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Perpetual Restart

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"No one is illegal" is one of the most important political campaigns and network initiatives of the 90s in the Federal Republic of Germany. Starting from the Hybrid Workspace at the "documenta X" (1997), it was designed as a hybrid project of artistic and political practice from the beginning. Diverse groups relate to "No one is illegal" or consciously distance themselves from the project, just as the campaign itself related to the "sans-papiers" movement in France and wanted to establish differences from traditional anti-racist initiatives. The international cooperation from the beginning of the campaign is now continued, after more than five years, primarily through its integration in the "No Border" network that has been created in the meantime.

"No one is illegal" has linked a multitude of anti-racist activities in complex political and aesthetic, e.g. (pop) cultural alliances. The beginning of the campaign was marked by an appeal that was developed at "documenta X". It was addressed to those who are actually responsible for action in the majority of the society, and therefore refrained from reformist demands addressed to the state, left out moral arguments of traditional concerned politics and paternalist approaches. In this context, at the start of "No one is illegal" there were supportive infrastructures in the foreground,

such as counseling organizations for illegalized people,medical care projects, the wandering churches asylum in Western Germany, support for so-called stowaways in international sea traffic on the North German coasts, and the first border camps in East Germany at the Schengen outside border to Poland. Meanwhile, these border camps no longer take place only at territorial borders, but rather address inner and virtual borders as well. Camp 2001, for example, focused on the Frankfurt Rhine-Main airport, and the international camp 2002 in Strasbourg on the digitally organized border of the Schengen Information System (SIS), with headquarters in Alsace. In 1998 (a federal election year), "No one is illegal" supported caravans initiated by exile groups in Germany for the rights of refugees and migrants.

In 2000 "No one is illegal" founded the sub-campaign "deportation.class", which is intended to move the national airlines Lufthansa to give up the business of deportation flights by sullying their image. With its methods, deportation.class also took leave of traditional ideas of anti-racist work. Sullying the corporate identity of Lufthansa and disrupting their symbol management is simultaneously a rejection of an identity-political approach of their own. In other words: the public appearance of deportation.class no longer reproduces the aesthetic codes and cultural imaginings of their own scene for the purpose of mobilizing this scene, but is instead a direct symbolic tool. The mobilization of their own scene relies on the content of the goal of preventing deportations and fighting for residence rights.

The first online demonstration in the Federal Republic of Germany also took place in the course of "deportation.class", a virtual sit-in on the Lufthansa servers. With over 10,000 participants, the online demonstration also queried the possibilities for political and activist action in virtual space through electronic disturbance. At the same

time, it impelled renewed discussions, for example about the extent to which (virtual) campaign politics is separated from social practice or immanent to the media: what significance does the contradiction between electronic disturbance and the freedom of information attain. From the beginning, "No one is illegal" made use of electronic tools like the Internet. In the self-descriptions published there, but not only there, it says that the campaign "conjoins radical political demands with tactical media understanding and a presence in the art discourse". This makes it a hybrid praxis, i.e. one that conjoins art, media and politics. The declamatory character is a program designed to attain hybridity, on the one hand, on the other it extrapolates actual approaches. Since the beginning of the campaign, political activists, theoreticians, media activists, fine artists, musicians, designers, etc. have all collaborated in it. The interplay of the experience they bring with them and the respectively acquired know-how results in a moment of the strength of no one is illegal. To avoid misunderstandings: it is not the simple attribution of roles, for example among artists, theoreticians or political activists, that this praxis describes, or even ethnifying models, but rather the collected common experiences. Apart from these experiences in common, there are also conjunctions of discussions that develop with the different emphases of musicians, artists, political activists, theoreticians, or journalists, for example. And previous participation in sometimes contradictory political, cultural or social discourses is continued. The overlapping of competencies or working in hybrid contexts takes place against the foil of specializations and socializations, which cannot be completely dissolved and do not want to be. This is already evident in that some prefer political working groups, concrete social projects and theoretical research, whereas others choose practice space or the studio in their praxis. What arches

over these focal points are personal desires, a wish for an energy charge and the attainment or recovery of the power of definition.

