//Marina Gržinić //Emma Hedditch //Klub Zwei //Laila Huber //Rosa Reitsamer //Elke Zobl

“She is a trouble maker! And they have thousands of non-trouble-makers.”

Interview with Marina Gržinić, Emma Hedditch, and Klub Zwei/Jo Schmeiser

At the symposium “Artistic interventions in the context of feminist and migrant self-organisation and collective practices” in November 2013 lectures were held by the artist and theoretician Marina Gržinić, the artist and writer Emma Hedditch, and the artist collective Klub Zwei — Jo Schmeiser and Simone Bader. In the discussion that followed, together with Elke Zobl, Rosa Reitsamer, and Laila Huber they debated questions concerning the role of interventionist practice in their work and in broader feminist and anti-racist struggles, appropriation and equal relations within the arts, and the role of institutions and the creation of counter-spaces and counter-publics. *(1)

To begin with, we would like to discuss the term “artistic intervention”. Could you explain how you see art as an interventionist practice? Is this term a good term to work with, or not?

> *Emma Hedditch:* I think for me what’s interesting to look at is this concrete situation of each time making an artistic work or being invited for a specific situation, and trying to look at what the space you’re in is, for example, this institution. Who comes here and what is it that you propose and what you want to do with inviting us, and the students and how does that fit into your broader program? From that point of view I would say in a sense to respond as an artistic intervention would be to see what we could add or do as a group of people in this moment. What are some of the very apparent, particular, and specific things that are raised at this moment and in the discussion today with the students? What are the most pressing questions? And then try to work with some of those issues. So for me, the artistic intervention is being able to see to some extent the field or the landscape in which you are working and trying to bring something to the discussion and make a kind of a break into the space. But not a break in the sense that it stops or halts the activity in this space, but in the sense that it tries to reexamine what this institution is and what these spaces are. So I have this quite conceptual approach, but this is also the starting point of my thought processes for working.
>
> *Klub Zwei/Jo Schmeiser:* I find it difficult to define or even to use the term “artistic intervention”. It implies that, as an artist, you would “own” the expertise to act, to suggest changes and should therefore be heard/seen in the public domain. And this is problematic, I feel, especially when collaborating with migrants who are denied such a privileged status in society. Structural differences and how they impact on our thoughts, views, collaborations were a permanent topic of discussion with *maiz* (Autonomous center for and by Migrant Women): What does it mean to intervene? Then you presume you, yourself, are someone who has the power and the authority to make a certain intervention. Who can intervene? And who can’t? But of course there is something like an artistic way of approaching political issues from a slightly different angle, so that it shifts these issues a little bit and raises new

questions. As artists we have a lot of knowledge about images in terms of how they are read by audiences, for example. That is something that we can bring in while *maiz* brings in knowledge from their political practice. They develop postcolonial/decolonial strategies from a queer feminist perspective and apply them to the Austrian context. They pass on decolonial knowledge to refugees and asylum seekers in their educational work, in German classes, for example. So what results from our collaboration is perhaps a political-artistic intervention, from our point of view.

Marina Gržinić: I will actually take the opportunity and claim this interventional practice, claim in the sense that at the moment that we start to talk about interventional or interventionist practice is actually the moment when I can say that new agencies and new subjectivities are entering what was once the canonical and institutional framework of contemporary art. And here, I mean precisely, for example, new political figures, who are actually immigrants. And if they are not recognized, I actually claim the power of these positions and also the possibilities for art, which was in need of new possibilities. So I would say that the interventionist practice starts also with the demand for self-determination on a double level: one level is the question of what contemporary art can actually do today because it seems that almost no other site stays relevant for relevant questions. That implies social and political bankruptcy. So you don't talk about these topics in these fields, which would be very necessary, but we actually transpose everything into the field of art. And if this is so, I think it's very important, because those who are not seen as subjectivities are actually intervening, including myself, because I'm also an immigrant in a certain way although I'm a very privileged one because now I'm a professor, but historically I was just someone from Eastern Europe. I think this is a possibility of self-determination and the new elaboration and determination for contemporary art. So it's very open and if it's so open, let's actually take advantage of this and make a new configuration of what contemporary art can be, and especially, what interventional practices are. Let's take the power of this, if there is any possibility for art to do something substantially. To finish, as Marie-Hélène Bourcier said: if feminism does not take the questions of race, class, and gender seriously, especially the question of racism, internally, then it is over. I would say if the fine arts do not take these topics seriously, it actually does not have any power in any sense.

