



An attempt for art to be effective

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INTRODUCTION

“What if artistic practice were understood *as* intellectual authority – moreover, as one which approaches social issues in a penetrating and not simply a reflective manner?”¹

I have come to see my artwork as a form of political and civic engagement for myself and others. This view has grown out of my experiences in trying to address social issues through art and the development of my identity as a citizen, or someone engaged in the politics of social relations. This focus has led me to consider how I think a work can be most effective in the sense of the work having an impact, an effect, or changing the situation which it is addressing, even if only in a small way.

If we think of politics as the way relationships in society are set up and maintained, then every action has a political consequence and all artwork would be political. While I feel that this is true, my interest lies in making work that acknowledges this dynamic and seeks to be self-consciously and self-critically political. By self-consciously political, I mean that the work (my actions and intentions as an artist) actively engages in its role as one of the methods we use to structure society. The work can do this self-critically by trying to be aware of and reflect on its own position within society and the context(s) with which it seeks to engage. For me this desire for self-consciousness and self-criticality ties back into the desire for effectiveness. In the situation described, the artwork is engaged with real life – actual material conditions – and as such has a certain ethical responsibility. The work makes things happen or not happen in a realm that overlaps with other realms (the political, the social, the economic, etc.). It does not exist autonomously. If I acknowledge that my work is part of this greater web of relationships, then I want what I do with my work to have a (positive) impact on it. The political potential in the work lies in its potential to have this impact on these societal relationships and on the way we structure them.

My interest in the efficacy of art is likely connected to my background coming from the Rust Belt region of the United States and its focus on the pragmatic. In an economically depressed region, visual art is often seen as a luxury. The collective scope of vision is dialed back to encompass only the most essential needs. I have often wondered what would make art seem essential, perhaps not on the level of a basic need (food, shelter, water), but something where the benefit to our lives is generally quite clear, and when it is not, we are willing to cut it a little slack. I want art to be useful and essential to people. I want it to touch issues that people care about and that affect them. I want it to be something not only through which we better understand the world but that is also a way of acting within it. In the overlap between art and politics I feel there is an area where the importance of art can become clear and can directly affect everyday life. There still remains, though the question of what form this effect can take.

In the past, I have described this desired effect in different ways from “creating a space for new questions and associations to arise” to “creating civic space in public space.” For a number of years, I have been looking to create more than a visual, aesthetic, or emotional experience for the viewer. I was also looking to generate some sort of intellectual experience – a process of thought that would lead to different thoughts and different perspectives. I was interested in dialog with the audience and

¹ Christian Höller, “How Not to Be Governed: on defining the positions of political and socially critical art,” in *The Artist as Public Intellectual*, ed. Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen (Vienna: VBK, 2008), 107

thought I could achieve this by creating a mental space within the viewer. I began with photography, and as the topics I wanted to “discuss” became more complex, so did the form of the work. By the time of my BFA I was creating mixed media objects and installations. I felt that combining different media with different cultural associations could incorporate a more nuanced look at topics than individual images. Gradually I became frustrated that the dialog was not a real dialog and that I couldn’t know or respond to the response of the viewer. I also began to feel that the audience for the work I was creating was not the audience I really wanted to reach. This led me to question traditional forms of exhibition which led me to working outside museums and galleries. Experiences in these “public spaces” led me to more changes in the form of the work, utilizing forms that included interaction from the audience, or involved participants in the creation of the work itself, so that the dialog was not just a virtual exchange, but a real and audible/visible one.

This shift in the media and context of my work was also driven by the content and concepts I wanted to create dialog about. What began as looking for how art could express my political voice has expanded to a search for how art can help others can express theirs. This has come not from a liberal do-gooder sense of guilt but rather from the realization that liberation is a shared project. In wanting to address the impact of gender or economics in people’s lives, I was in fact addressing issues of whether and how we acknowledge the various forces at play in society. Starting from a position of critique, I began to feel that this was not enough, that the work in some way could model how things could be different.

My work now often takes the form of creating platforms through which communication takes place, whether that might be a literal soapbox on the street or a shanty on a frozen lake. I am often still creating objects, but the main “material” or medium of the work is the communication and the effect of that on these social relations. While I often crave clear, substantial results, I am also cognizant and appreciative of the small effects: the improved state of interaction between users of a frozen lake (the “Rendezvous Café”) or the introduction of a new feedback method for fellowship finalists (the “Minnesota Emerging Artists Exhibition”). I also don’t exclude the possibility of the work’s ability to affect the audience’s imagination and become effective through a change in mindset.

In the following pages, I will attempt to pick apart the choices I have made for the form and context of my work, particularly as it pertains to my work since 2003. I will do this through the examination of three recurring idea that I see as critical to the works ability to be politically effective: working outside museums and galleries, using participatory practices, and presenting alternatives in the work itself. I will conclude with an examination of how these ideas play out in and shape my current work, “Das Fundbuero.” What I present in the paper is a bit of a provocation for myself, a questioning of whether the methods I have developed actually can produce the effects I desire. In this sense I often need to remind myself that the politically effective art work might only exist in the “artistic imaginary.” It is not something one can draw a map to, but something toward which I can travel, something that, like the water mirage on a two lane highway, always appears to be just over the next hill.

In this way, this paper is not intended as a positive exposition of a system of belief, but rather the interrogation of the one I seem to follow. At the end, I cannot claim to find answers, but only more questions. However, just as Christian Höller calls

for an art that is “fluid, mobile, etc, in response to the fluid mobile relationships of power,”² I do not see any theoretical position as fixed, but as something that changes and responds as I have new experiences, complete new projects, and continue to engage with the world as both artist and citizen. In this way, this paper is a snapshot of where I am now, with an explanation of how I came to be here, and with a hint of what may lie further down the road.

² Ibid.

OUTSIDE GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

When I was in undergraduate school, we students were often asked to think about who the audience was for our work. Yet we were also being encouraged to follow an inward-looking, personal-vision driven view of art-making. The result was a situation in which one made (and was rewarded for making) the work one was “compelled” to make and then decided later about who its audience was. The unspoken assumption was that the work would exist in some sort of art space, whether that was a commercial gallery, non-profit space or museum.

I have to admit that I struggled a lot with this question of audience. I was making work driven by a desire to raise questions and challenge assumptions about the social roles we played, but I often didn’t see how this could actually happen, particularly showing the work only in art spaces. For the form in which I was working, mixed media sculptures that drew from fairy tales, the audience seemed limited at best. Toward the end of my degree, I jokingly said to Wayne Draznin, one of my instructors, that I had figured out who the audience for my work was – they were likely white, middle class, college-educated women. Wayne’s response was very simple and probably the best pedagogy I’ve ever experienced. He asked, “Is that who you want your audience to be?” It was something of a revelation that as an artist one could legitimately focus on to whom one wanted to say something and adjust the form of the work to suit that, rather than focusing purely on what one wanted to say and trying to figure out later who would listen.

Clearly Wayne’s question would not have had such an impact if I had not already been considering how to reach some sort of wider audience. And there were of course concurrent and subsequent experiences that shaped how I thought about audience. Thinking about the relationship of my family and friends to my artwork and art in general had an impact. Teaching photography to “non-artists” at a community college in my hometown of Toledo was also a significant experience. Both of these things led me to realize that I was interested in reaching a non-art-going audience. I realized that if I wanted to address issues of gender roles or economic class in a way that I felt would have the potential for impact (for implementing some kind of change), then I needed to reach a broader audience than those visiting museums and galleries. I began envisioning work that could function in everyday spaces, often piggybacking on the visual culture already existing. In the work itself, I moved away from obscure symbolism and literary and theoretical references toward use of commonplace objects and text as a simple and clear way of communicating with a “non-art specialist” audience.

This move was not driven by a romantic conception of the “common man,” but rather by my experiences coming from and returning to live in an economically depressed city. Art as it is traditionally presented very much seems like a luxury when you’re struggling with the high unemployment and lack of opportunity that characterize the area where I grew up. Even coming from an “art positive” family I had to question what art was actually contributing to the people I knew or to the city as a whole. Aesthetic experience didn’t seem like an adequate answer, particularly as this was something one could have in other ways than viewing paintings at a museum. When I was teaching, my students were not hostile to art, often quite the contrary, but few of them ever visited the Toledo Museum of Art or even the more accessible open air art shows held in the summer. They were skilled interpreters of images in everyday life, but

when those images were presented in the context of art, they doubted their abilities. Art just didn't seem like something that connected to them or that reflected their experiences, and why should it, as art, or at least the way it is presented in galleries and museums, reflects by and large, the experiences and interest of the "ruling" class³ or has become so self-referential as to be relevant only to those with advanced degrees in art history.

Of course people who are not art specialists and not part of the ruling class *do* visit museums and galleries along with art specialists and the elite. But knowing how rare it was for most "normal" people to visit visual art institutions, I decided to start finding ways to bring art to people where they already were. I do feel that art can create an exceptional space in which audience members can see things from a new perspective, and that this is part of art's political potential, but only some people will go to the exceptional space of the museum or gallery. We all need the opportunity to enter the exceptional space, to have our assumptions challenged, but as long as people don't see the connection between art and their own lives they will not go to the established exceptional spaces. That's why it is important to bring this exceptional space to regular life through creating work outside museums and galleries.

