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Christoph Schlingensief's Image Disruption Machine

It is simply not possible to provide a single, uniform categorization of Christoph Schlingensief's art. It ranges from films made for the cinema and works for television, to opera productions, theater productions at the Berlin Volksbühne and other theaters in Germany and around the world. Not for nothing is Schlingensief described as a "total artist" [*Gesamtkünstler*] (Jank and Kovacs 2011). A text on Schlingensief in an anthology devoted to "Disruption in the Arts" is justified, however, by a single, specific aspect of his *oeuvre*, an aspect that bestows continuity on all of his work and identifies him as a paradigmatic representative of an aesthetics of disruption.¹ This aspect concerns his repeated efforts to undermine the expectations of his audience by creating moments of irritation and confusion, as well as semantic, narrative, and aesthetic breaks. Schlingensief strives for an art form that does not rest content with sleek, smooth meaning, an art form that attacks all forms of closure – of the world, of the subject, of meaning – accentuating instead the provisional character and openness of art and life.

This stance of refusing closure, which is simultaneously the motivation and result of his aesthetics of disruption, cannot be pinned down (solely) on the basis of content. Rather, as a formal program of a meta-art, it addresses the audience in the mode of a calculated uncertainty regarding the status and boundaries of fiction and reality in the audience's own practices of reception and reflection. The substantial thrust of Schlingensief's action art "no longer consists in a demand for changing the world, expressed in the form of social provocation, but rather in the production of events, exceptions and moments of deviation" (Lehmann 2006: 105),² which first and foremost create a space of reflection on the relationship between the symbolic order, semiotic practices, and "reality." In other words, Schlingensief's "total art" is concerned above all with the quasi-transcendental question of under what conditions it is possible to form an idea of the society and the world in which we live.

¹ Originally published in German (Koch 2014) and translated into English by Gregory Sims. On the concept of an "aesthetics of disruption," see the contribution by Lars Koch and Tobias Nanz in this volume.

² Translation slightly modified.

Theater critics repeatedly described Schlingensief as an *agent provocateur*,³ a term that is accurate and inaccurate at the same time – inaccurate because Schlingensief's art could never be reduced to the gesture often attributed to him, namely spectacular provocation for its own sake; accurate, because Schlingensief always adhered to Heiner Müller's *aperçu* that “theaters that no longer manage to provoke the question ‘WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON HERE?’ are closed down, and rightly so”⁴ (Müller 1996). The moment of provocation is not an end in itself for Schlingensief, but rather a perceptual and political instrument. In this sense, his aesthetics of disruption is an epistemological mode of action that exposes latent power constellations as well as the socially and economically permeated configurations of subjectivity, by provoking communicative and affective reactions that derail a society's routines of discursive normalization.

It is precisely these forms of discursive normalization in the mode of scandalization that Schlingensief has in mind when he points out: “It's always others who create the scandal.”⁵ (Schlingensief in Bierbichler et al. 1998: 19) Schlingensief interprets the commotion in the media regarding “scandals” as an attempt at communicative repair work that becomes necessary when – and because – art unsettles the cultural schemata of everyday “world-making” (Goodman 1978) and thus calls into question things that are considered normatively and politically self-evident:

Provocateur, *enfant terrible*, the terms don't interest me. At the very most, I provoke myself. [...] This is the trick of System 1, to immediately fix on something that enables a comforting classification: Aha, a provocateur, I understand. Aha, a nutcase, now I understand even better. [...] From that point on, everything can simply go on as before.⁶ (Schlingensief 1998: 17)

To use Niklas Luhmann's terminology, Schlingensief perfected an aesthetic approach that undermines the established codes and spatial “situatedness” of

3 For example by Irmgard Schmidmaier in the newspaper article *Nazi-Hamlet: Schlingensiefs Aktionismus provoziert Zürich* (Schmidmaier: 2001).

4 “Theater, denen es nicht mehr gelingt, die Frage WAS SOLL DAS zu provozieren, werden mit Recht geschlossen.”

5 “Den Skandal erzeugen immer die anderen.”

6 “Provokateur, *enfant terrible*, die Begriffe interessieren mich nicht. Es ist doch höchstens so, daß ich mich selber provoziere. Aber ich freue mich, wenn funktionalisierte Humanisten verstrickt werden. Vielleicht merken einige, wie lächerlich es ist, immer den Konsens zu suchen. [...] Das ist der Trick von System 1, sofort etwas festzumachen, das beruhigende Einordnung ermöglicht: Aha, ein Provokateur, verstehe. Aha, ein Spinner, verstehe noch mehr. [...] Von da an kann alles so weiterlaufen wie bisher.”

communication, thereby shifting the focus of attention onto the wealth of pre-conditions for these codes and situations.⁷ He thus provokes “collapses of meaning” (Stäheli 2000) in which the eminently political procedures of a society’s self-description – which otherwise remain suppressed below the collective perceptual and discursive threshold – can then become the object of reflection and critique (see Luhmann 1998: 867).

1 Aspects of an aesthetics of disruption

To gain a more accurate idea of Schlingensief's disruptive work, it may be helpful to situate his artistic actions within the constellation of contemporary post-dramatic theater. As Hans-Thies Lehmann points out, theater today “does not become political[ly] [effective] through direct thematization of the political, but rather through the implicit content and critical value of its *mode of representation*”⁸ (Lehmann 2006: 178). Contemporary theater is

a practice in and with signifying material that does not create orders of power, but rather introduces chaos and novelty into orderly and ordering perception. Theater can be political by opening up the logocentric procedure – in which identification is paramount – in favor of a practice that does not fear the suspension and interruption of the designating function.⁹ (Lehmann 2006: 178)

The audience is thus meant to understand that all formations of form are at one and the same time evident *and* contingent, and that any choice – “[since] every use of form has an effect of rendering [certain things] invisible”¹⁰ (Luhmann 2008: 301) – of formations of form rules out other possible choices. In this sense, “the politics of theater is a *politics of perception*.”¹¹ (Lehmann 2006: 185)

7 “For Luhmann, the achievement of a work of art consists precisely in the fact that it presents its form as necessary, and at the same time makes [its] contingency manifest [...]” [“Die Leistung eines Kunstwerks besteht für Luhmann genau darin, daß es seine Form als notwendig vorführt und zugleich die Kontingenzen erkennen lässt [...]”] (Werber 2008: 467).

8 “[...] kaum mehr durch die direkte Thematisierung des Politischen [politisch wirksam], sondern durch den impliziten Gehalt seiner Darstellungsweise.”