How would you describe the specific contribution of artistic strategies or artistic interventions within broader feminist and anti-racist struggles?

Emma Hedditch: I think it is like you [=Klub Zwei/Jo Schmeiser] were saying that it is in the way of this specific notion of the relationship to materials, the way of working with images, and a contribution within this specific field of knowledge. I think for me it's important to claim the space, but to be cautious about also claiming that it is a space where these things can take place and that there are no other places for this discussion to happen, other spaces are disappearing. And simultaneously we can't ignore the culture around artistic production and the history of the kind of embedded relationship with colonialism and capitalism that is really perpetuated within artistic spheres. Of course it is very complicated, but I do claim that we have the job as artist to not only remain stuck in the artistic field, but to also bring these skills and knowledge into other fields.

Klub Zwei/Jo Schmeiser: I wanted to react to you because what I enjoyed so much in your lecture was that you made perfectly clear that the whole

vocabulary — you were talking about modernism — is defined or even contaminated by our histories of colonialism, racism, and in a German speaking context also of national socialism. Where do we take our visual vocabulary from? We have been to art academies; we have travelled internationally and looked at art shows and what people produce, but what is encased in and transmitted by this visual and textual vocabulary that we are using? […] When we cooperated with *maiz* for the very first time we thought that we had a better idea of what the result of our collaboration should look like. Today I don't have this universalist view any more, I have learned from the criticisms of maiz. But back then I thought that I had been trained to know what a certain aesthetic expresses. I was not aware that this very much depends on the geographical and social position of the person who is looking. When, for example, at *maiz* they look at artistic production, they interpret it in other ways than I do. They have not been to an art academy but to university and have studied philosophy or liberation theology there, or they are using means like theater, performance, etc. in their political practice. So I learned a lot from maiz in terms of questioning the aesthetics I like and use: Which aesthetics do I consider good and why do I do that? Which views of the world are linked to it?

Marina Gržinić: I would like to say two things that I think are really important: One thing is looking at [my] personal history, listening to the debates about modernism I think it's also important that although we who are discussing here are all white, there is a big difference in the constitution and the histories behind us, so we are all children of modernism. And the other side of the modernist paradigm is coloniality. So modernity cannot be thought of without coloniality. And this is, I think, the big lesson that comes from different postcolonial, and even more from de-colonial theories. If we simply look at the European context, though, we now speak about one space, although there have been differences historically. Because coming from a socialist context — it's not important to say that you are "the Other", but that there were other ideological prerogatives for the constitution of contemporary art. The demands were not connected so much to the market, but to the political discourse. Every move in art had the intention of radicalizing the work of art, and so especially in my case, or in the case of Aina Šmid, we were never thinking about these parameters of art, we were always thinking about the political and militant dispositive. Art worked as a place where you really put together critical practice […]. This is one thing, and the other is: We have to be very clear and very careful; in making a relation to Araba E. Johnston-Arthur, she is a theoretician and artist, but most of the time theoretician and activist from a research group for Black history and presence in Austria, so from a Black Diaspora group that is very active in Austria: She said that we have to be very careful when all these anti-racist discourses that are promoted are not once again used by leftist white positions who are also appropriating them in a way. […] She was very clear that this cannot be a new kind of genre, in the sense that we are now engaged in this and then in two or three years in something else.
Because the issue remains that those who are actually at the center of this, who actually ask for self-determination, are still excluded; they only can speak in very specific situations and are still considered an object that the dialogue is about and this is really an important matter that we all have to bear in mind when speaking about these topics.

Do you mean that it's important to move beyond discourse and start to change structures?