It is precisely in this open contradictoriness, the vague situations and transversal conditions that the productive option is found. This is not perceived automatically, but always in concrete actions with concrete difficulties. This presupposes not only recognizing the respective situative options for action, but also an interest in not pretending there are no contradictions. The goal is not a kind of purity in discourses or - to use a different image - not a debugging, but rather dealing with a dirty configuration, which works with a restart, in case the thing gets stuck. This is an approach that is aware of the difficulties confronting hybrid praxis. Although these difficulties may be glossed over in theory or in mobilization and marketing strategies, e.g. in references to one's own superior - because more lofty - aims, but in practice they persist as a challenge. The dichotomy of politics and art does not only exist in the gallery market or in traditional museum operations, but rather also in left-wing or autonomous contexts. There, however, it is superseded by a specific set of hierarchies.

What one of the hierarchizations imagines for art is that it has an auxiliary relationship to a political core. This idea, which is indebted to political organizational work devolved from both bourgeois and left-wing traditions, does not perceive artistic production as an independent expression of content or as a possibility for gaining insight, but rather as a handicraft realization of contents that are rooted and decided elsewhere.

For the border camp 1998 in Rothenburg, political activists proposed setting up a "Memorial to the Unknown Escape Helper". The idea was to set up a kind of stone stele. Artists active in the campaign were asked to help with the further realization. Instead of

the stele, they suggested an "Exercise Path: Fit for Escape Help". The "Exercise Path" consisted of several blue signs on poles, which were to be set up along the German-Polish border. The signs recommended certain exercises, beginning with simple physical training and turning into tasks for secretly crossing the border, including such difficult techniques as preparing alias documents. In one way, the "Exercise Path" grew out of the further development of a work by one of the artists involved in the campaign, the so-called "Exercise Path for Artists in Training", but in another also out of the awareness of and reflections on the debate about the "Holocaust Memorial" in Berlin that was going on at the time. The position on the question of what a monument is, which is entirely comprehensible in the artistic context, was transferred in the context of political activists to enrich demonstration culture. Instead of banners, signs were carried and set up. The artistic work was absorbed by the activist political culture, but it did not change any existing ideas. The procedure remained the practiced one: the "demonstrators" marked their content and the accompanying police removed infringements against public order. "The Exercise Path: Fit for Escape Help" was documented with a mobilization video, copied and distributed. In the picture, it shows the demonstrators on their way to set up the "Exercise Path", and the soundtrack supplies the recorded radio messages of the corresponding police dispatch from the off.

This integration of artistic working methods in a political action can be read at first as an outstanding hybrid realization. It is only at a second glance that the dilemma becomes apparent: in the course of integration, the aesthetic issue disappeared. Even in the video documentation prepared directly afterward, there is no more indication of the "Memorial to the Unknown Escape Helper". Instead, it refers to the confrontation with the police that is

popularly used to establish identity in political activism. The disappearance of the aesthetic statement was accelerated and facilitated by bringing the "Exercise Path" into a collective project at the camp and consciously dispensing with authorship in the sense of the copyleft movement. In this way, the address for criticism and feedback also disappeared. The demonstration was enriched through an idea for action, but the aesthetic discussion came to a standstill. This means that it needs a restart next time. Because the link "memorial" is missing, it will not be possible to refer to experiences. In the course of preparations for the second border camp from no one is illegal, several musicians explained that for practical reasons, they would not be able to perform under their well known band name, but only under a name created especially for this occasion. It briefly became transparent, which role artists assume in the context of political action: in the preparation plenum, disappointment was formulated, a performance under a different name was considered useless, since it would not have a mobilizing function.