9 “[...] eine Praxis in und mit signifikantem Material, die nicht Macht-Ordnung schafft, sondern Neues und Chaos in die geordnete, ordnende Wahrnehmung bringt. Als Öffnung des logo-zentrischen Procedere, in dem das Identifizieren überwiegt, zugunsten einer Praxis, die das Aussetzen der Bezeichnungsfunktion, ihre Unterbrechung und Suspendierung nicht fürchtet, kann Theater politisch sein.”

10 “Jeder Formgebrauch hat einen Invisibilisierungseffekt.”

11 “Politik des Theaters ist Wahrnehmungspolitik.”

In his actions, performances and stage productions, Schlingensiefel pursues the “lines of flight” (Deleuze) of just such a disruptive politics of perception.¹² In endeavoring to destabilize modes of perception, he stands in the tradition of the avant-garde, which has always sought to deconstruct a passive immersion in art. Like Brecht or Handke, Schlingensiefel also strives to create an alienation effect, although it is much more ambivalent and less clearly didactic than was the case in the epic theater.¹³ Even when concrete socio-economic and political issues are dealt with in Schlingensiefel’s art, he finds it just as important to involve the audience in a game that, by means of extremely diverse aesthetic strategies, focuses on the procedure of the production and legitimation of societal self-images, a procedure oscillating between transparency and opacity. In order to problematize self-evidence and authenticity, Schlingensiefel repeatedly creates situations in which the self-evident can become clearly recognizable as a construction. In such constellations, it becomes apparent that the plausibility of the seemingly self-evident is created by the mechanisms that govern perception in media productions. If one wants to describe Schlingensiefel’s disruptive maneuvers more precisely, there are three main significant distinctions which are repeatedly deployed in integrative combinations.

In order to thematize shared conceptions of normality – the constitutive conditions of which generally go unnoticed – Schlingensiefel works first of all with techniques of cognitive dissonance: he repeatedly builds disruptions or incomprehensibility into his theatrical texts and performances,¹⁴ which as discursive

12 “After all, people, thoughts and images are all just waiting to be disturbed,” [“Die Leute warten doch nur darauf, die Gedanken warten darauf, die Bilder warten darauf, dass sie gestört werden”] (Schlingensiefel in Kuhlbrodt 2002: 142).

13 Another genealogical line connects Schlingensiefel with the shock aesthetics of surrealism. André Breton’s statement that the simplest surrealist act would be to take a revolver and shoot into the crowd corresponds with Schlingensiefel’s repeated calls for the assassination of various politicians (including Helmut Kohl and Jürgen W. Möllemann), which he presented as an empowerment of art, the idea being to recode aesthetic statements politically, in the public’s reaction to them.

14 For example, the recorded aircraft noise used in the post-9/11 piece “Rosebud”, which, because of its sheer volume, made the communication on the stage incomprehensible, thus making it palpable that September 11 had created a massive scarcity of discourse in the mode of fear. At the same time, this irruption of turbine noise also makes clear just how much the audience’s cognitive associations are determined by images and sounds from the media: “This tonicity was recognized by almost 80% of the audience and condemned as too blatantly obvious. In the course of the premiere, the sound was replaced with the sound of a Cessna. At that point, only 20% of those present recognized the allusion. It was only weeks later, after a fifteen-year-old in the USA had crashed his plane into an office building, that once again 80% of the spectators understood the allusion and felt that the sound was interesting and authentic”

aporia render discernible the principle of representation itself. Schlingensiefel himself appears on stage as a frame-breaking commentator and acts as a second-order observer, who, often equipped with a megaphone as a medium of disruption,¹⁵ comments on the reactions of the audience to the occurrences on stage, thus initiating a dynamic communication in the form of a feedback loop. Furthermore, the audience of a Schlingensiefel action must always expect to be subjected to a constant process of sensory overload – Schlingensiefel works with such a flood of signs, references, and plot elements that one inevitably loses the overview and one's perceptual capacities are stretched to the limit. This involves a permanent sampling of media content, a vortex of pop-cultural and political quotations, their presentation cadenced by disruptions in the representational flow. Schlingensiefel's "rhythm is derailment" [Rhythmus ist die Entgleisung] (Kohse 2001). He uses the resulting cadence "to create gaps in perception, to produce blank spaces that confuse and unsettle the audiences. By delaying meaning, the text is opened up for a different approach to reception"¹⁶ (Nissen-Rizvani 2011: 178).

A second major strategy of disruption, which supplements the cognitive dissonance, results from the implicit or explicit thematization of the co-presence of actors and spectators, which always plays a role in Schlingensiefel's performances. Schlingensiefel works with a complex interplay of distance and proximity, withdrawal and contact, reproduction and *liveness*, which completely dismantles the fourth wall that conventionally structures the theater space. The experimental space of the theater thus becomes a

[“Diese Tonizität wurde von fast 80 % der Zuschauer erkannt und als eindeutig verurteilt. Noch während der Premiere wurde das Geräusch gegen das Geräusch einer Cessna ausgetauscht. In dem Moment erkannten es nur noch 20 % der Anwesenden. Erst Wochen später, als ein 15-jähriger in den USA mit seinem Flugzeug in ein Bürogebäude krachte, verstanden es wieder 80 % der noch anwesenden Zuschauer und empfanden das Geräusch interessant und aufrichtig”] (Schlingensiefel 2002: 48–49).

15 The megaphone is thus the medium of a metacommunication, which is not used to convey a message, but rather to eliminate the possibility of an unambiguous, supposedly correct reception.