In this sense, my move to working in so-called public space was not generated by an interest in space per se, but rather by questions of audience and the ability of art to be politically effective. This leads me again to the idea of art as more than a reflection on society, but as an active player in it. I was drawn to the idea of incorporating art into everyday experiences for multiple reasons. I wanted to show that art could reflect things of importance and interest to "normal," non-elite people, that it could be relevant to their lives. I wanted to show that art could be meaningful beyond cultural caché. I also wanted to show that art was still able to be a vital and effective force in society, that art had the ability to impact how we see and interact with each other. I also think that the exceptional space art can create cannot be institutionally bound, and subject to the limits of those institutions, if art wants to be an active, recognized and valuable player in the lives of ordinary people.

It is difficult for me to articulate the importance of the work being accessible to a broad audience. Just as I have decided not to privilege one medium in my work – to be an arts generalist in terms of technique, I feel that I am aiming to be an arts generalist in terms of audience. I would make the analogy to someone like Brian Greene, author of *The Elegant Universe*, a book on string theory written for a general audience. While Greene's training and research are specialized in theoretical physics, he is able to bring this research to a wider audience through books and television programs aimed at the layman. It is easy to identify the critical importance of the generalist's work for the sciences, but I feel that in the visual arts it is often overlooked and undervalued. This is also tied to how I feel the work can be most effective politically. If the aim of the work is changing minds and actions, then it is important to try to reach as many people as possible, from as diverse backgrounds as possible without diluting the impact or content of the work. Of course, as I will discuss later in

³ The essay that helped me to crystallize these ideas was the first essay in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. I began incorporating Berger's essay into my photo curriculum, to see whether it rang true to my students' experiences, particularly the studies on perception of the museum space as tied to socio-economic status. It was interesting to see that in the 30 years since the book's publication (during which time I admit that museums have tried to make significant outreach) little had changed.

the sections on participation and presenting alternatives in the work, I am also interested in artistic structures that raise questions the specialist/layman relationship, something that Greene's work does not do.

Working with a broad audience in spaces outside of museums and galleries has led me to questions about public space, or questions of space in general, particularly in connection to the idea of art as an expression of civic engagement. I have to admit that in the past two years, I have become sloppy with my language, using "public space" to stand in for "outside galleries and museums." It can be argued that museums are intended as and can function as public space – at least when not closed off by the price of admission. "Public space" is a broad concept and one not necessarily bound by physical location. Any location has the potential to become public space when it is used to discuss the questions of how power is distributed.⁴ In this sense, public space is created when people enact it through this discussion.⁵ And the discussion does not have to be the traditional verbal argument but can encompass many other kinds of action.⁶ One of my goals artistically is to expand the ways and places in which this manifestation is possible.

For me, emotionally speaking, the idea of public space is tied to the idea of the commons. Public space would/should be the space that we all own and to which we all have access.⁷ This is of course a rather utopian ideal. Entrance fees and physical distance are not the only things that can close off access. Social relations, often manifested in and reinforced by governmental regulations also determine who has access in the sense of who is "allowed" to enter, let alone to speak in a public space. Since I come from and my past work has taken place in a liberal democracy, where this access is culturally promised and legally guaranteed, I feel that my work is often engaged in pushing such a society to live up to these promises. This is connected to my role as a citizen and my art as an expression of civic engagement. In order for democracy to function for me, it needs to function for all. This returns me to a rather utopian proposition and the idea of public space as something that is constantly (re)enacted, not pre-existing, and something that is constantly coming into being, but never actually exists in its ideal form.

In looking for the commons, or places to enact the commons, I am drawn to the street in particular. This can again be criticized as a romantic notion of public space, but for me it is actually quite practical. Since I have decided to work as a sort of art generalist, trying to make work that is relevant to and apprehendable to a broad audience, it is important for me to find places where I might find this broad audience.

⁴Angela Harutyunyan cited in Malcolm Miles, "Reclaiming Public Space" [article on-line] (2006; accessed 29 May 2009); available from <http://www.malcolmmiles.org.uk/Reclaiming.html>; Internet. Harutyunyan gives the example of the kitchen in Soviet Russia as public space in the sense of being the only location in which one could openly discuss the actions of the state at the time.

⁵ Malcolm Miles, "Reclaiming Public Space" [article on-line] (2006; accessed 29 May 2009); available from <http://www.malcolmmiles.org.uk/Reclaiming.html>; Internet., Olivier Marchart, "Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s). Some basic observations on the difficult relation of public art, urbanism and political theory" [article on-line] (1999, accessed 2 May 2008); available from <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0102/marchart/en>; Internet., Rosalyn Deutsch, "Agoraphobia" in *Evictions*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) 289. "the political public sphere is not only a site of discourse; it is a discursively constructed site."

⁶ Gary Bridge in Malcolm Miles

⁷ Nancy Fraser in Kathrin Wildner, "La Plaza: Public Space as Space of Negotiation" [article on-line] (2003, accessed 29 May 2009); available from <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1203/wildner/en>; Internet.

A place like Nicollet Mall, a pedestrian street in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is still one place where there will be a diverse mix of classes, races, ethnicities, genders, etc.

In searching out a broad audience, I have in some ways reacted against the form of identity politics and community art that seem to prefer homogenous communities and identities that are reducible to one aspect. One reason for this was because I did not feel myself to be part of any community recognized by this politics. I also realized that my identity is created from more than one aspect: it is not solely determined by my being female, white, American, straight, "working class," or college educated but by the interaction and combination of these things. Another reason comes from my experiences teaching in community college, where we also often had quite varied groups of people in a class. Perhaps this is partially a utopian vision of differences living in harmony, but I think the interaction of identities and perspectives is actually more complicated; and that I like the idea of these different perspectives coming together to challenge each other's perceptions of the world. Perhaps this is because when I began teaching, I had a certain idea of how I would teach, and the actual experience of it made me reevaluate not only my teaching methods but also how I understood the material I was trying to teach. This led to experiences that I feel opened incredible new vistas for me personally and artistically. So perhaps I am trying to create that experience for others. This leads me to seek out other places where there will be this broad section of the population coming together. I am seeking the places that are collectively public, the places where interaction between people is already necessary and often already happening. In this situation, the artwork can slip into the potential public space that already exists and, at least temporarily, amplify it, creating a full blown public space.

In this context, I think it might be useful for understanding my goals in relation to creating access to art and dialog with "non-art" audiences to look at what I have considered public space in previous projects. The locations are quite varied. In addition to the street, I have located projects in shopping malls, coffee shops, the Internet, parks, city hall, a frozen lake, a drop in center for homeless youth, a college art gallery, and supermarkets. With a few exceptions, the unifying feature is these are everyday spaces that attract a varied population. Many spaces are ones that most audiences would consider to be public already, spaces that most people would feel they have unrestricted access to. However, if space becomes public by discussion of how power is distributed, then sometimes the space will need additional activation. The artwork is one way in which the space can be activated and become public space. The space itself becomes public not by the placement of the art object (if applicable) in it, but rather through the interaction of people with the artwork, and the corresponding production of the political through this interaction. I am aware of course, that not every project will speak to every audience member in the same way, and that not every person can be the audience for every work. I am not promoting a universalist idea of audience. I am though trying to draw on the common bonds that do exist between audiences in order to bring them into interaction with one another. For a detailed analysis, I am choosing a work in which the content is not overtly political, but that through the use of space as a place of discussion and interaction between groups becomes so.

The Art Shanty Projects (ASP) on the frozen surface of Medicine Lake in Minnesota is a yearly project in which artists build their own versions of the small house-like structures (shanties) used by people fishing through the ice on the lake. When I applied to the ASP in the 2005/06 season I knew that there had been problems the

previous year. On my own visit to the site I had encountered work that appeared shoddily crafted and of questionable aesthetic or functional value. I was not surprised to find out that some people in the local community of ice-fishers who also used the lake was less than enthusiastic about this new group of “residents” moving in on what they considered their territory. Many fishers seemed to consider the artists to be urban elitists unconcerned with the context of the lake. Many artists seemed to consider the fishers to be suburban ignoramuses incapable of appreciating art. This situation was in direct contradiction to the ASP’s goals of being a community oriented project that pushed people’s definitions of art and who was an artist. In discussing our proposal for the project, my studio-mate Jane Powers and I decided to develop our original idea of a delivery service/information point into a project that would more actively connect the art and ice-fishing communities on the lake. The abundance of lakes and rivers in Minnesota ensures that every person living there will have some sort of story involving fish or water. This was a common link Jane and I could use to create a bridge between these two “communities” that could lead to a better understanding of each other and hopefully a better coexistence on the lake.

