to men. God offers Africa to Europe. Take it! (...) Go, build roads, build ports, build cities, expand, cultivate, multiply, and may divine spirit affirm itself through peace in this land, more and more free from the influence of priests and princes.”<sup>40</sup> Mbembe depicts the personality of European Romanticism from an averted perspective that is not a common part of literary or theatre discourse. Thanks to this complexity, we can better understand Europe, its history and development. In its own way, the mul-

<sup>38</sup> In practice, one primarily comes across the principle of comparison, when a subject considers another subject inferior on the basis of comparison. The criteria often listed are education, way of life and the associated standard of living, religion, and others. For more see MBEMBE, A. *Critique of Black Reason*, pp. 103 – 128.

<sup>39</sup> Cited according to < <https://www.physics.smu.edu/pseudo/Propaganda/goeb-bels.html>>. [cit. 8 June 2021].

<sup>40</sup> MBEMBE, A. *Critique of Black Reason*, pp. 71 – 72.

timedia installation *BLÖ* supports the tenet that the “contemporary sentiment” at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has not changed much since the Romantic and Enlightenment periods, only its edges are sharper, more pronounced.

Translated by Mária Švecová

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