16 “[...] um Lücken für die Wahrnehmung zu erzeugen, Leerstellen zu produzieren, die die Rezipienten irritieren. Die Verzögerung des Sinns öffnet den Text für eine andere Rezeptionshaltung.”

social system that is [...] structured by the reciprocal perception of those present [...] and thus, typically oscillates between the acclamation of warmth and proximity on the one hand, and the criticism of confinement and violence on the other.¹⁷ (Baecker 2003: 16)

This gives rise to a communicatively and atmospherically created communality in the form of an event, which as a transient phenomenon initially resists hermeneutic interpretation, and is only retrospectively interpretable as a fissure, disruption, or division: “Art is thus no longer viewed as a hermeneutic undertaking but becomes instead an arena of aesthetic experience that invariably forestalls hermeneutic understanding and enables experiences that initially elude logical categories of thought.”¹⁸ (Steiner 2012: 461)

A third aspect, which places Schlingensiefel in the tradition of Joseph Beuys, the founder of anti-elitist “social sculpture” [soziale Plastik] (Harlan 1986), is the recurring use of amateur actors, some of them with physical and/or mental handicaps. In their supposed otherness, these actors unsettle customary social viewing habits and, through their physical presence and habitual non-conformity, bring out into the open the latent mechanisms of social exclusion, generally concealed by the self-image of an open, democratic society. “Their lack of a guise,” writes Catherina Gilles,

allows them to break into our standardized image of humanity like a piece of reality, a truth, like Lacan’s *a*, the small other [...]. This makes a point beyond all theatrical, demonstrative effects and makes the events a touch more unpredictable than is generally the case in the theater.¹⁹ (Gilles 2008: 93)

Thus, it is understandable that Schlingensiefel’s art, as composed as it is, necessarily retains elements of experimentation and improvisation. Even if the public discourse about his work is strongly configured by his personality and, especially during the final creative phase, in the confrontation with anxiety, illness, and death, it becomes a kind of “cross-fade” of social and biographical problems,

17 “[...] sozialen System, das [...] durch die wechselseitige Wahrnehmung der Anwesenden strukturiert ist [...] und daher typischerweise zwischen Akklamation von Wärme und Nähe einerseits und Kritik von Beengung und Gewalt andererseits hin und her oszilliert.”

18 “Kunst wird damit nicht mehr als hermeneutische Aufgabe betrachtet, sondern Kunst wird zum Austragungsort eines ästhetischen Erlebnisses, das dem hermeneutischen Verstehen stets zuvorkommt, das Erfahrungen möglich macht, die sich den logischen Denkkategorien zunächst entziehen.”

19 “Das Unverstellte an ihnen lässt sie in unser genormtes Menschenbild hineinbrechen wie ein Stück Realität, eine Wahrheit, Lacans *a*, das Andere [...]. Das trifft einen Punkt jenseits aller theatralen Vorführungseffekte und macht das Geschehen eine Spur unberechenbarer als im Theater üblich.”

Schlingensief's performances are unmistakably decentralized in their organization, perhaps most clearly so in the mid-phase of his career, around the turn of the millennium.²⁰

Where the performance takes over public space and extends the circle of possible actors far beyond the readily discernible range of informed participants, an unpredictable dynamic comes into play. This dynamic results in an experimental opening, becoming politically more resourceful thanks to the experimental arrangement, in which, through the conceptual disruption of hegemonic images, zones of spontaneity are created. Schlingensief is well aware that images are "not a window on reality" [kein Fenster zur Wirklichkeit] (Belting 2006: 7), but rather, as a product of a complex chain of signification involving manifold selection processes, they constitute a merely "tendentious version" of reality. Accordingly, Schlingensief describes his art as "an image disruption machine" [Bilderstörungsmaschine]. What he means by this in concrete terms will now be discussed in detail, on the basis of several of his works.

2 *Chance 2000* as a code collapse

A spectacular action, with which Schlingensief caused a sensation far beyond the field of artistic discourse, was the founding of the *Chance 2000* political party in March 1998, with which he intended to stand for elections to the German Bundestag the following September. The party's declared goal was to give a voice to "the socially invisible" [den Unsichtbaren]. (Schlingensief and Hegemann 1998: 18) The political initiative was accompanied by a large number of corresponding actions – for example, a shopping expedition together with unemployed and handicapped people in the luxury department store "Kaufhaus des Westens" in Berlin, or an excursion involving group bathing at Helmut Kohl's favorite holiday location, Lake Wolfgang in Austria – which were intended as a critique from different perspectives of the fiction of a fully open, participative German society.

With regard to the question of the aesthetics of disruption, *Chance 2000* is interesting for two reasons. On the one hand, Schlingensief gives the principle of social sculpture a significantly broader basis by radically reinterpreting the

²⁰ I have in mind above all the actions *My Fat, my Felt, my Hare – 48 Hours* (Kassel 1997), *Pasion Impossible – 7 Day Emergency Call for Germany* (Hamburg 1997), Schlingensief's deconstructions of the talk show *Talk 2000* (RTL and Sat1 1997) and *U 3000* (MTV 2000), the founding of the political party *Chance 2000* (1998), the container action *Please Love Austria!* (Vienna 2000) and his staging of *Hamlet* in Zurich (2000).

space of art as a public space of social action, with the intention of disrupting perfect “staged performances” of everyday life and reallocating social roles. By applauding all visitors as they entered and left the *Kaufhaus des Westens*, Schlingensief and his companions were able to revitalize the concept of “breaching experiments” [Krisenexperimente] (Mehan and Wood 1975: 24),²¹ which originates from ethnomethodology, “in which a break in reality is generated which forces one to examine self-evident assumptions and perceptions”²² (Albers 1999).

While Garfinkel disrupts social order in order to investigate it, and provokes a “breach” in order to examine the hidden “routines of everyday life,” Schlingensief’s theatrical actions and experiments – aided by his intruding as a dilettante and outsider on a ‘perfectly staged event’ – consist in breaking open familiar social and medial scenarios, smuggling in the invisible and the non-representable, whatever is held to be other or excluded by the prevailing order.²³ (Albers 1999)

It is no longer a question of sabotaging or setting fire to the department store (as was the case in the days of the Rote Armee Fraktion) – “resistance is over, they have to produce inconsistency, contrariness”²⁴ (Schlingensief 2000) – but rather a question of rendering visible, of an alienation effect, which functions as an image disruptor.

Chance 2000 works against the invisibility of so-called “marginal” social groups such as the unemployed and people with disabilities, an invisibility based on insidious mechanisms of selection, and thus promotes a new regime

21 “People interact without listing the rules of conduct. Continued reference is made to this knowledge nonetheless. This referencing is not ordinarily available as long as the reality work continues normally. When the reality is disrupted, the interactional activity structuring the reality becomes visible” [“Personen interagieren, ohne die Verhaltensregeln genau zu verzeichnen. Trotzdem wird ständig auf dieses Wissen Bezug genommen. Solange Realitätskonstruktionen normal verlaufen, ist dieses Bezugnehmen üblicherweise nicht statthaft. Sobald die Realität zerbrochen ist, wird das Interaktionshandeln, welches die Realität strukturiert, sichtbar”] (Mehan and Wood 1975: 24).