The final project, “The Rendezvous Café,” was an 8x8 foot shanty that served hot drinks and homemade baked goods in exchange for a story about fish or water. The original idea was to collect the stories in the café for others to browse. The café would provide a casual environment to deflect existing prejudices where artists and ice-fishers would be exposed to each other and allow space for new relationships to build. In execution, the target groups shifted somewhat. Because of warm weather, the lake was not thoroughly frozen, and we were located much closer to the shore of the lake (most fishing takes place in the deeper water at the middle of the lake). Our main visitors, aside from participating artists and visitors to the project, became people who used the attached park for walking, jogging, or exercising their dogs. This was still not a typical art-going audience and also another important group of people who used the lake. It is also not exclusive of people who ice-fish on the lake. The café provided a warm space in which, because of the size, a visitor is essentially forced to interact with others. In addition to the artists meeting the neighborhood residents, residents also met other residents. While we asked people to write down their stories, a lively culture of oral storytelling also quickly grew in the café, based on these “cross-community” experiences of falling in ice fishing holes when young or canoeing on lakes in the summer.

While the lake itself is public space in the governmental definition – anyone can put a structure on the lake as long as they follow a few simple rules – the café was an enactment of public space by creating a location for dialog between different constituencies who used the lake. This dialog becomes a political act that helped cause a permanent change to the social dynamics of Medicine Lake. While “The Rendezvous Café” cannot claim full credit, it was an integral part of the Art Shanty Project’s acceptance by local residents and other lake users.

INTERACTION AND PARTICIPATION⁸

I have described how locating artwork outside museums and galleries can facilitate its political potential by reaching a broad and diverse audience as its individual members are engaged in everyday activities, but this on its own is not enough for a work to be effective. The work must seek in some way to actively engage the audience member, to involve each of them in its production in order to begin to touch the political. But how is such an activation of the audience through the interaction with(in) the artwork possible and how does it become political? In my opinion, changing the relationship between the artist and audience can also be a step to changing other social relationships, and thus a way in which the artwork becomes political. By utilizing communicative processes that overlap with the realm of politics, the work engages the audience in ways that also have a political effect. It is the form and the process of the work creating new relationships, working with the ingredients of politics, in addition to the content of the work that creates the political potential, the possibility of changing societal relationships.

A traditional view of artist-audience relationship sees the work as something originating completely from the artist to be absorbed, appreciated, and assimilated by the viewer. Duchamp complicated this relationship by stating that it is actually the viewer who completes the work and its meaning.⁹ While certainly creating a liberating space for critical interpretation, it does not fundamentally alter the relationship between artist and audience as creator and receptor, respectively. We can see in Duchamp's own work that the audience is in a no more or less passive position than they would have been 700 years before in a medieval church. The artist is still the creator of the symbols to be interpreted; the work's final form is still fixed and unchanging regardless of the interpretation brought to bear upon it. There can be contemplative effect, it can lead to new considerations, but it can only indirectly activate the audience or facilitate their engagement outside the work itself.

In my work I am looking for something more dynamic. My idea is that the activation of the people, turning from a passive audience into active participants, is fundamental to the political potential of the work. By acknowledging the relationship between artist and audience and by creating a situation of mutual feedback, the work can more easily address other social issues. It is not an abdication of authority for the artist, though it strives toward a less hierarchal and more egalitarian approach. The process of dialog or give and take is essential in creating a more accurate picture of where we are now in order to open up more possibilities of where we might go. The artist functions in a sense as a facilitator and the participants as the "experts."

Stephen Willats uses a diagram (reproduced below) that is to me a good representation of the many, mutual levels of interaction necessary for a work to be self-consciously political. Here there is a feedback between the artist, the "audience" (who through this feedback become participants), the artwork, and the context in which it is made. For Willats, in order for the work to achieve a "counter-consciousness" that challenges the current (unsatisfactory) situation, the artist and audience must engage

⁸ This section includes a reworking of a paper I wrote in 2008 on what form a political work of art can take.

⁹ Marcel Duchamp, "The creative act," in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, (New York: Da Capo, 1973), pp. 138-140.

on the same level and the work must reflect and change in response to this exchange.¹⁰ For me, and I think also for Willats, this “counter-consciousness” is not a revelation of how things actually are, but the ability of the work process to create a new perspective, the exceptional space, from which new possibilities can be imagined and envisioned.

Of course, not every form of participation has the same level of exchange between the artist and the participants and different forms have different political potential. Christian Kravagna¹¹ has tried to differentiate models of participatory art practice, and through this also questions the relationship of participation to the political nature/ability of artwork. To simplify the realm of discussion, he defines participation as different from interactivity (in which the form of the work is pre-set, and the interaction of the audience is largely reversible and repeatable) and collective work (in which the form of the work is developed with a largely non-hierarchical group from the beginning) in that “Participation ... is initially based on a differentiation between producers and recipients, is interested in the participation of the latter, and turns over a substantial portion of the work to them either at the point of conception or in the further course of the work.”

Within participation he defines three models: a “playful/didactic” model traced to groups like Fluxus or the Happenings, the community based approach to solve a specific issue taken by much New Genre Public Art (called “pastoral”), and a “sociological” approach that is an open offer and is open ended in terms of results.

Though Kravagna uses the word sociological, it is clear that he also sees this last model as the one having the greatest political potential because it creates an environment in which a new set of relations between artist, audience, and the greater world can develop, and because it has no predetermined outcome, i.e. it does not seek to address a specific social ill, but rather to change fundamental relations, if even in a small way. He hesitates, though, to demand permanence from this change as he sees that as falling into a trap of instrumentalization, wherein independent art projects become a way to provide social services as governments cut back their budgets. I think this hesitation results from the collapse of the political into the social as described by Marchart.¹² In the political, the actual distribution of power is questioned whereas the social focuses on the administration of this power. Applying these criteria, because of their focus on an immediate answer to a specific problem, work by artists using a pastoral model is often overwhelmed by the social - working to change the administration of policy - and thus, for Kravagna, falling into the “trap” of doing the government’s work for it rather than raising questions and presenting alternatives to existing forms of government itself. An example of this pastoral method can be seen in WochenKlausur’s “Shelter for drug-addicted women.” In this project, the group has focused on an immediate social need, a place for drug-addicted women to rest during the day, and while using a unique approach to them, essentially uses normal government

¹⁰ “A prerequisite for an art work that manifests a counter-consciousness is that the separation which existed between the artist and audience is closed, that they become mutually engaged, to the point where the audience become the rationale in both the making and the reception of the work.” Stephen Willats, quote from Society through Art Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: community and conversation in modern art*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2004), 91.

¹¹ Christian Kravagna, “Working on the Community. Models of Participatory Practice” [article on-line] Trans. Aileen Derieg (1999, accessed 20 July 2008); available from <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1204/kravagna/en>; Internet.

¹² Marchart

channels to secure it. The result is predetermined, seemingly with little consultation of the group directly involved, but rather with “specialists from the fields of medicine, prevention and therapy”¹³ and the various political parties of Zurich.

As examples of the sociological model, Kravagna cites Adrian Piper’s “Funk Lessons”, and Stephen Willats’ body of work involving English housing estates. Each project differs in the degree to which they are open ended or how the group of participants is determined, but the lack of specific goals is in some sense what sets their form apart from the pastoral one.

In “Funk Lessons,” Piper puts out an invitation to teach people how to dance to funk music. Through this playful social situation, issues concerning race and stereotypes can be discussed as they manifest themselves through the participants’ concerns and interests, rather than through a set agenda of Piper’s. Piper is creating a situation that can change and respond to different groups of participants, ideally leading to a re-examination of everyone’s prejudices, including her own. An important aspect of the work is that Piper is making an offer, and is not choosing a predefined community to work with, though she assumes that most respondents will be white and middle class. Kravagna also cites Piper’s own self-interested position in the project as important. She personally will also gain something through the work, rather than it being a work she is doing on behalf of another “disadvantaged” group. In the way I am most familiar with the presentation of the work, as a video, it functions only on the playful/didactic level, but if one thinks of “Funk Lessons” as a repeatable performance, it does possess liberatory political possibilities as each performance would have a different outcome and influence Piper’s role in the next performance, creating the sort of feedback loop in Willats’ diagram. In this way it provides an interesting model for the structure of a participatory work where it may not be completely open but has a certain fluid possibility.

Stephen Willats borrows heavily from disciplines like sociology in his process, but it is the openness of this process and the room for multiple outcomes that make his work artistic and political. Willats’ work in English housing estates takes a community that in some sense is pre-defined (all people living in a particular apartment block), but also recognizes that these people are not a monolithic mass. The inhabitants have differing and potentially conflicting concerns, opinions and ideas. Through the process of meetings, interviews and other activities, the inhabitants themselves help define commonalities and create connections with each other – in effect creating a real community from an artificial one. Willats’ projects seek to create a situation in which residents find their own sustainable ways to deal with the problems that they perceive in their living situations, to empower them to reclaim space, in a sense. Willats uses interviews, meetings, photo collages and other methods to do his research, but these activities also create a sense of investment on the part of the participants – they are creating the focus of the project and its form through these processes. While the foci of the projects are sometimes problems specific to a particular estate, they are also reflections of a larger issue of social isolation and alienation in contemporary English life. It is the openness of his process and this movement between the specifics of a given situation and how that situation reflects more fundamental problems that I feel gives this work its political impact.