Marina Gržinić: No, this is not our invention; it is not an academic invention. It is coming out of direct and precise struggles that were conducted by positions that didn't have a voice but actually understood very clearly that the only possibility is this struggle for agency and the struggle for the reconstitution of the social-political-epistemological space. And now, those positions are still not integrated, practically, while others already have developed new discourses, let's say, the white paradigm, the regime of whiteness, and are actually capitalizing on this. And I thought that this warning that she quite recently formulated is something that has to be taken very seriously. And one interesting case is *Operation Spring*, because we are speaking in Austria, and *Operation Spring* was the biggest let's say horrifying post-Nazi situation, when they were cleansing the specific immigrant Nigerian population here in Austria, when after this was over, after the fight and the engagement of the black community, what happened? They made a film and in the film we don't have even one representative of this community speaking about what was going on; instead, they are only speaking because they were in prison. And the formulation of the fight, the struggle, the economic argument, the framework, is actually coming from white discourse.
[…] My point was simply to say that if we have this relationship, this means we have to completely rethink the place from where we are speaking. So that means rethinking the theses that happen when we're talking about interventionist practices, it's a part of art to rethink, […] that's what I call a radical critical practice, what is it that we do? And not just as a rhetorical question.

Emma Hedditch: […] I do think this is something that happens in the teaching practice and in the field of curating; the question to learn is not to assume your own position in history as the only and central place to work from. This is all I can say about it. In terms of appropriation or talking about practices you see, are recognized as coming from a different history than your own […], but still, we have to be careful and think how we introduce that into the institutions that we are involved in […].

Klub Zwei/Jo Schmeiser: You [Marina] talked about this film Operation Spring and I understand what you mean because when you see the film it's made by two white people and you can look at the film and you can criticize: Who is making this film? From which position, and is this position described in the film, is it shown, is it a topic or not? And I would say no, it's not at all a topic in the film, the topic is Black people and the way they are treated in Austria, to sum it up in a nutshell. […] And I think for me, when I do something, now I really have this approach of positioning myself in relation to it and making this relationship a discussion. What does it mean when I go and make a movie about Operation Spring? From which position do I talk about the subject? […] So you really have to look in detail at the ways in which you are making a documentary film or other piece of work.

Marina Gržinić: This was my point. […] This is very important when someone reads it and thinks "oh another preaching of modernist art…" or if we think instead, and reflect on what we actually say and why we are saying it.

As the next question, we would like to talk about the role of role self-organization and collaboration in your artistic work. How has this approach of collaboration and self-organization changed for you over the years?

Emma Hedditch: I mean, this term of organizing also relates to the notion that

you should leave the context, or that you have to find things outside of what you feel and experience, being the direct surroundings and context in which you live in. So for me, the notion of self-organizing came directly from this sense of need and that was so impossible to work with in the given context or what was available at the institutions […]. And so together we, different friends, artists, activists, decided to declare that we open certain spaces for us to meet and talk in. For example, I worked with the *Copenhagen Free University* of 2001 and 2008, I've worked with *Cinenova* since the late 1990s, and I worked with the *Lambeth Women's project* also from the late 1990s until 2006. So these spaces were for me an education for myself where I was gaining access to materials that I couldn't find in other places […]. The *Free University* was a way to think about the kind of knowledge production I wanted to be involved in and in relation to what was happening in educational institutions at the time and this continues today. So they were maybe responses and reactions to something that I thought I needed and lacked. This also connects to this public space question, so to make spaces that you feel you can trust where you can have discussions that would be perhaps problematic in other spaces.

Klub Zwei/Jo Schmeiser: I have to go back a bit to talk about collaboration. When I think about when I studied at university, the reason to collaborate was that I and some other people had the feeling that the way in which we were working or thinking had no space to be seen in the art field. So we founded a newspaper; and we wanted not only to show what we were thinking or doing, but also to have a critical discourse on that. So we organized a newspaper that was called *Before Information Magazine*. We didn't want to have a gallery space, we thought that the gallery space was dead and nothing interesting was happening there. And then we started to talk a lot about political issues. At that time, in the 1990s, a lot of people also started to collaborate with groups outside of the art field. Simone [Bader] and I, we had done a lot of work on issues like asylum, refuge, migration without it being called this at that time. And I think the newspaper project and the people involved in it changed our whole idea of collaborating. We discussed the idea of egalitarian collaborations and also the question of whether it is possible to have a collaboration that is egalitarian if we live in a society that is not. So how can we establish a way of working together, of negotiating differences between us, negotiating our own positions? And I think that the debate of these questions has changed a lot. At the beginning, for me, collaboration was like: "Oh it's nice to work together and we are all equal; we have similar ideas and we can have an exchange." But there was no thinking about discrimination and asymmetries yet. And I believe this has been developing more and more. I don't know where it will go. Now I am at the point where I think: Yes, we have been talking about the negotiation of differences a lot and we still need to do that. But we also need to do it in a way that doesn't fix and close our positions. Because then they stand side by side and we can only talk about them in binary logics we can talk about appropriation or non-appropriation, good or bad … But I think, what we have to do is break these dichotomies down without saying they do not exist. Because they do, even if we don't want them to.