22 “[...] bei denen ein Realitätsbruch erzeugt wird, der zur Überprüfung selbstverständlicher Annahmen und Wahrnehmungen zwingt.” Thus Irene Albers in her very clever essay, largely ignored by the research on Schlingensief.

23 “Während Garfinkel die Ordnung stört, um sie zu erforschen, die Krise provoziert, um der verborgenen ‘Routine des Alltags’ nachzugehen, bestehen Schlingensiefs Theateraktionen und Experimente darin, mit Hilfe der Intrusion als Dilettant und Außenstehender in eine ‘perfekte Inszenierung’ vertraute soziale und mediale Szenarios [...] aufzubrechen, das jeweils Andere und Ausgegrenzte der Ordnung, das Unsichtbare und Nichtrepräsentierbare einzuschleusen.”

24 “Widerstand ist vorbei, sie müssen Widersprüchlichkeit erzeugen.” See the interview with Christoph Schlingensief in the materials accompanying the DVD “Ausländer Raus! Schlingensiefs Container” (*Ausländer raus!* 2000).

of visibility that calls for the articulation of non-hegemonic positions and at the same time attempts to lay bare the power of the social mainstream to muzzle, to render mute. By creating confrontational situations in which the participants (for example, the employees of the security service, who initially look on helplessly at the humorous goings-on at the *Kaufhaus des Westens*) lose their sense of assuredness and effectively fall out of their social role, a space of possible re-negotiations opens up. The disruption resulting from the supposed out-of-placeness of the handicapped people and the unemployed, categorized as “other,” suspends the invisibility of the normal.²⁵ The physical presence of the otherwise marginalized social groups creates a non-discursive fissure in the normality of the capitalist temple of consumption, a fissure that rejects²⁶ the “hitherto prevailing confines of the visible” [bis dato maßgeblich sichtbar] (Diederichsen 1998: 119).

The second, even more significant function of *Chance 2000* consists in its exploration of the relationship between authenticity and staged performance in the field of politics on different political, social, and aesthetic levels. In a way, the founding of *Chance 2000* is a form-oriented response to the thesis regarding the complete virtualization of reality, transmuted into hyper-reality, which was much discussed in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁷ Schlingensief reacts to the disappearance of the category of “truth” from political debate by deliberately merging art and politics. In the ensuing uncertainty about the nature of *Chance 2000* – is it art or is it politics?²⁸ – Schlingensief is aiming to draw attention to

25 “Due to its lesser significance, the normal eludes representation. It becomes visible either in the abstract forms of mathematical visibility or indistinct symbolism, or even by remaining invisible itself, namely in the staging of what is opposed to it, where the normal then appears as the latter’s other.” [“Das Normale entzieht sich aufgrund seiner geringen Signifikanz seiner Repräsentation. Sichtbar wird es entweder in den abstrakten Formen mathematischer Visualität bzw. unscharfer Symbolik oder eben, indem es selbst unsichtbar bleibt, nämlich durch Inszenierungen seiner Gegenteile, als deren Anderes das Normale dann erscheinen kann.”] (Cuntz and Krause 2012: 197)

26 Schlingensief’s repeatedly criticized collaborations with physically or mentally handicapped people are also to be understood in this sense, namely as an image disruption arising from a kind of social interaction that is often perceived as unsettling. The facial expressions of the handicapped actors, for instance, are particularly important, since they perturb standard viewing habits: the less premeditated play of facial expressions, the fractured staging of unfamiliar affective images, brings the grimace as a borderline case of the semiotization of affects into the foreground. This provokes a disruption of signifying practices in the sense that the hermeneutics of communication – which is still largely verbal – is rendered more complex (see Löffler 2003).

27 See for example Baudrillard 1993.

28 *Chance 2000* fulfilled all the formal criteria required of a political party: it had a proper executive committee, a set of policies, etc. (Schlingensief and Hegemann 1998).

the staged character of “real” politics: “We’re being perfectly serious. The really frivolous parties are sitting in the Bundestag.”²⁹ (Schlingensief in Albers 1999)

In line with this, in the “election campaign circus,” the official founding event of *Chance 2000* in the Berlin Prater, the prevailing thesis was that a totalization of the staging of reality on all levels had taken place and that the staged event could be understood as a problematization of distinction between art and politics. *Chance 2000* is a project that functions as a reflexive staging of – and a staged reflection on – the permanently (unreflected) staged forms of everyday life, of social life and politics. For Jean-Francois Lyotard – whom Schlingensief could have invoked as a philosophical authority – “mise-en-scène [...] is not an “artistic” activity, it is a general process affecting all fields of activity, a profoundly unconscious process of selection, exclusion and effacement.” (Lyotard 1978: 56) In order to expose this latent staged character, *Chance 2000* refuses all attempts at categorization, which would inevitably produce a reductive, pigeonholing effect. On the contrary, Schlingensief is concerned with maintaining the tension that results from a constitutive undecidability by making the disruption of order-imposing discursive patterns a paradoxical principle of his political actions: “Theater today is politics. Politics has long been theatrical. And politics is even in the process of becoming better at theater than the theater itself [...] Learning from politics means learning how to stage an event.”³⁰ (Schlingensief 2003)

What is interesting here is that Schlingensief bids farewell to the old position from the sociology of art – manipulative politics on one side, critical theater on the other – and instead introduces a new distinction derived from the position of a second-order observer:

What up to this point sounded like an accusation directed exclusively against the pseudo-reality of politics has now become a complaint directed at the very being of contemporary theater, its retreat to the stage, into fiction, a theater that contents itself with allusions. [...] Politics and the media are really much better at this now! Isn't this what makes the theater truly outrageous? Withdrawing into itself and contenting itself with aesthetic commentary over a nice glass of sparkling wine at a premiere?³¹ (Schlingensief 2003)

29 “Wir meinen es erst. Die wahren Spaßparteien sitzen im Bundestag.”

30 “Theater heute, das ist Politik. Politik, das ist schon lange Theater. Und sie schickt sich an, sogar das bessere von beiden zu werden. [...] Von Politik lernen, heißt Inszenieren lernen.”