¹³ <http://www.wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=4>; (accessed 4 May 2009); Internet.

I think of myself as working more in a sociological model, for while there may be problems I am trying to address, they are often of a more systemic nature rather than a specific social ill. I also don't feel that there is a fixed solution for them or that I am trying to offer one. I see myself as engaged with the problem of creating more room for civic engagement, and in this way each project is a different approach. The offer, self-interest, and the open-endedness of the process are aspects that I find important and try to incorporate in my own participative practice.

The idea of an offer and not working with a pre-defined community is something that I touched briefly on when discussing why I work outside museums and galleries. It has some problematic aspects. Since the participants must arrive in response to an offer, they must have a minimal level of engagement already in order to feel that the offer is being made to them. It becomes a group that selects itself, and this can be both a strength and a weakness in the work. It is a strength in that it creates engaged participants, but the weakness is of course that it may exclude people who I would like to reach through the work. As I mentioned above, I find it important to work with a heterogeneous rather than homogenous model for community because of the possibilities it creates for new perspectives for the participants, including myself. The offer is an important way of building that heterogeneous group that through the project can become a community.

Self-interest also connects to the offer, in that I am trying to make offers for engagement that I want for myself. While I try to be cognizant of the ways in which my position is privileged, I also feel the need for more engagement and visibility. These projects are often just as much about my own "learning to be a citizen" as they are for others. I am also hoping to experience the kind of transformation through the work that I can envision for the participants. This is another aspect of the feedback circle of Willats' diagram.

This feedback pattern is also tied to the open-ended form of the work, and how rigid of a framework to create is something with which I continue to struggle. Kravagna differentiates between participation and collective work, or collaboration, through the position of the artist in the project. If there is still a differentiation in status, then it is participatory, if the status is largely equal, then it becomes collaborative. This would seem to be connected to how open-ended the work can be. If the work is participative, the artist can set more of the form at the beginning, if it is collaborative, the form must develop through the interaction of the group. I am generally working in a participative mode and setting more of the initial form, but this can also vary widely with some work being more structured and some more open. I often have to remind myself that this is also a process, something toward which I am striving, and not something perfect to be achieved.

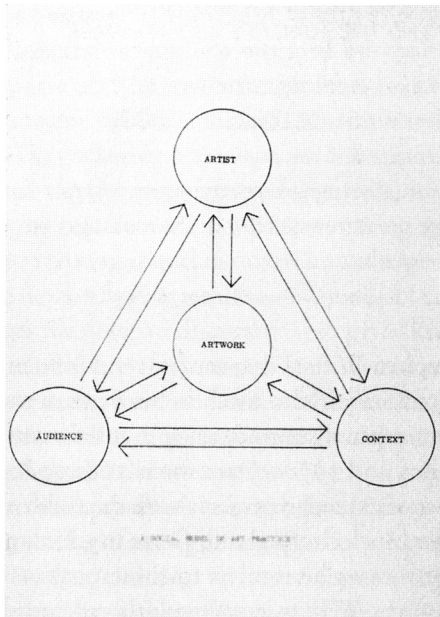
At the moment, I feel that different parts of my past works incorporate different elements that are key - the offer, self-interest, open-ended form - but there is not one that encompasses all of these things. In Table 1 in the Appendix, I have made a short analysis of all my major work since 2003, including some works that were not situated outside museums or galleries. Each work, with one exception, involves some level of interaction or participation. Of those works categorized as participative (using Kravagna's definition), I have noted whether they involved the ideas of the offer, self-interest and the open-ended form. Virtually all works make "an offer" to a broad audience and do not rely on a predefined community. There are two exceptions. The

“Das Fundbuero Flyer Aktion” did not involve an open offer. Because of my limitations with German at the time, I selected the interviewees in advance. The “Minnesota Emerging Artist Exhibition” involved a quite heterogeneous pre-determined community - all the artists rejected from a particular fellowship in 2006. This is a type of pre-determined community I would see as similar to Willats’ block tower residents – the members may know each other already, but often have very different concerns and attitudes toward the subject being addressed. Of course there is still an offer involved in that the artists must decide whether or not they want to participate.

The element of self-interest is more a matter of degree than anything else. It could be viewed as the relationship between self-interest and self-sacrifice, not to say that these are mutually exclusive. Self-interest could also be characterized as what I will gain personally from the project in a direct way. Because I view my art as a way for me to engage civically, there is a level of self-interest to all the projects. In a project like “Last Train Out,” where I am dealing with the history and representation of my own native region, the self-interest or what I will gain from the project is more obvious. In a project like the “Das Fundbuero Flyer Aktion,” the self-interest is perhaps more indirect and connected to my general interests in social justice and civil society rather than a direct gain through the project topic.

Three of the works involve attempts to combine all three elements of the offer, self-interest and an open-ended form. It is in these projects where I have struggled with the question of exactly how open-ended the form of the work can be. I feel like I have hit both extremes, where in “SurfaceMarks” the form is too open and the “community” too disconnected to function as I would wish and at the opposite end the “Minnesota Emerging Artist Exhibition” where I offered a complete structure too early, and people didn’t feel much need to give input on it, but were happy to “fill out the form” so to speak. Again, in “Last Train Out,” there is a strong suggestion for how the participants would interact with the work also, perhaps strong enough that it is inaccurate to consider it open-ended, even though the eventual form does build itself from the contributions of others.

This struggle with leaving the work open-ended is, I have realized, a struggle with my own need for control and my own desire for engagement through the project. It is also, of course a fine line between Kravagna’s definitions of participatory and collaborative. How much of the structure can I or do I have to define and yet still have the project successfully engage the participants? At what point is the project truly collaborative, and I should no longer be putting my name on it as the creator? These are issues that I am facing in the current “Das Fundbuero” project and thus something which I am still defining for myself.



Stephen Willats, "A Socially Interactive Model of Art Practice"
c 1970 Used without permission

PRESENTING ALTERNATIVES IN THE WORK

The final element that I try to incorporate into my artwork is in some sense the one that I find key to the political effectiveness. In order to “bring[is] disorder to the issue of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable political governance of people,”¹⁴ that is in order for the work to be politically effective, it needs to present an alternative form of relations in the work. By presenting alternatives in the work, what I mean is that it is not enough to offer only a criticism of an existing problem, system or situation. One should strive for the work to in some manner enact a new model, another possible outcome, or another set of relations. In the case of my own work, enacting models of democracy or citizenship in the work shows the possibilities of/creates new ways of interacting with the world, and presents a way to move out of old patterns. Ultimately it is the “be the change you wish to see” philosophy.

Artwork that provides a critical reflection of a situation can also serve a political purpose, but I find there to be two related problems with this approach when it comes to the work’s political effectiveness. What often seems to lie beneath the reflective/critical approach in artwork is the idea that a problem merely needs to be exposed in order to be resolved. This presumes a sort of latent knowledge or underlying truth that becomes obvious once the veil is lifted, or the curtain is pulled back to show the small human man behind the Wizard of Oz.¹⁵ More problematically, work in this reflective/critical mode often posits the artist as someone outside the situation who can reveal the truth of the situation to others with less acuity in their vision. While I do feel that the artist’s work can create a critical perspective, to claim that the artist is outside the situation and has a special access to the truth privileges the position of the artist too much and ignores his or her position as a subject in the world and also constructed in relationship to it. This is at odds with the process of mutual feedback between artist and audience required for the participative aspect of the work, and it is connected to another problem. What happens once the veil is lifted? We supposedly see the “true” inner workings, but what can we do about them? To put it simply: Oppressed people usually know that they are oppressed; what may be less clear is how to use the resources they have at hand to change the situation. This is not to say that the artist can come in from outside and say “you should go do x, y, and z.” This situation assumes a false consciousness on the part of the audience and a primary authority on the part of the artist, which merely replicate the existing power dynamic that oppresses the group in the first place. That is again why there must be a participative or even collaborative process of finding alternatives.

In relationship to this idea of a participative or collaborative development of alternatives through the work, I think it is interesting to consider the work of Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed.¹⁶ Inspired by Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the*

¹⁴ Höller.

¹⁵ “...such counter hegemonic interventions cannot have as their objective to lift a supposedly false consciousness as to reveal the ‘true reality’....What is at stake in the transformation of political identities is not a rationalist appeal to the true interests of the subject but the inscription of the social agent in practices that will mobilize its affects in a way that disarticulates the framework in which the dominant process of identification is taking place, so as to bring about other forms of identification.” Mouffe, Chantal. “Cultural Workers as Organic Intellectuals,” in *The Artist as Public Intellectual?*, ed. Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen (Vienna: VBK, 2008).