Marina Gržinić: So maybe I will also look back in history. I worked with Aina Šmid but also with other people in 1982. It was thirty-one years until now and I'm saying this because the context in which I started to work was socialism. I think this is an important thing that cannot just be generalized because it was a different constitution of the space, it was a space – if we talk about the artistic practice – which had no art market, so it was very much connected

> with questions that were very ideological […], everything was actually politicized, every space, but still the paradoxical thing was that art in itself was not political; it was a very paradoxical situation. So this work that we started in 1982 was very much connected to two topics and they were in a certain way history and sexuality. Because everyone was poor in socialism, but many things were equal for all, for example health [security]. It is very important to be clear on this: we had people who were working, everybody was working in socialism, and we had social security and free education, and this free education was very good, even better than today. But other things like patriarchal structures, heteronormativity and big discrepancies between political discourses and what were actual possibilities, pressed on us heavily. This was really present, this discrepancy between the political elitist talk of the communist party nomenclature and what was actually said to us that we could have and do. Because of this, working as a group was very important for me, […] because we were very much engaged in different processes, and one was definitely the coming out of gays and lesbians. […] So if I go back, and this is for me the most important point, it's actually this moment when it was a hardcore fight against this patriarchal, chauvinistic but also heteronormative position, which was actually very similar to the West. It was quite an interesting situation because the social space was actually a space that I would call "egalitarian misery," but we had social security, we had health security and people could work. My mother and father were both working, because to work you actually socialized your positions in a certain way. You are not privatized at home as female, for example, but you work, you have a certain process, which is quite an important thing. So for me this was one of the interesting points, that we could connect to each other and do a lot of collaborations. So we have worked together now for thirty-one years, with many other people and in many situations. […]

One last question: so for Klub Zwei, the experience you describe of receiving fewer invitations now than in the 1990s and you [Marina Gržinić] also experience the same, what can we do?

> *Klub Zwei/Jo Schmeiser:* Most of the times when I go to an art show it's completely uninteresting, there are very few things I see these days that I find interesting. Political issues seem to be almost entirely absent in most museums and galleries. There are not so many people in the art field today that deal with political topics let alone share our views and thoughts. But nevertheless there are also differences between the few of us who claim being feminist, antiracist and wanting to change society as it is. I feel we have to take into account and discuss this more. For example, institution or institutionalization is an issue that we need to address. Simone works at the Academy and, you [Marina] are a professor there. I earn my living mostly by working as a freelance graphic designer and lately as a trainer in the educational projects of maiz. Being not part of an institution means living and working precariously. What happens if you are part of the institution? What happens if you are not? What the institution does to us is so strong. But I have no answer to your question what we can do against the marginalization of political work within the art field. I think the only answer is that we always have to think about it and talk about it and criticize it. Or at least we have to criticize these contexts where it makes a little bit of sense, because of course when I go to a big art museum it doesn't make any sense. I just stop going there because the art is not interesting anymore. I have no influence over it, but I can criticize the people I respect and I know and I like and tell them what happens when they are absorbed in an institution. And I expect the same from

my friends and colleagues that they tell me when I start to depoliticize, for example, artworks that came out of a political context with maiz or whatever. And I'm really grateful when people tell me these critical points because this is what we need to talk about.