31 “Was bis hierhin wie ein ausschließlicher Vorwurf an den Wirklichkeitsschein der Politik klang, das ist jetzt bereits eine Klage gegen das Sein des aktuellen Theaters, seinen Rückzug auf die Bühne, in die Fiktion, die sich mit wortwörtlichen Anspielungen begnügt. [...] Das können Politik und Medien nun wirklich besser! Ist das nicht das tatsächlich Unfassbare am Thea-

Based on this critique of the theatrical status quo, which is derived from a sensibility for the sedative effect of the bourgeois reception of art, *Chance 2000* develops a social experimental arrangement that forestalls all forms of the self-assured distance and the comfortable setup behind the fourth wall separating the stage from the auditorium, and seeks to replace passive consumption with an insistence on self-positioning responsibility:

We carry out our actions seriously and with gusto. Everybody can participate, we don't want to be perceived as an art party, where System 1 can then simply talk its way out again, claiming it's all only theater after all. And the unemployed, who should actually be at the center of our efforts, fall by the wayside yet again. (Schlingensiefel and Hegemann 1998: 52)³²

In concrete terms, *Chance 2000* is thus an experimental arrangement composed in a poly-perspectival fashion, which endeavors to establish a position from which to observe the latent stage-managed character of media scripts and political-cultural routines. Because actors and spectators encounter each other directly, or rather because under the motto "failure as an opportunity" they become functionally equivalent, leading to a system-amalgamating border transgression, an infringement of otherwise neatly distinct spheres of action: "Schlingensiefel's actions counteract the fundamental 'impotence' of the aesthetic, by collapsing the boundaries between art and non-art, as well as generating double binds, undecidability, paradoxes, thus exposing the hidden rules of hermetically sealed systems such as politics, economics and art, or taking them to absurd extremes."

³³ (Schößler 2006: 270) *Chance 2000* is therefore to be understood as a breaching

ter? Der Rückzug in sich selbst und die Genügsamkeit des ästhetischen Kommentars bei einem Gläschen Premierensekt?"

32 Hans-Thies Lehmann makes it clear that *Chance 2000* can indeed be characterized as post-dramatic art: "Instead of the deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside, [post-dramatic theatre] can shift the disturbingly mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the center of things and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception." ["An Stelle der trügerisch beruhigenden Dualität von Hier und Dort, Innen und Außen kann [...das Theater] die beunruhigende wechselseitige Implikation von Akteuren und Zuschauern in der theatralen Bilderzeugung in den Mittelpunkt rücken und so den zerrissenen Faden zwischen Wahrnehmung und eigener Erfahrung sichtbar werden lassen"] (Lehmann 2006: 185–186).

33 "Die Schlingensiefelschen Aktionen begegnen der grundsätzlichen 'Impotenz' des Ästhetischen, indem sie die Grenzen zwischen Kunst und Nicht-Kunst kollabieren lassen, zudem double binds, Unentscheidbarkeiten, Paradoxa generieren und so die verborgenen Regeln der vielfach hermetisch abgeschotteten Systeme wie Politik, Wirtschaft und Kunst kenntlich machen bzw. ad absurdum führen."

experiment with the principle of democratic representation, which creates a vortex of oblique representations through the mutual disruption of events, situations and actions, whereby the aesthetic strategy of “taking things literally” is repeatedly deployed as a mode of language criticism. For example, the metaphor of the “tug of war” loses its apparent political harmlessness when, on an evening of the “election campaign circus”, two groups enter into an actual physical contest, and the antagonism of their exchange of political views acquires a violent, physical dimension. Schlingensiefel thus proves to be a destroyer of language images, the hegemonic power of which is exercised in the form of performative speech acts and thereby obscured.³⁴

Apart from the disruption of set phrases, *Chance 2000* also works in other respects with the performative enactment of abstract concepts. For instance, in response to heckling from the audience, an evening of the “election campaign circus” is interrupted (the ensemble withdrew backstage for half an hour), thus countering the monologic political flow of television with a confrontational, dialogical situation in which the political – properly speaking – can actually take place. In the feedback loop that is thereby induced between the actors and the audience, in a dramaturgy that uses the out-of-control situation and the mounting excitement curve as a way of rendering aporia visible, a self-provocation occurs that brings to light the conditions of possibility of political opinion: “What we’re doing here is a self-provocation – an empty space on which to project your image – your film – and you continually have the problem that the images turn against themselves.”³⁵ (Schlingensiefel in Lilienthal and Philipp 2000: 100) Juliane Rebentisch, drawing on Adorno, notes that “the social potential of art [...]” consists precisely in the fact that “it interrupts an immediate, ‘practical impulse’ in favor of a reflective distantiation [...]” (Rebentisch 2012: 265). Martin Wuttke’s response to this comes when, during the party launch where the audience is comfortably addressed as “we,” Wuttke ruptures the consensual community of feelings, insulting the party supporters in a wild litany, and starts addressing them as “you.” This thematization of the affective dimension of the political is also pursued in other contexts – for instance, it always eventuates when the question of the limits of the representable and the sayable arises in response to the intrusion of individual vulnerability into the smooth surface of the media world: “The

³⁴ Schlingensiefel works with the same effects of ambivalence, for example in his stage play *Atta Atta*, which playfully draws on the phantasm of cleansing and its underlying xenophobic resentment in connection with the figure of the 9/11 terrorist, Mohamed Atta.

³⁵ “Das, was wir machen, ist eine Selbstprovokation – eine leere Fläche, auf die projizieren Sie Ihr Bild drauf – Ihren Film –, und Sie haben pausenlos das Problem, dass sich die Bilder gegen sich selbst kehren.”

whole project is embarrassing. Read what our candidates are proclaiming as their program. It's embarrassing in the positive sense because it is honest and not functional."³⁶ (Schlingensiefel in Albers 1999) Focusing on the thresholds of embarrassment helps to subject the political-medial "pathos inventory of our times" [Pathos-Inventar der Gegenwart] (Schößler 2006: 290) to a critical revision and thus to delineate the objectives of image disruption. This is then developed further, especially in his Viennese *Container Action*, which took place two years later, and in Schlingensiefel's confrontations with the reality-constituting dramaturgy of the talk show. The fact that, ultimately, *Chance 2000* was not elected to the Bundestag prevented it from being corrupted by the so-called "System 1," the political establishment that subscribes to market conformity. The slogan of the election campaign encapsulates the fact that, for programmatic reasons alone, it would not have been possible to make it into the Bundestag: "failure as an opportunity" [Scheitern als Chance].