¹⁶ Description of the Forum Theatre process, history and aims are drawn from the Theatre of the Oppressed website, <http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org> and Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_the_Oppressed both accessed May 22, 2009

Oppressed, Boal sought to find a form of art that could put into practice Freire's ideas of liberation as a joint project and dialog as a method of liberation. In the model of Forum Theatre, a basic script reflecting an oppressive situation relevant to the audience is performed. While there are people from outside the community involved in the production, people from the community serve as actors and audience. Boal uses the term "spect-actors." The play is performed one time without changes to the script. As the play is performed a second and third time, members of the audience can change the behavior of characters in the play by assuming their place and responding differently to the situation. The second time through, "spect-actors" change the actions of the oppressed characters, while the original actors then adjust to try to bring the narrative to the original conclusion. In the third run through, audience members can also change the behavior of the oppressors, in order to more accurately reflect their experiences, or responses of the oppressors they can imagine. By actively engaging in the production of the work and creating and enacting alternative responses to the oppressive situation, the "spec-actors" are preparing themselves to behave and respond differently in the "real world" and thus take an active role in changing their situation. Forum Theatre follows a very specific formula and is not above reproach, but its goal of engendering alternative relations that will change the situation of oppression is something I see as aligned to what a politically effective work of art wants to do. The question is how to translate this presentation of alternatives into non-theatrical art? How can a work of what we call visual art present alternative solutions and develop alternative behaviors that change the status quo of relationships?

For many artists who engage in participative practice today and see their work as engaged with the political, the focus is on what Mick O'Kelly terms the "urgent" problems.¹⁷ It is in some ways similar to Kravagna's model of "pastoral" participatory practice. Projects that are focused on the "urgent" tend to pick a somewhat self-contained situation that needs a resolution and develop a solution for that instance. In Kelly's "Nomadic Kitchen" he led a series of workshops to develop and construct a kitchen/community space in a Brazilian shantytown (a favela). WochenKlausur's "Shelter for drug-addicted women" would also fall into this category. Wolfgang Zingg of WochenKlausur has stated his reason for focusing on what he called "concrete interventions" as a reaction against earlier "forms of activist art, which often 'sought to change everything but wound up changing nothing.'"¹⁸ It is natural to understand the disillusionment with the grand revolutionary projects of the 1960s and 1970s and their apparent failure, but these projects are also an important part of the social imaginary, prodding us to ask more from ourselves and our society, providing something to strive for. Many projects that address these self-contained situations become so focused on the immediate that they do not provide enough of a big picture view. In this sense, they cannot break through to being political, in that they do not bring a change to relations of power between people, but only in how those relations are administered. The closure of the "Shelter for drug-addicted women" exemplifies the pitfalls of this model. As long as the funding was available, the project addressed an urgent need. However, once the funding was cut, these women are faced with the same problem. Their position in society has not changed; they are still in the same precarious situation. The shelter was only a stop gap solution and as such exists on the social rather than political level.

¹⁷ Mick O'Kelly. "Art and the production of public space," Monday Night Lecture at ACC Galerie, 13 October 2008.

¹⁸ Wolfgang Zingg quoted in Kester, 98. The webpage Kester cites is no longer available on the WochenKlausur site

One could consider the idea of presenting alternatives in the artwork as a variation on the “give a man a fish” idea. In a project like Theatre of the Oppressed, the participants are learning how to do for themselves – how to organize, how to face oppression in new ways, learning to use the tools around them. In the “urgent need” model, people are being done for. The target groups are being “helped” but are not necessarily learning how to assert their own political power. This creates a precarious situation for the work itself as it is often dependent on external powers who are not a part of the group directly affected by or invested in the project. In the case of the “Shelter for drug-addicted women,” when the governmental support for the project was cut, there was no group who could continue to support the project. In the “Nomadic Kitchen,” Kelly claims to be providing a place for the favela residents to “self-govern,”¹⁹ but it is unclear how providing this space will alter the relationship of the favela residents to the larger Brazilian society.²⁰ On WochenKlausur’s website, they argue that one can and should do both – develop the stop gap solution and lobby for the larger changes, and I would not disagree, but I feel that works focusing on a specific solution to specific problem are less likely to be politically effective.

Of course, both “Nomadic Kitchen” and “Shelter for drug-addicted women” deal with constituencies that are among some of the most abject, but I do not think this necessarily excludes the possibility of using more participative and collaborative methods or by working directly with the constituents to develop alternatives. Theatre of the Oppressed is an effort to do just that and was certainly developed with abject communities as the target group. This is also why the question of sustainability is important. If the project does not have sustainability outside the system it is critiquing, then its failure is quite likely and its political impact is diminished.

I would identify an additional method through which the artwork can be politically effective by presenting alternatives, and this is through the form of the work itself. In practical terms, this is very much connected to the participatory structure. By adopting a participatory structure and the mutual feedback it requires, the artwork is in its structure modeling a possible form of democratic relations between people. In this way, it is possible to open up new possibilities and to make new ways of relating seem possible. To me this is connected to Walter Benjamin’s call for the author to being working not just on the “products but always, at the same time, on the means of production” as a way of challenging those means.²¹ In this sense, it is not (just) the content of the work that makes it political, but how the work itself is created. A work that is critical of a system but still operates within that system can be easily co-opted and have its political potential neutralized. Benjamin goes on to describe the importance of trans-or interdisciplinary practices and the author’s active engagement to this work on the “means of production” or how the work is created and distributed. I would connect this to the idea of working outside museums and galleries and the self-interest of the artist as described in the participatory process. In some ways this enacting of alternatives could be seen as symbolic. They are unlikely to have a

¹⁹ http://www.ncad.ie/faculties/fineart/sculpture_mickokelly.shtml accessed 24 May 2009; Internet.

²⁰ “A form of art which simply pursued the advocacy or >>thematization<< of a problematic social situation would be just as ineffective as a form of politics which was concerned exclusively with the regulation of already existing problematic fields.” Höller. 121. italics in original

²¹ Walter Benjamin, “Author as Producer,” in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1978) 233.

permanent, visible form, but the effect in this case becomes an internal one – a change in the audience/participant themselves, and their conception of what is possible.

This is a place where my pragmatism and drive for efficacy come into conflict with my idealism. How can a politically effective work balance between something that would be clearly useful (an urgent need) and a grand utopian undertaking? How can a work balance between the micro and macro? Can you present “alternatives” that have a practical effect? Is it possible to be both practical and idealistic in one work, or must each work be an exploration of a different aspect?

In my own work, the presentation of alternatives has often leaned toward the more utopian side. In their current forms, projects like the “Free Speech Machine” or the “Free Speech Surrogate” have limited scope and limited long-term impact. In both of these projects, the freedom of speech guaranteed by the US constitution is questioned. The projects ask how the average citizen can really use this freedom, where is the outlet for these individual thoughts, opinions, feelings, etc. But the projects do not remain only critical; they provide an alternative model. In one case, a portable soapbox from which people can speak is supplied, and the speeches are recorded and uploaded to a blog. In the other, people can use a surrogate speaking on a public square to express their opinions. These models are flawed solutions but also express potential alternatives. What if every city had a “Free Speech Machine” or “Free Speech Surrogate?” Could that not provide more agency for the individual citizen? Doesn’t the work provide a change to the current situation if only temporarily? What if just one city were to adopt a “Free Speech Machine?” When I ask myself how this temporary change could become more viable or sustainable, I am often led to think about the scale of the project. As an individual artist with limited resources, I can often only make small, temporary interventions in the political fabric. To implement a tangible, lasting alternative seems as though it would require more collaboration, not just on the part of artist and participants, but cross-disciplinary collaboration between the artist and other institutions. I have to admit that I am ambivalent about this prospect because I do not want the utopian aspects to be lost in the practical or pragmatic. And when collaborating with institutions there is the same danger as WochenKlausur encountered with the “Shelter for drug-addicted women,” where by working through established channels the work became dependent on them. However I feel that with my current project, “Das Fundbuero,” I am being compelled to experiment to find the balance.

THESE THINGS AT PLAY IN DAS FUNDBUERO

“Das Fundbuero” is an on-going project with multiple parts. It touches on a variety of topics (the archive, oral history, etc.) and could be examined from any of these aspects; however in the context of this paper I will focus on how the form and content of the work relate to my previous work and the idea of how art can be effective. In “Das Fundbuero,” I have tried to bring together the three aspects outlined above – working outside museums and galleries, encouraging participation and presenting alternatives, not in an effort to make a political work of art, but because the subject and goals of the work require each of them. My analysis will focus on the portion of the project taking place in Weimar between March and July 2009. After a description of the context and form of the work, I’ll examine the relationship of the project to the aspects of working outside museums, encouraging participation and presenting alternatives, and to the idea of a politically effective work.

Project Background

The immediate topic of “Das Fundbuero” is the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, also: East Germany), with a goal of building a dynamic archive of this history through the stories of the people who lived through it. On a different level the topic of the project is how the telling of history affects the ability of citizens to feel engaged with their government. I see my goals for “Das Fundbuero” as related to those of people working in the discipline of public history. I am interested in a recording and depicting of events that is relevant to and useable for a broad audience.²² In the case of East German history, I have come to see the recording and depicting of this history as vital to the ability of many former GDR citizens to identify with and participate in the new society of unified Germany.