In traditional models of organization, the phenomenon would not be interesting beyond this. Of course, a political party, a union, a business or other corporation is happy to adorn itself with artists - and artists can profit from this as well in terms of image transfer. In the context of hybrid practice, however, this remains theoretically surprising and practically irritating, because it perpetuates precisely the separation that is supposed to be overcome. There is less friction involved, for example, in the way the form of a benefit concert works. It allows all the participants - as a political context for the organizers, an artistic context for the bands, and the location operators as a sometimes commercial infrastructure - to act, largely undisturbed, alongside one another, mutually energizing one another. Exhibitions of posters and flyers

work the same way. They can serve to accompany a so-called content-based event or even constitute it.

A second hierarchy becomes apparent in the attention economy, which is attributed to the various media and practices used in the campaign. Roughly overstated: the preliminary preparation and subsequent treatment of text-based theory development usually triggers substantial discussions, debates and positioning attempts. The selection of videos for a film night is based on an immanently political rationale. For posters and flyers, every plenum claims competence, whereas the selection of musical contributions is entrusted to a special working group, and the production from the broad field of performing or fine arts is sorted for an accompanying entertainment program. The distribution of content-based attention in the hybrid decision-making process thus largely follows that of the majority society. The greatest political relevance is attributed to text and picture media, which correlates to our own habits of consumption. The consumer preference corresponds to controls in production. Drafting texts is a highly frictional process obligated to find a consensus, and the selection of picture material is subject to rules of political content, not aesthetic content.

A third hierarchy attaches to the body. The more obviously the body and especially the possibly endangered body is brought into conjunction with content, the more relevant its politicity is read to be. In the hybrid context, this can generate an order that imagines political practice based on the cliché of the streetfighter, rather than perceiving real practice that is also social practice. In the organization of the border camps, for example, this hierarchy generates independent, so-called protective structures with a military habitus and accordingly outmoded charged meaning, all the way to a gender-specific distribution of roles. The hierarchy attached to the body is also evident in the censorship of mechanical

and digital symbol production in the context of political activism. The prohibition of photography or video recordings and audio recordings is based on a hierarchical consideration, which maintains that the body is jeopardized particularly by recordings. The prohibition on preparing picture and sound material at the Border Camp 2002 in Strasbourg, for example, generated nothing but absurdity: due solely to reasons of urban development, the state law enforcement agents retained a documentation of all the bodies in the Strasbourg camp, while this was refused to the camp participants. At the same time, the prohibition revealed a lesser valuing of artistic procedures in the production of symbols in comparison with bodily actions. In the logic of hierarchization attached to the body, symbol production becomes inauthentic and is grasped and used, at best, as adornment. The meaningfulness of art in the context of political activism is most likely to be accepted with the argument that backup can be found in art or - if the argument becomes entirely banal - that this is a way to get funding. The lightness of the argument is rooted in the stance that art can be of service here, because it can be applied financially. At the same time, this argument neglects addressing the contents of aesthetic production and the conditions of the art business. In the case of other alliances deemed political, this would be taken for granted. This shows, on the one hand, that the so-called "backup" presumes a separation of art and politics. On the other hand, though, it also leads the cooperation promoted as "backup" to adopt the curator model from the art field in hybrid practice, but without adopting the institution-critical reflections on this model that are possible in art. To put it roughly, this results in "scene curators" that claim and realize representation at the intersection between art and hybrid practice, but in such a way that their aesthetic, political or personal strategies cannot be questioned. The emergence of curating is also fostered in that the traditions of

museum operations correlate to the set of hierarchies sketched out here.

This also marks the lines of conflict in hybrid practice that can be identified through key words such as representation, strategic or tactical understanding of the respective practice, especially, however, at the level of identity-political approaches. Identity politics, here understood as gaining political agency through the construction of identity through methods of inclusion/exclusion, may be politically necessary as a temporary platform, but as a long-term strategy, it supports the reproduction of relationships of domination.

For this reason, it has always been the aim of the hybrid practice of "No one is illegal" not to fix identities, but rather the opposite: to seek intersections, transitions, dissolutions, tactical common interests, or at least productive misunderstandings. This means that the practice conjoining art and politics sometimes appears feasible as plug and play, even when its hybridity calls for a restart.