Emma Hedditch: I had this thought that also came up earlier today; and just thinking about what is happening in the exhibition spaces or these places and this notion of appropriation and absorption but of different practices from activism or from other fields that have been kind of worked on from inside art institutions. So I wonder what these connections are in terms of the transformation of the space; I also like to see how museums are responding to this dematerialization, as it's called, but which is happening maybe in different ways through technology and more discursive practices that are often blamed for this reduction in the visual materials that we get to see in exhibitions. So I ask this question: what are the working conditions that you see and how that has changed over the years? For me, maybe it hasn't changed or fluctuated that much for the last fifteen years. To say it has been more or less the same kind of level of trying to keep afloat in the work and in the engagement. So I don't have the same experience, but the question was also that this idea because of the relationship to the economy and the possibility to survive from working as an artist or from teaching and how this is affected by the kind of practice you have. When you present a work that is made in this kind of collaboration context and when there is this question asked about the ethics of this collaboration, for me, this poses a problem because it simply seems to imply that we shouldn't make this kind of work and this kind of work shouldn't be inside of institutions.
So then maybe all these things are coming together in a way, like a kind of censorship, a self-censorship of working within institutional frameworks or a fear of this. Also because they are becoming much more corporately funded and this often implies a kind of fear of these contradictions of how the spaces are operating and for whom the exhibitions spaces are open.

Marina Gržinić: Maybe I can say just two things: One is that in our case (Gržinić and Šmid) again, coming from this specific context because of this strong new re-occidentialization of the whole institution of contemporary art, it is much easier to dispense of positions that are from other parts of, let's say the European context, from Eastern Europe, and so on. Especially because capitalism works with new blood, they want the new and they have no time for this rethinking of what has been done, what was important, and what we can learn from it. They just say we don't need this, because we have an enormous quantity of artists in the first capitalist world. And the other thing is actually going back to the question of museums and here I think it's necessary to criticize museums. So they are working in a certain way, I don't go to museums either unless it is necessary, but when you go there and see how these histories are re-written, how positions are taken out and get more and more depoliticized, this is very problematic and for us I think it is necessary to react. And one way is really, with all the possibilities that they have, and I really do that but the price is paid, you are even more so not invited – and this is the price. And you are more and more marginalized … and how is this presented, that you are a problematic person? It's all on the individual level – the brand mark is: She is a trouble maker! And they have thousands of non-trouble-makers. This is also a problem. But it's important. I mean, if this will be published – which I would like – it would be fantastic, because then somebody will read it and we will know why we are actually put in the grave, in the cemetery.

//Zur Person

Marina Gržinić

Dr. Marina Gržinić is philosopher, artist and theoretician. She is professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her latest book is *Re-Politicizing art, Theory, Representation and New Media Technology*, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna and Schlebrügge Editor, Vienna 2008. She also published an edited online book on *Biopolitics, Necropolitics and De-coloniality* (Pavilion, no. 14, 2010). Gržinić has been involved with video art since 1982, she works for 30 years with Aina Smid, she is professor of art history and free-lance editor. Gržinić lives in Ljubljana, works in Ljubljana, Slovenia and Vienna, Austria. Films and texts by Gržinić under: http://grzinic-smid.si/

//Zur Person

Emma Hedditch

Emma Hedditch (born 1972, UK) is an artist and writer based in New York. Her work focuses on daily practice, materiality, and distribution of knowledge as political action. She often works collaboratively with other artists and groups, for example The Copenhagen Free University (2001–2008) and Cinenova, a feminist film and video distributor (1999–present). Heavily influenced by politicized conceptual art practices and feminist politics, her work has taken on flexible forms as performances, collectively produced films, fanzines, as well as workshops, screenings, and events. Emma Hedditch was artist in residence for performance at the Munich Art Academy in 2013.

http://overidentification.blogspot.co.uk

//Zur Person

Klub Zwei

Jo Schmeiser und Simone Bader arbeiten seit 1992 als Künstlerinnenkollektiv zu aktuellen gesellschaftspolitischen Themen. Neben der Reflexion medialer Darstellungsweisen geht es ihnen auch um eine egalitäre Zusammenarbeit mit politischen MigrantInnen und das gemeinsame Herstellen kritischer Öffentlichkeiten. Ihre Arbeit zu den Nachwirkungen des Nazismus in der Gegenwart findet sich z.B. in ihren Dokumentarfilmen.