I became interested in the history of East Germany and its continued impact on people’s lives through the stories of people who lived there. The people that I met and interviewed often spoke with a great sense of ambivalence about their past, the unification process and Germany’s future. It was clear they had many different ideas, experiences and knowledge that they were trying to reconcile. When I began to read published accounts of this history, I often found these written accounts to lack this ambivalence and consideration of the nuances that seemed to be such a large part of people’s actual experiences. I also found that the experiences of individual people were often marginalized as writers looked to fit events into a grand narrative. I wondered if this was because I was reading texts published in English, but the more I spoke with people, the more it was clear they felt marginalized within the German discourse also. They felt that their experiences as former GDR citizens were discounted and that to express a positive opinion about something in the GDR opened them up to accusations of *Ostalgie*, nostalgia for East Germany, or to characterizations as a backward “Ossi” unable to compete in the capitalist world.

Identity was a topic that has come up repeatedly in the interviews I have done and is also addressed directly in some academic research on the former GDR.²³ Those

²² Jennifer Evans. “What is Public History?” (from the Public History Resource Center website, 2000, accessed on 26 May 2009); available from http://www.publichistory.org/what_is/definition.html; Internet.

²³ Of particular note is Daphne Berdhal, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Berdhal takes an anthropological perspective to analyze identity formation and remembering in the small East German border town of Kella immediately after the fall of the wall and following up in 1996.

living in the GDR had developed an identity based on their situation as GDR citizens, whether that was an identity aligned with, against or indifferent to the state. After the events of 1989 (the *Wende*), East and West Germany were not unified under a new constitution, instead East Germany was re-structured into its five pre-WWII regions (Thuringia, Saxon, Saxon-Anhalt, Mecklenburg-Pommerania, and Brandenburg) and Berlin. Each region was then admitted individually into the West German republic as a new federal state. With the entering of the new federal states into the existing structure of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), former GDR citizens were asked to accept new values and develop a new identity as an FRG citizen. For many people, though, this has not been a process of replacing one identity with another, and the previous aspects of their identity coexist with the new ones.²⁴ Values of cooperation, community and equality, whether these were actually existing in the GDR or not, are things that many East Germans still hold important and feel are lacking in the West German system. Additionally, many former East German citizens feel like they lack recognition and visibility in the story of their own history, and thus do not feel like an accepted part of the current socio-political system. Even if they've been able to integrate into the new system successfully, there is always this layer or partition where they are also outside of the current system. With direct experience of GDR, they have a perspective from which to compare two different socio-political systems.

This process of identity construction and the ambivalence and conflict within this identity are interesting to me as a way of thinking about how engagement with society is felt and enacted. I am interested in how art can be part of this process of making an inclusive history and in turn an inclusive society. "Das Fundbuero" is an attempt to find a way of representing this history complete with its conflicts and ambivalences rather than seeking a historical consensus.

Project Structure

For the project in Weimar from March to July 2009, the structure can be outlined as follows: there is an on the street survey with Weimar residents on topics related to the GDR, unification and Germany's future. Then there is a public meeting to present and discuss the results of the survey. In a second part, a small work group or *Arbeitsgruppe*, formed from previous contacts, the survey and public meeting, works collaboratively to develop a form for an edition of the "Fundbuero" archive. As the time of this writing the survey and public meeting are over, and the work group is in its early stages. Each section of the project has a multiple function where it attempts to have some effect on its own terms but also contributes to the project and its effect as a greater whole.

The survey began in mid-March and had a duration of two weeks. It was conducted by me and my project assistant Ann-Kathrin Rudolf in various locations around Weimar, primarily on the street. Questions on the survey were developed in response to my previous research, recurring topics of importance for people as revealed through previous interviews and questions developed from my own curiosity. I also drew inspiration from surveys that had been done by universities in Dresden, Leipzig and Jena during and immediately after the *Wende*.²⁵ The topics in the "Fundbuero" survey

²⁴ I find this situation to be similar to the idea of subjective identity as described by Chantal Mouffe and others where these multiple aspects of the identity often come into conflict within the individual.

²⁵ Collected by the Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, and available at <http://www.gesis.org/en/services/data/survey-data/gdr-new-federal-states/>

included national, ethnic and political identification, feelings about the unification process, the relative importance of various dates in 1989 and 1990, and a series of more abstract questions about feelings toward Germany's future and the opportunities, gains and losses of the past 20 years.²⁶

As a tool, the survey serves multiple functions for me in this project. On a basic level, it is a way of gathering information and opinions on a larger scale than is possible with individual hour-long interviews. While I do not have the resources or training to conduct a truly "scientific" survey (my sample is only 165 people), it does broaden the anecdotal base of information, and give a snapshot of public feeling. In this way it also creates a body of information to which the *Arbeitsgruppe* can respond in its work. It creates a jumping off point for conversation and for future "Das Fundbuero" projects. It creates an outlet for people to express their opinions that does not require a long-term commitment and can serve as a conduit to more time intensive options, should the interviewee be interested. In this way, the survey also functions as a device for meeting people and beginning a conversation and thus as a way for me to build the *Arbeitsgruppe*.

In preparing for the public meeting on April 19th, I had the survey data analyzed by a physicist to find patterns in answers based on age group, gender and answers to other questions in the survey. The choice of whether the pattern was interesting enough to present was purely subjective, based on what seemed surprising to me or likely to provide a conduit for conversation in the meeting. This information was then aggregated into PowerPoint presentation to form an outline for the meeting and discussion.²⁷

For me the purpose of the meeting was again two-fold. One purpose was to open up discussion about GDR history in a casual public platform, the other was working toward building the *Arbeitsgruppe*. In terms of the discussion, I found that the survey results did provide the needed backbone to keep discussion from devolving merely to a battle between versions of events – though there were of course times when this happened. The inclusion of younger age groups in the survey and in the meeting helped to highlight the importance of how GDR history is communicated and focus the discussion on those questions and their implications. As an artistic or communicative form, the public meeting provides a measure of "publicity" that is critical to the goal of the project. While a part of this reconciling of history is internal for each person, it is also crucial that it happen in the public sphere as well for it to have meaning for the participants and lead to a sense of engagement and visibility.

The *Arbeitsgruppe* began meeting on May 7th in a storefront I have rented for this purpose. I had considered a number of locations when planning the project including individual apartments, rented meeting rooms, etc. but found that the storefront with street access was the most suitable and versatile solution. Perhaps most important, it creates a neutral space for the discussion of GDR history. It is a space with few associations for people, and by modification of the interior, it becomes identified with the project and its goals with which the participants have already identified. It becomes a space they can feel ownership of. The storefront also creates a visible presence for the project in Weimar, providing the opportunity for the

²⁶ The complete survey in German can be found in the Appendix

²⁷ The PowerPoint slides can be found in the Appendix

Arbeitsgruppe to expand its work to more people. The storefront, perhaps more properly to be thought of as an office (*Buero*), also gives a possible structure to be used for the *Arbeitsgruppe*'s final project. Finally, the space can be used as a way of documenting the process of the *Arbeitsgruppe*.

There is no set form for the meeting structure. It is of course difficult to arrange multiple schedules, and not every person can attend every meeting. However, Ann-Kathrin takes minutes for the meeting which are then distributed to all active group members. I usually have individual contact with group members in the time between meetings also. While there were many changes of membership in the initial weeks, it seems now that the group has settled to a core of three members in addition to Ann-Kathrin and me.²⁸ Meetings are usually split between practical issues or developing the project of the *Arbeitsgruppe* and discussion of topics related to GDR history and its presentation and what role art can play in this. I envision that as we move from the development stage to the practical stage the structure of the meetings will also change to become more focused on the delegation and completion of tasks.

I think it is important to note that the success of the project does not hang on what the *Arbeitsgruppe* achieves. While I have a strong need for a tangible result and feel that this is something the group also desires, it is the process of the work group, its coming into being and providing the platform for people to discuss GDR history and try to find ways to express their relationship to it that is the more important project.

Analysis of Structure

"Das Fundbuero" clearly employs the three elements I have identified earlier as being critical to the artwork's ability to have an effect and approach the political. It takes place outside of museums and galleries, it is participative and it attempts to present alternative situations and relationships within the work. Under these broad categories are also the issues of audience, making an offer, my self-interest and role in the project and the open-endedness of the project structure within the *Arbeitsgruppe*. The experience of the project has of course also posed new questions for these categories and for how I will continue to structure the work both with the *Arbeitsgruppe* and in future projects. In the following section, I will discuss how the project relates to these different concepts and where it may differ from my previous approaches to them.