3 The talk show as a fiction of authenticity

While *Chance 2000* focused above all on the stage-managed character of politics, in the essentially simultaneous actions *Talk 2000* and *U3000*, Schlingensiefel subjected the simulation of authenticity and consternation in the genre of the "talk show" to a similarly biting critique. As was the case with *Chance 2000*, Schlingensiefel in his own version of the talk show sought to subvert the format from within, a format which in the 1990s had reached inflationary proportions, especially on private television stations, selling the voyeuristic "view through the keyhole" as an opportunity for self-expression for the audience. Through his appropriation of the established dramaturgies of the genre, Schlingensiefel brought to light the aporias in its professed authenticity. *Talk 2000* and its successor *The Pilots: 10 Years of Talk 2000* (2008), function as a disruption of the purported discussion platform, which conceals its own commercial, constructed character and its pornographic economy behind the aggressively promoted offer of discursive participation by the television audience.³⁷ Schlingensiefel counters any suggestion of an authentic program taking a genuine interest in the stories of the talk show guests by deploying an aesthetics of exaggeration, of framework rup-

36 "Das Projekt ist peinlich. Lesen Sie mal nach, was die Kandidaten als ihr Programm verkünden. Es ist im positiven Sinne peinlich, weil es ehrlich ist und nicht funktional."

37 Ironically, in accordance with legal stipulations, *Talk 2000* was broadcast on Channel 4, a special interest television channel that had to be operated by Sat1 and RTL due to a provision in the State Broadcasting Agreement.

ture or technical failure, repeatedly making it clear that the talk show in commercial television has to meet certain requirements of the medium and the advertisers, and is thus far from open or spontaneous.³⁸

The dramaturgy of *Talk 2000* is characterized by a formal design that seeks to attain a comic book-like, flagrant quality in order to point up the commercially conditioned nature of the talk show format, which it achieves by accelerating the succession of edits and topics, thus creating an impression of superficiality and agitation. In the first episode, for example, Schlingensiefel remains demonstratively silent over a long period, but on the other hand continually interrupts his guests and on other occasions he breaks the flow of conversation with the slogan “Kill Helmut Kohl!” [Tötet Helmut Kohl!] His guests, such as Hildegard Knef, Rudolf Mooshammer, and Ingrid Steeger, find themselves confronted with questions that force them to make political statements.³⁹ In the final episode, entitled “[A Matter of] Life and Death” [Auf Leben und Tod], Schlingensiefel even gets into a fight when taken to task for the superficiality of his show – “it’s just faked shit, an exercise in brainlessness” [Fake-Scheiße, eine Verblödungsmaschine] – by a supposed member of the audience, the actor Bernhard Schütz. The paradox of his own role is thus symbolically underscored: a talk show in which disputes are settled not with arguments but with brute physical strength is an indication of the overall violent nature of the genre, a genre that is not even remotely interested in establishing a discourse relatively free of domination, but solely in gratifying a sensation-seeking curiosity. The implicit core question regarding the authenticity of the content broadcast in the media – which is also the object of a similar discussion in Schlingensiefel’s persiflage of a casting show, *Freakstars 3000* (2002 on Viva) – is explicitly answered by Schütz when he hits Schlingensiefel in the face, accompanying his action with the words, “Here, this is real!” [Da, das ist echt!]

This form of self-referentiality – irritating precisely because it openly states what one has long known but, in keeping with the format, generally sweeps under the rug in favor of the “normal” pleasure of media consumption – is

38 This deconstruction of talk show normality was in turn productively taken up by the television talk show *Roche and Böhmermann* (2012–2013 on ZDF-Kultur). Here, too, it was a question of establishing another form of the talk show, which constantly fed its format-bound character reflexively back into the content it produced, for example through the fact that, at the end of each episode, the two moderators stood in front of the camera and presented a preliminary critique of the program’s machinations.

39 With quite embarrassing consequences in the case of Mooshammer in episode 2: following an absurd dialogue on happiness, work and money, Mooshammer expounds on the pleasure that one can also take in a rainbow, adding that this kind of happiness is free of charge.

also at work in the 2008 sequel, *The Pilots*,⁴⁰ which was produced in cooperation with the Berlin Academy of the Arts. The forms of self-destruction that were developed in *Talk 2000* are re-deployed here, although with an additional aspect, since the production focuses less on Schlingensiefel himself and instead leaves more room for the invited guests. Precisely because they are all media professionals and behave accordingly, in the slightly displaced frame of reference of the “Pilots” they come across as remote-controlled, uncanny ghosts from “real” life. This is precisely the case, for example, with the involuntary self-destruction of the journalism of solicitude and dismay embodied by the TV pastor Jürgen Fliege, where Schlingensiefel creates a situation on the stage in which the typical exploitation routines of simulated solicitude are only ostensibly operative. Fliege, whose great popularity resulted from the authenticity and attention-gaining he offered, is exposed in his calculated media-resonance, solely because, when confronted with a mother and her mentally handicapped adult son in the context of the meta-talk show, he does what he always does, namely ask simple questions that are meant to signal empathy. Fliege does not realize that he has thereby fallen into the trap of unmasking himself, but it does not elude the audience.

Schlingensiefel produced a similar disruption of the talk show's impression of authenticity when on another evening he agreed to the Green politician Claudia Roth's request to join her in drinking a glass of red wine in honor of her friend, Hrant Dink, who had been shot dead that same day in Turkey. Contrary to Roth's expectation that the thematization of death would induce an appropriate degree of concern and compassion, Schlingensiefel had the live scene replayed, referring to a poorly done transition to the next wide-angle shot, and thus essentially had it re-enacted. The repetition of the pathos-filled *in memoriam* gesture makes it clear that emotions on television are always subject to a mediatization effect. Death is no laughing matter, this much becomes evident, but this certainly does not put an end to the work of staging emotions in a television show.

The end of the opening episode of the *Pilots* makes it clear that the standards of so-called “political correctness” are not part of an ethical or political debate, but rather as preset breaking points of discursive normalization they are meant to prevent the quality standards of television from being scrutinized. Here, too, Schlingensiefel is principally concerned with seeing, with visibility, and rendering

⁴⁰ The show, which was supposed to consist of eight episodes, was abandoned after 6 episodes due to the serious illness of Schlingensiefel's father. These episodes are documented in a 90 minute condensed version produced by the director Cordula Kablitz-Post under the title “The Pilots – Christoph Schlingensiefel.”

visible. After commenting on A4-size medical images of his inner eye and describing his fear of going blind in his later years due to a hereditary defect, as his father did, Schlingensief directs his attention to a woman in the audience wearing a Burka, with the words “I take this masquerade as a personal offense”⁴¹, and rips the veil from her head. In the ensuing turmoil, which, along with Schlingensief, involves the actor Rolf Zacher, another spectator and a voice-off coming from the studio technicians, it remains completely unclear whether the scene is to be taken as staged, partly staged, or as a genuine scandal. It is precisely this liminality of an aesthetics of disruption that reveals that political confrontation only begins when one oversteps the boundaries of the sayable.