Since 1992 Klub Zwei – Simone Bader and Jo Schmeiser – has been working at the interface of art, film and new media. Our main fields of interest are socio-political issues and how they are portrayed. Our work centres on critiquing dominant modes

of representation and developing new ways of presenting them. The potential for social change also lies in its images. Our further interests are critically assessing structures and engaging in egalitarian co-operations among women with different backgrounds, histories and life concepts.

www.klubzwei.at
http://dok.at/person/klub-zwei-simone-bader-jo-schmeiser/
www.sixpackfilm.com/de/catalogue/filmmaker/3515

//Zur Person

Laila Huber

geb. 1980, studierte Kulturanthropologie und Kulturmanagement in Graz und Neapel/Italien. Ihre Arbeits- und Forschungsschwerpunkte sind partizipative Kunst- und Kulturarbeit, Selbstorganisation, autonome Räume, Stadtforschung sowie Interkulturalität. Ihre Dissertation „Topografie(n) des Möglichen (in) der Stadt Salzburg" wurde im Rahmen des Doktoratskollegs „Kunst und Öffentlichkeit" (2010-2013), am Schwerpunkt Wissenschaft und Kunst /Universität Salzburg und Mozarteum, ausgearbeitet und 2014 abgeschlossen (Publikation in Vorbereitung im transcript Verlag). Von Jan. 2011-Jan. 2014 war sie ehrenamtlich in der Salzburger Kunstinitiative periscope tätig. Und seit Januar 2012 ist sie Mitglied des Salzburger Landeskulturbeirats in den Fachbeiräten „Bildende Kunst" und „Kulturelle Bildung". Seit Okt. 2013 ist sie wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Programmbereich „Zeitgenössische Kunst und Kulturproduktion" am Kooperationsschwerpunkt Wissenschaft und Kunst (der Paris-Lodron-Universität und Mozarteum Salzburg) – u.a. im Sparkling-Science-Projekt „Making Art – Taking Part! Künstlerische und kulturelle Interventionen zur Herstellung partizipativer Öffentlichkeiten von und mit Jugendlichen" (www.takingpart.at).

//Zur Person

Rosa Reitsamer

Soziologin, arbeitet am Institut für Musiksoziologie an der Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien. Ihre aktuellen Forschungsschwerpunkte sind an der Schnittstelle von Musik-, Kunst- und Jugendsoziologie sowie der Cultural Studies und Gender Studies angesiedelt. Zuletzt erschienen ihre Monographie „Die Do-it-yourself-Karrieren der DJs. Über die Arbeit in elektronischen Musikszenen" (transcript 2013), die Anthologie „They Say I'm Different... Popularmusik, Szenen und ihre AkteurInnen" (hg. gem. m. W. Fichna, Löcker 2011) und die Artikel „‚Born in the Republic of Austria'. The Invention of Rock Heritage in Austria" (International Journal for Heritage Studies, 2013) und „Female Pressure: A translocal feminist youth-oriented cultural network" (Continuum. Journal of Media and Cultural Studies, Vol. 26 (3), 2012).

//Zur Person

Elke Zobl

Elke Zobl leitet den Programmbereich Gesellschaft & Nachhaltigkeit | Zeitgenössische Kunst und Kulturproduktion am Schwerpunkt Wissenschaft und Kunst, einer Kooperation der Paris-Lodron-Universität Salzburg und der Universität Mozarteum Salzburg. Ihre Arbeitsschwerpunkte liegen an den Schnittstellen von Kunst, Kultur, Medien und Gesellschaft. Sie forscht seit vielen Jahren zu feministischen Zines und alternativen Öffentlichkeiten und beschäftigt sich mit den Möglichkeiten selbstorganisierter Medien als Formen kultureller und politischer Teilhabe. Aktuell beschäftigt sie sich in dem Projekt „Co-CreART. Co-Creating Change!“ mit dem Potenzial von Kunst und Kultur in der Klimakrise. Als Kulturvermittlerin entwickelt sie künstlerisch-edukative Vermittlungsformate und Materialien und führt Workshops mit Jugendlichen und Multiplikator*innen durch.
Links:
https://w-k.sbg.ac.at/conart/
https://www.p-art-icipate.net/
https://www.moz.ac.at/de/co-creART

//Fussnoten

*1 *Unfortunately, the pdf-version is not able to convert some of the special signs. We apologize for that!*