

significans

Skin Marker

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significans. A group of women artists from Berlin.

We are currently working as a group of four – four women. All the men left or are involved in our projects peripherally, though this is to be a discussion topic later.

significans sees itself as an archive, an information bureau and a studio for artistic intervention. The work group acts at the points of intersection between art, cul-

ture and political action. Artists, cultural critics and journalists, both men and women, focus on current developments in social control systems producing various forms of discrimination, especially in law on aliens and asylum.

The research centres on evidence-gathering on the body: monitoring and identification techniques, as well as secondary control systems in reception institutions for refugees and migrants – both men and women.

What is common to the various procedures is the intention to reify people and manage them as “bodies” and as biologicistic data gathering.

If **significans** were to be described as a physical mass, or better as a rhythm of changing states of an aggregate, then an entirely random change from the liquid state to vapour, gas and mist could be observed – more or less unexpectedly a condensate forms, which in turn sporadically solidifies into “lumps”.

A bit of biology: these lumps are not rhizomes, putting out underground shoots. They are more like frog spawn, in the amorphous form of carriers transporting hereditary material, history, questions, visions: here, of course, from the Society of Frogs.

From being lumps, the little clumps of cells become separate again, going out as young swimmers, tadpoles, leaving the original protection of the jelly, moving out of context. As separate, individual aspects of the lump, however, they nonetheless bear the features, the code, of the whole – as mini-frogs.

These frogs are our documents.

Documents of the significans Archive

Tables, functional descriptions of biologicistic measuring instruments and identification techniques, sketches, x-rays, newspaper articles, letters from the authorities, statistics, household texts, legal texts, legal expert reports, medical letters, murals, songs, patent applications, family histories, plans of camps, records, interview texts, EU and UN dossiers, reports of experiences of people who at a particular point in their lives and because of particular circumstances came to Europe.

The fact that they are coming at a time when the inhabitants of the country of arrival feel deeply disturbed, even threatened, will vex them on the long road, the obstacle course, of their arrival. It will sicken them. The instruments employed in identification measures by the aliens authorities are instruments of vexation because they replace language and create speechlessness. The welcoming of the new arrivals, and their stories, are simply ignored, replaced by the recording of their body measurements, their saliva, blood samples, secretions and images of their bones. In the surreptitiously taken speech samples, it is the sibilants that matter, since the hired language experts want to use them to determine where an asylum seeker comes from and can be expelled back to. Even the paying of pocket money to asylum seekers is used administratively as a monitoring technique. Transactions have to be made using chip cards, enabling diagrams of the asylum

seekers' movements to be built up from the recordings. Restricted areas and residence obligations for asylum seekers, who are allotted to closed-off territories, mark the boundaries of the multicultural pop, the Bacardi Sound and all the various come-together labels that make every changing-room into an event location.

This is the silent background of Bred&Butter: the German State of Brandenburg, for instance, with all its camps for asylum seekers, starts fifteen kilometers from the upmarket neighbourhood of the Berlin Fashion Fair. There, the heady odour of the big wide world comes to an end.

Yes, it's a sad story, but at the same time it provides a basis for art, which has to do its utmost here. For art traditionally always takes its stance where culture changes society, and conversely society changes culture.

Researching the burgeoning monitoring industry for the areas where the aliens authorities operate means gazing into the innards of today's cultural production. It is here that the regulatory structures and the DIN Standards of social communication are produced and characterized. The Patent Offices are full of the great plans for the monitoring and management culture that is to supersede an age-old culture of narrative and argument. Expensive machinery spits them out, with state-subsidized compulsory integration programmes purring softly around them.

significans proposes to organize the administration of the plans, laws and expert reports in such a way as to bring a new cross-sectional reading. Visitors to the **significans** archive installations decide on the basis of lists of archives how they will move through the documents.

The **significans** archives reorganize the logic of the text sequence. Reading, say, a doctor's report, determining the age of a young woman seeking asylum from her naked body, alongside extracts from the national budget (the entries for air tickets for expellees) makes the gearwheels of machinery that has replaced social planning by a waste disposal operation visible.

Archive and Discussion

significans raises questions in various social research areas about sensitive shifts in society's consensus on the evaluation of autonomy, personal competence and democracy. Bringing the systems being discussed together makes transformations in the concept of culture visible. The incompleteness of the documents and their association by topic bring new directions of reading.

Description of the terrain

Art has the capacity, over and above scientific, numerical data gathering, to let positions and facts float in space like satellites, let them collide with each other sharply or gently, and describe a state of being anew, starting from this incalculable

ble crash. Its multidimensional debate makes it able to develop untried, Utopian approaches to solutions.

Work methods

The group questions people involved, contacts organizations, sets up contacts between groups concerned, searches out video and picture material, and collects studies and documents which, like paper cells, describe a society.

All the documents are freely accessible to the public.

The design of the exhibition room corresponds formally with the topics in the context being discussed, enabling visitors to perform an individual search. Office equipment, photocopiers and video monitors motivate visitors to do research independently in the exhibition room and supplement the collection with material of their own. The copying facilities are important, allowing individual texts to be taken away, or text collages to be assembled autonomously.

The projects develop with the successive involvements of the artists taking part. The themes and contexts that determine the course of an exhibition or an action have no consistent rationale. Like the elements of the archive itself, they are a sort of scattered material, describing an atmosphere.

After a joint production (exhibition, event) the artistic work is divided up again into individual authorships. The group has not adopted any continuous rhythm. The artists involved are in very varied work contexts apart from the joint projects. Thus, **significans** is to be understood not as a label, but as a temporary planning area or container for our researches, which we carry out in close cooperative activity with colleagues, both men and women, from academic, journalistic and media-oriented professions.

Given the female makeup of our core group, one might perhaps speculate that we women are well able to handle transformative production processes that do not produce any outcomes with a dominant product character – we are professionals of the amorphous and of structure. Who knows...?

The aesthetic production is freely linked with the architecture of an exhibition room, a given. The containers for the archives, the floor planning, the storyboards and murals provide accommodation for the many silent elements of the installation.

The stage-management of the archive room encourages particular movement patterns by visitors. A random choreography becomes visible: wander through the document area – stop – bend – squat – read – stand up – change direction – move on. The silent sequences of movements and the concentration on the abundance of written voices give the exhibition room the dignity of a Grail – of course you can laugh about it once you're outside the exhibition room and organizing the next demo!