All in all, Schlingensief’s television projects are in keeping with his entire oeuvre: the disruptive potential of his actions results from the undecidability concerning the sphere of encoding and decoding of the event in question. It is never quite clear whether we are dealing with authentic emotions or staged feelings; the comprehension of reality develops into a crisis that opens up the possibility of reflecting on modes of medial world-making. With its claim to “reality content,” the talk show becomes a field of experimentation for putting mere reality effects to the test. When in his TV hybrid *U3000*, produced for MTV, Schlingensief has the actor Peter Kern collapse from a heart attack, the distinction between actor and role collapses along with the cardiovascular system of the person concerned. In *U3000*, produced three years after *Talk 2000*, Schlingensief travels on a special underground train through Berlin, at night. Next to a “talk” carriage, there is a “dressing-room” carriage and a “music” carriage, in which in each show a different prominent band performs. As a result of the constant shuttling back and forth between the “talk” carriage and the “music” carriage, the communicational connections are constantly interrupted, thus making it clear – “in vitro, underground” (Schlingensief 2011: 430) – that television is above all based on keeping a flood of images and sounds in incessant motion, and which do not necessarily have to be bound to any actual prior content. The guests selected from the typical celebrity repertoire also contribute to the situational artificiality of this anti-show, just as Schlingensief himself does by repeatedly changing costumes before introducing his guests and by reproducing the exaggerated procedures characteristic of television entertainment – for example when he “slaughters” a soft toy (in this case, a cat) or reflects with his

41 “[...] diese Maskerade empfinde ich als persönliche Beleidigung.”

guests on the social function of rituals.⁴² Overall, the composition of *U 3000* is governed by the principle of incessant information and stimulus overload, which creates a form of white noise, thus rendering visible the latent social function of television as a debilitating flow of images and feelings (Williams 1974).

4 *Container Aktion* as a breaching experiment

It was in the context of the *Container Aktion* that Schlingensief mounted in 2000 on the occasion of the Vienna Festival and in the context of the verification of the E.U.'s compliance with European civil rights, that the formulation "image disruption machine" (Schlingensief in *Ausländer raus!*) emerged, a formulation that deftly encapsulates Schlingensief's aesthetics. In the process of image disruption, the approaches to the critique of the staged character of politics and the simulation of authenticity in the media converge and amalgamate with an awareness of the effects of "imaging" [*Bildgebung*⁴³]⁴⁴ into a two-level strategy of communicative disturbance, which simultaneously involves the destruction of the socially and politically self-evident. With the Viennese container action, Schlingensief undertook a radical political action in the medium of art in the sense that, in the course of the several days that the action lasted, he managed to produce a form of publicness in which conflicts in all their antagonistic explosiveness managed to be articulated.⁴⁵ Given the large number of participants and

42 As a consequence, one finds a lot of background information, historical documents, etc., but no videos on the documentation page U3000 (Schlingensief 2000).

43 "Imaging" [*Bildgebung*] is to be understood here in a broad, non-technical sense, only loosely referring to terms such as "medical imaging" and "digital imaging" (translator's note).

44 Schlingensief could have gained theoretical reinforcement of his position from Hans Blumenberg, who in his *Metaphorology* points out: "It is not just language that thinks ahead of us and backs us up, as it were; in our view of the world we are determined even more compellingly by the supply of images available for selection and the images we select, which 'channel' what can offer itself for experience in the first place" (Blumenberg 2010: 63).

45 "What is decisive is that public art is not 'public' simply because it is placed in a 'public space' defined as urban instead of in the semi-private space of a gallery. Rather, art is public when it takes place in public, that is, in the medium of antagonism. [...] Only when a conflict flares up and is actually played out is a public created [...] Publicness is nothing but the collision itself." ["Entscheidend ist, dass Public Art nicht deshalb 'öffentlich' ist, weil sie ihren Ort in einem urbanistisch zu bestimmenden 'öffentlichen Raum hat' statt im semi-privaten Raum einer Galerie. Sondern Kunst ist öffentlich, wenn sie im Öffentlichen stattfindet, d. h. im Medium des Antagonismus. [...] Erst in dem Moment, in dem ein Konflikt ausgetragen wird, entsteht über dessen Austragung eine Öffentlichkeit [...] Öffentlichkeit ist nichts als der Aufprall selbst"] (Marchart 2007: 239–241).

the prolonged duration of the action, Schlingensief was no longer alone in deliberately targeting and interrupting communicative routines. Rather, triggered by the image politics of the *Container Aktion*, a political dynamic developed that in turn disrupted the routines of media regulation. “The antagonistic public always has something disruptive about it with respect to the logic of the institution and the ruling ideology: it interrupts regulated processes, responsibilities, hierarchies.” (Marchart 2007: 243)

Schlingensief’s political actions, especially *Please Love Austria – The First Austrian Coalition Week* and *Chance 2000*, mainly make use of techniques of “embodiment and visualization, in order to concretize abstract political speech in the form of liminal images, which disrupt the evidential effect of the visual” (Schößler 2011: 118). In this action, Schlingensief used the Internet as a forum to allow people to vote on the deportation of the “interned” [in the container] asylum seekers, thus making tangible the practical consequences of the national-conservative policies of the FPÖ-ÖVP [Austrian Freedom Party-Austrian People’s Party] coalition by personalizing the fate of those concerned. The action, which not only drew on the (at the time) highly popular TV show, *Big Brother*, but at the same time invoked the camp as a bio-political paradigm of modernity, was a “complex play with discursive positions, forms of address and the implications of appropriation and demands for solidarity” (Hochreiter 2011: 444), in which the FPÖ and the [right-wing tabloid] *Kronen Zeitung* were also involved, as were passers-by, Internet users and Schlingensief himself. The “happening”, which highlighted its own character as an event through the use of spotlights and a brass band, was disruptive in the sense that, while all forms of media entertainment were invoked, they were not presented within the framework of a coherent overall tableau-image [*Gesamtbild*]. Using the strategy of “deliberate affirmation” – as Dietrich Kuhlbrodt described Schlingensief’s strategy with regard to the similarly commotion-filled production of *Hamlet* in Zurich – , it becomes possible “to gain access to the political and social stage and to disrupt from within the powerful or feeble work being staged there, and to steer it in the desired direction” (Kuhlbrodt 2002: 142). At the center of this parallax-like image disruption, however, stands the container, sporting a banner on its roof with the slogan “Ausländer raus” (“foreigners out”) – an extreme, heterotopic site in the middle of Vienna, rendering visible the boundaries between inside and outside, between issuing and obeying orders, between decision-making power and those at the disposition of this power.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Dirk Rustemeyer, for example, argues along similar lines: “Camps and prisons can themselves become symbols that mark cultural differences and can occasion conflicts or stories, if