My reasons for working outside of museums and galleries for "Das Fundbuero" are the same as my reasons in general – the ability to reach a broad audience, to bring the work to people where they are as a way of creating engagement. As I have mentioned previously, having an open offer to a broad audience is an important aspect of my work, and I find the survey gives me a way to approach people to make this offer. Working on the street with the survey is a way to find people who I may not otherwise come into contact with working solely through contact networks or with a pre-defined group.

With "Das Fundbuero" in particular it is important to me to have a diverse group of participants. It was suggested to me to limit the demographic of the group in some fashion, or to find a pre-existing group with which to work, and I agree that in many ways this would have made my job easier. But I find the idea of a group diverse in age and gender far more compelling for this topic because recording the variety of

²⁸ For minutes and detailed descriptions of meetings, see Appendix

experiences is part of the project's goals. As a guide, I would cite Pavel Schnabel's 1991 film "Brüder und Schwestern." Filmed in Weimar during 1988-1990, it follows a mixed group of protagonists that range in age from a 17 year old girl to an author and his wife in their 60's, and includes interviews with various people from grade school students up to women in their 80's. It is clear to me that the diversity of the interview subjects is what gives the film its power: these different perspectives and experiences of the GDR, different challenges because of being in different life stages during the political and social changes of the *Wende*. In "Das Fundbuero" I am seeking a way to create a nuanced history that reflects the diverse and conflicting experiences people had, so I feel that the group should also reflect this diversity and even potentially the conflict.

The public meeting on April 19th confirmed the appropriateness of this approach. Six of the thirteen attendees were people that I had met through the process of the survey. Two were people I had previously interviewed. Three were people with whom I had had no previous contact who had been brought by friends. One was a journalist and one was from my thesis committee. They ranged in age from their early twenties to late seventies. Two came from outside the area of the former GDR. The presence of people with a variety of relationships to the GDR was critical in keeping the discussion lively and not sliding into either just condemnation or just nostalgia. The presence of people who were quite young at the time of the *Wende* emphasized the importance of having a public history of the GDR that has more nuance as their impressions were often influenced by those of their parents or by popular depictions of the time.

The diversity of the *Arbeitsgruppe* is also important, though it also creates significant challenges for the working process. If we consider the *Arbeitsgruppe* to include Ann-Kathrin and me, then there are three people with no direct experience of the GDR and two with direct experience. Ann-Kathrin is 22 and from the former west, I am 36 and from the United States. A third member is from Weimar but in her early 20's. The fourth is from Weimar and in her 50's, and the last member is a man originally from Magdeburg also in his 50's. The non-core members (people who cannot come to every meeting, people who came to some meetings but have dropped out) include people primarily in their 50s and older from various locations in the former east.

I've mentioned in the project description how the location of the current project in the storefront facilitates the goals of the project in the way an institutional space could not. What has become apparent in this project is the question of how less literal connections to institutional support could affect it. In some ways to achieve the goals of the project, it is clear it needs to operate on a larger scale. Institutional partnerships could enable this. However, any clear connection to another organization, whether artistic, political or social, in some way limits the open-ness of the offer the project can make, and in turn limits who the possible participants might be. This is a question I have not yet resolved, but something I will be continuing to consider as I attempt to further the project.

Participation is naturally critical to "Das Fundbuero" if only because the topic is not something with which I have direct experience. No matter what final form I worked in, it seems that I would need to rely on participants of some sort, the question would be how much these people are a part of shaping the form of the work. Because of my interest in creating alternatives through the work, I have chosen methods that

privilege the participants' contributions, and hope that the participative methods function as a way of fostering the engagement that I feel is critical for dealing with the topic. Different parts of the project require different levels of participation, partly for my own sake creatively but also because in wanting to make an offer to a broad audience, I know that people will have varying amounts of time, and I want people from different backgrounds to be able to participate. The dilemma of participatory work is who has time to participate, or perhaps prodding more deeply, how can what the work of art is doing seem important enough that people will take the time to participate? This is a question I am trying to answer by trying to make the work effective. This comes into conflict when the effect is too utopian and not practical enough.

My self-interest in the project is perhaps less obvious than in a work that deals directly with my situation as an American citizen or an artist in Minneapolis. Previously my work drew heavily from American cultural/political history and American ideas of citizenship. I was reacting to the system in which I had been raised, prodding and questioning it based on my own desire to feel more connected to it, more engaged with it. How can I translate that into a project that is not about my own history? Focusing on my personal self-interest, as opposed to my interests as a professional artist, I think there are ways in which I am clearly invested in and feel that I can gain from the project. Many of the questions that the group has developed about GDR history touch on the broader topic of political and economic systems in general. As someone who wants a more just, inclusive and egalitarian society, I see a clear connection between how we can answer these questions and how we are able to build a society that more closely approaches these ideals. I would say one of the things I have learned already in the project is that it is also a test of my own commitment to these ideals. How well do I really know how to work in a group and be inclusive? This feeds not only into other projects, but into my role as a citizen in the greater world. Finally, I feel that working in a project like this where I do have a little bit of distance will help to inform how I can work when I return to a project that hits much closer to home. I have wanted for years to address the issues of my hometown in a work of art but was never able to find the form or even in some sense to identify what my focus should be. Working with the *Arbeitsgruppe* in "Das Fundbüro" is helping me to see new ways to approach this topic.

The final work with the small group is significantly more open-ended than anything I have tried before. A participatory process is critical to the work because of the topic. As someone who has no first hand knowledge, I am reliant on the experiences and stories of others. Since I am trying through the project to create a sense of engagement and value for the experiences of these people, I feel that it is only right that they are directly involved in the production of the work. In the survey and the meeting, the structure and roles are quite clear, but in the work group, I have tried to leave the form open-ended and develop a working method that borders on the collaborative. This is a challenge for me both artistically and personally, and it is sometimes unclear how I can define my role in the *Arbeitsgruppe* as a more collaborative one but then still have the role of a leader for the project as a whole. I have titled myself in the project as *Vermittlerin* which can translate as mediator, facilitator or intermediary. One reason for choosing this title and the role it creates was the importance of the intermediary in East German culture – someone positioned between the people and the system who

could represent the people to the system.²⁹ In my view, I can serve as a mediator in the sense of using my knowledge and training as an artist to find the appropriate form to express what people in the group see as the important issues. I am of course the initiator of the project, but with the *Arbeitsgruppe* I am attempting to have a very horizontal, egalitarian structure. I have been able to bring the people together, but it is their experiences and their desires that drive the project, much as with Stephen Willats and the block tower projects. There is sort of a multiple level here, where on one hand the bringing together of the group is one project, and on the other is the project that the group will create together. Sometimes it's hard for me to separate the two. Both levels rely on the conversational form order to progress and the goals of these two sub-projects are not distinct. It is a dynamic situation that changes weekly and I am constantly trying to readjust my role and how much I direct the group and how much I let the group direct the project.

Discussion plays a big role in the meetings, and participants of the group have referred to it as a *Stammtisch* (a regular meeting, usually in a bar, where a particular topic is the focus of discussion.) At one point my goal for the project was primarily to form a discussion group, but I began to feel, and the work with the group has made it clear to me they are very interested to have something concrete. This brings us again to the issue of effectiveness and the issue of publicity. They need the public acknowledgment as a way of feeling engaged, as I do, too. The question that arises is what sort of result will they feel has an effect? What is a reasonable expectation for what is a small group working in a very limited time frame? To me this connects to the idea of how alternatives can be presented through the work.

In bringing together a group of people to make a record of East German history, the project is mirroring the process of political and civic engagement and seeking to provide an alternative model for social relations. The process on the micro scale of the group has the same preconditions as on the macro scale of society: the participants must acknowledge the existence of and right to existence of those with differing views. In practice this has been the primary obstacle to the group work. We are, in a sense, trying to enact an agonistic model of politics in which while opinions may differ, we each recognize the legitimacy of the other person as a partner in dialog. The people participating must already be open to questioning their own experiences and how they have evaluated them. When they are not, and have too much of a stake in a particular telling of the history, they are unable to participate in the give and take that the process requires.³⁰ This has been why some people with whom I have contact have not joined the group and in my opinion, this has been the cause for several members leaving the group. In one case, because the person was the one unable to leave room for differing views, in other cases, I think because the people feared that the experience of the group would only be a repeat of the experience they had in the greater society where their opinion was denigrated and undervalued. One question that has come up for me is what do you do when one of the parties will not recognize the rights of the others to participate in the dialog? It is clear to me that the conclusion of the *Abeitsgruppe* will not provide any definitive answers to the questions raised, but can perhaps through the experience provide something to inform subsequent work.

²⁹ Kerry Kathleen Riley, *Everyday Subversion: From Joking to Revolting in the German Democratic Republic* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2008) 308-309.