The direct confrontation with Austrian asylum policy is constructed around a refined experimental arrangement, which uses image disruption as a method of criticizing the Austrian self-image of an open, democratic society. "Schlingensief's images are, to use Roland Barthes' terms, 'crazy', not 'tame'; in Lacan's sense, they are disquieting 'trompe l'oeil'."⁴⁷ They mark out a wound in the order of representation and discourse which cannot be closed by means of simple narrative operations. Schlingensief is aware of the power of "*doing images*," (Burri 2008) of performative image-acts, which configure our conception of normality by establishing regimes of visibility. His image disruption machine implements a subversive counter-strategy which sets in motion" an interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function." (Foucault 1980: 195) The container action is first of all a disruption of public order, but at the same time it is a dismantling of binary right-left codifications: the leftist demonstrators, who after several days of heated discussion end up destroying the "foreigners out" banner, are unwittingly improving Austria's public image. By having the banner put in place and subsequently, using his megaphone, repeatedly getting worked up about it, Schlingensief positioned himself as a trickster⁴⁸ in Canetti's sense, as a parasite on the routines of sensation-seeking in the media (Serres 2007: 422–423). It is not just a question of criticizing the right-wing populism of the FPÖ in a simplistic, didactic fashion. Rather, the container-action creates a new cultural and political forum in which a communicative conflict about the actual meaning of "publicness" can take place. Accordingly, Schlingensief is not concerned with an ontologization of concrete political content – on the contrary, he aims to bring out the contingency of all political and social orders and thus brings about a liquefaction of ideologically-hardened standpoints, which is the prerequisite for facilitating a renewal of politics. As Jacques Rancière has pointed out, the prevailing "post-democracy" has led to a situation of complete conformity between the forms of the state and the state of social relations, deter-

not myths. They are sites of surveillance, which can be the center of social awareness, even though – and because – they minimize the possibilities of observation." ["Lager und Gefängnisse können selbst zu Symbolen werden, die kulturelle Unterscheidungen markieren, und zum Anlass zu Konflikten oder Erzählungen, wenn nicht Mythen werden. Bei ihnen handelt es sich um Orte der Beobachtung, die selbst im Mittelpunkt gesellschaftlicher Aufmerksamkeit stehen können, obwohl und weil sie die Möglichkeiten der Beobachtung minimieren"] (Rustemeyer 2009: 165–166).

⁴⁷ "Schlingensiefs Bilder sind im Sinne Roland Barthes' 'verrückt', nicht 'zahn', sind im Sinne Lacans beunruhigende 'trompe l'oeil'."

⁴⁸ Elias Canetti writes: "[W]ie von keiner anderen Figur, die man kennt, lässt sich von ihm das Wesen der Freiheit ablesen. [...] Er belustigt [...] die Leute], indem er ihnen alles durch Umkehrung verdeutlicht" (Canetti 2011: 192–193; see also Schüttelpelz 2010).

mined by a neo-liberal realism that has all the trappings of an undisturbed processing of opinion formation but in reality does not present any alternatives and thus discredits utopias (Rancière 1999). To counter this kind of totalizing discursive homogenization, Rancière deploys – and Christoph Schlingensiefel's performance art follows Rancière here – the notion of “dissensus,” a principled dissent derived from the margins and boundaries of the sayable and the visible that brings to the fore the “part of those who have no part” (Rancière 1999: 9) in the political process. It is precisely here that Schlingensiefel's container action intervenes: by involving the mute asylum seekers in the artistic production, the possibility of a different social and political communization emerges in the aesthetic experience, which invokes a new partition of the sensuous and an alternative politics of the visible as a (utopian) possibility.

5 Schlingensiefel's radicality

Even in his early films, Schlingensiefel always refused the predictable narrative structures and aesthetic patterns that threaten to turn cinema into a merely functional medium for exercising influence and hegemony. When Georg Seeßlen speaks of “radical art” with regard to Schlingensiefel's film oeuvre, what he has in mind is precisely the “critique of world-making” (Goodman 1978: 94), which is being referred to here as an “aesthetics of disruption” in order to render productive Schlingensiefel's confrontation with society's powerfully effective self-descriptions. Schlingensiefel's aesthetics of disruption encompasses an aesthetic experience that does not primarily depend on representation, but rather above all on exposing the different conditions of constitution that underlie reference to what is usually known as the “world” or “reality.” Starting from the “constitution of meaning as a process” (Lehmann 2006: 102), Schlingensiefel took on the various communication systems of television, theater, film, and opera without allowing himself to be compromised or appropriated by their symbolic routines. He produces “nomadic art,” which means that “an artist can wander through different artistic and social spaces, change them, but also leave them again.”⁴⁹ (Seeßlen 2011: 76) Schlingensiefel's post-dramatic performances and actions operate “in the crisis mode,” inciting a corresponding “intensification of extreme situations,

49 “nomadische Kunst [der es darum geht, dass] eine künstlerische Person verschiedene Räume der Kunst und der Gesellschaft durchwandern, sie verändert, sie aber auch wieder verlassen kann.”

border and threshold experiences”⁵⁰ (Primavesi 2012: 147), and thus endeavoring to spread “active viruses” [aktive Viren] (Kuhlbrodt 2002: 142), a process of contagion⁵¹ out of which a new politics and society is meant to develop. The metaphor of the viral is cleverly chosen: if one follows Rancière’s reflections on the “aesthetics of politics” (Rancière 2009), then political art can only occur in the contemporary world as a politics of form. *Contagion* here means an activist art that realizes aesthetic experience in the mode of performance and feedback loops, as a process of contradictory participation in the temporal metamorphosis of social structures. The nucleus of Schlingensief’s image disruption machine lies precisely in this functionality without a precisely defined function. Or in the words of its creator: “What I actually want to do is get back to, get inside the image. And I can’t accomplish that without movement. So what should I do?” (Schlingensief in Heineke and Umathum 2002: 5).

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