³⁰ See minutes and notes for meeting 2 in particular

It is the work of the group itself that is the other possibility for proving an alternative, in this case an alternative understanding of GDR history and its affects. The content, or concrete goal of the group, is in a sense an attempt to provide an alternative history, one that is non-narrative, dynamic and reflective. The work of the project itself can also be seen as an attempt to build a form of the commons – a history that belongs to all and in which all are represented. It can also be critical (and political) by making visible a more complex version of the “East German” subject. If the work of the group is able to establish a subject in society that counteracts the established image of the nostalgic Ossi who “just can’t adjust” then it succeeds in opening up the debate and creating more room for others.³¹ This would be a very practical and tangible result of the project, but one that I think is difficult to measure. Again it brings up the question of the scale of the project and what one small *Arbeitsgruppe* is able to achieve. In this context I am remind of Wallace Heim’s idea of “slow activism” and that the results may not be something visible in the weeks of or following the project, but that sometimes it is the importance of laying the groundwork for something that will happen later.

At this time, the form of the project that the group will undertake is still under consideration. From the discussions we have had, there is a strong instinct to collect both objects and stories. The drive to have a measurable impact is also quite strong, and participants have already raised the question of whether the project is something that is sustainable after I leave Weimar. In my role as mediator, I have tried to guide the discussion away from specific forms for the moment and to the ideas of what the group sees as its goals, how long the group wants to continue working and who the group sees as its target audience. In some ways, I feel like I am teaching my own approach to art-making and facing in the group the same impatience and demand for the practical that I find in myself. It is a curious situation which in some ways reminds me of a mobius strip – from the outside there appears to be two sides, but if you try to draw a line, you find out there is only one.

³¹ Deutsche.

CONCLUSION

The experience of working on “Das Fundbuero” has served to strengthen my belief in the importance of art to engage with society, but it also continues to raise questions for me about how this can most effectively be accomplished. I am convinced that art has the possibility of bringing new ways of understanding to the world, but I find that the definition of how this happens still eludes me.

Working in “everyday spaces” outside of galleries and museums in order to engage a broad audience and involving them directly in the creation of the work still seem essential to me for the work to have an effect. Using the form of the work itself to present alternatives, ideally by both enacting an alternative form of social relations and by creating something that can be adopted and continue past the project seem absolutely critical for the work to be what I would consider effective. However, working on “Das Fundbuero” has also challenged my belief in these methods by asking me to rethink how I find participants for the work, to redefine my role in participative processes, to question how I define effectiveness, and to have patience for the process of dialog to have its effect. While I am hopeful that the work of the *Arbeitsgruppe* will find a conclusion that is satisfying to the participants, I feel that I will still be left with a number of questions.

The main question still revolves around the effectiveness of the artwork – how does the information of the project get communicated to some place where it makes a difference? And what is that place that makes a difference? Since we are not working to address a specific policy, but rather the character of a set of relations, where is the locus of that? It is not just other East Germans, but West Germans, and even the world beyond. How is that practical or achievable? Is it really just a matter of being in it for the long haul? What form or art can have the sort of reach it seems like it is needed to have an impact?

The other question is about what relationship the work can have to institutions. It seems to me that for the project to have a better chance of having an effect that the scale of the project needs to increase, that “Das Fundbuero” must in some sense become a franchise. The logistics of this seem to necessitate working with partnering organizations, perhaps socio-cultural or political, but what is lost in that partnership? Do the utopist aspects of the project have to be sacrificed in order to meet the sort of effectiveness that funding boards seek? Or is there an alternative way of working, a so-called grass roots method of expanding the project?

To me, these are not questions that can be resolved in a 12-week project or perhaps even in a year-long project, but it also seems that they can only be addressed by continuing the work in a self-conscious and self-reflective manner, keeping in mind the aims of the project and questioning what benefits or losses may come from each decision. It is as always a process of small steps forward and retreats from the goal that lies beyond the politically effective work of art to the inclusive and egalitarian society.

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APPENDIX

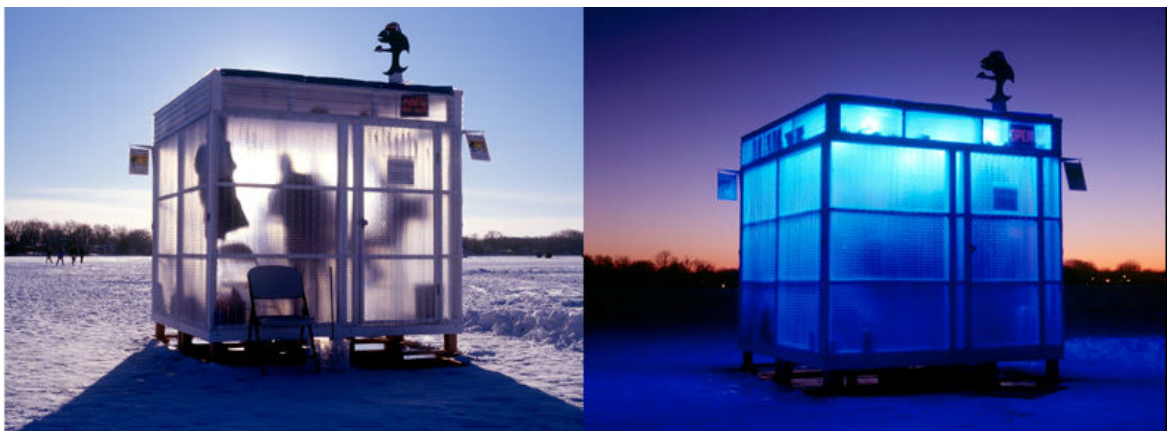
Table 1, An Analysis of My Major Artworks since 2003

Title of Work	Year	Short Description	Relationship to Audience	Offer	Self-Interest	Open-Ended Form	Comments/Analysis
Federal Holiday Series	2003-2004	Collaboration with Jane Powers involving the free distribution of postcards and small objects to explore origins and symbolism of US federal holidays and the meaning of patriotism.	Between Traditional and Interactive				Conversation during the distribution of the cards added a more interactive element. Cards could be written on and sent to other people.
What Does Your Future Hold?	2004-present	Vending machines placed in coffee shops dispense a fortune or a gumball stating/based on the statistical likelihood of an event related to the American Dream.	Interactive				
Whistle Stop Stumping Podium	2004	Players must correctly choose the twelve powers of the US president as granted in the constitution; winners receive a button that says "Chief" as a prize	Interactive				
SurfaceMarks	2005-2006	Free sets of temporary tattoos depicting the Church, the State and the Corporation were distributed via a website. Participants were invited to post thoughts, photos and feedback to the site's forum.	Participative	Y	Y	Sort of	While the interface was not something the participants could change, the possibilities of what they said on the forum was open. In some ways I felt that it was too open, and this made it difficult for people to formulate how they could participate in the project.
Rendezvous Café	2006-2007	Visitors to the café in a shanty on a frozen lake receive a free hot drink and homemade baked good in exchange for writing or recording a story about fish or water. The stories are available for others in the café and read on the low power radio station that is part of the "exhibition."	Participative	Y	Y	N	An overall structure is implemented, but it leaves room for people to bring what they see as appropriate to the shrine.
Last Train Out	2006	People are invited to contribute to a shrine dedicated to the rust belt. Devotional cards are available that can be stamped in the time clock located in the altar.	Between Interactive and Participative	Y	Y	Sort of	

Table 1 - continued, *An Analysis of My Major Artworks since 2003*

Free Speech Machine	2006-present	Sculpture that investigates the interplay between physical and virtual public space through a soapbox and megaphone. Speeches are recorded and uploaded to a blog, widening the speakers' audience.	Participative	Y	Y	N	
Internal Divisions: A Land Use Garden	2007	A sculptural garden depicts the use of land in the county through a pie graph shape.	Traditional				The offer was made to all non-winning artists, but not to a general public. Participating artists were invited to give suggestions for the actual installation of the exhibit but were happy enough with the form I suggested to merely supply their images to be projected in the gallery and viewable on a computer archive.
Minnesota Emerging Artists Exhibition	2007	Artist not chosen for a prestigious fellowship are invited to exhibit their work in a show held within the exhibit of the winning artists.	Participative	Sort of	Y	Tried to have it	
Das Fundbuero Flyer Aktion	2008	Four interviews with Weimar residents are used as the basis for flyers about things that were lost and found during the Weende, the political changes in East Germany in 1989-90. The flyers are hung in local supermarkets. The pull off tabs direct people to a website where they can upload their own stories.	Participative	N	Indirect	N	
HörMal	2008	A survey of Weimar residents finds out about their use of the park and knowledge of the park rules. A jingle of the park rules is composed and played from bicycles while riding around the park. The results of the survey are given to the park owners in the form of a multimedia presentation.	Interactive	Y	Indirect	N	
Free Speech Surrogate	2008	People can submit texts via email and a physical drop box to be read aloud at a predetermined date and time.	Participative	Y	Y	N	

Images of Past Work



Rendezvous Café



Das Fundbuero Flyer Aktion

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Durch ihre Arbeit hatten die Leute persönlichen Stolz und eine Identität für sich geschaffen. Dieser Stolz hängt mit unserer Geschichte zusammen.

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Gelegenheit GEFUNDEN

Jetzt gibt es die Gelegenheit zu reisen, damit man sich seine eigene Meinung bilden kann durch den Beweis vorm eigenen Auge.

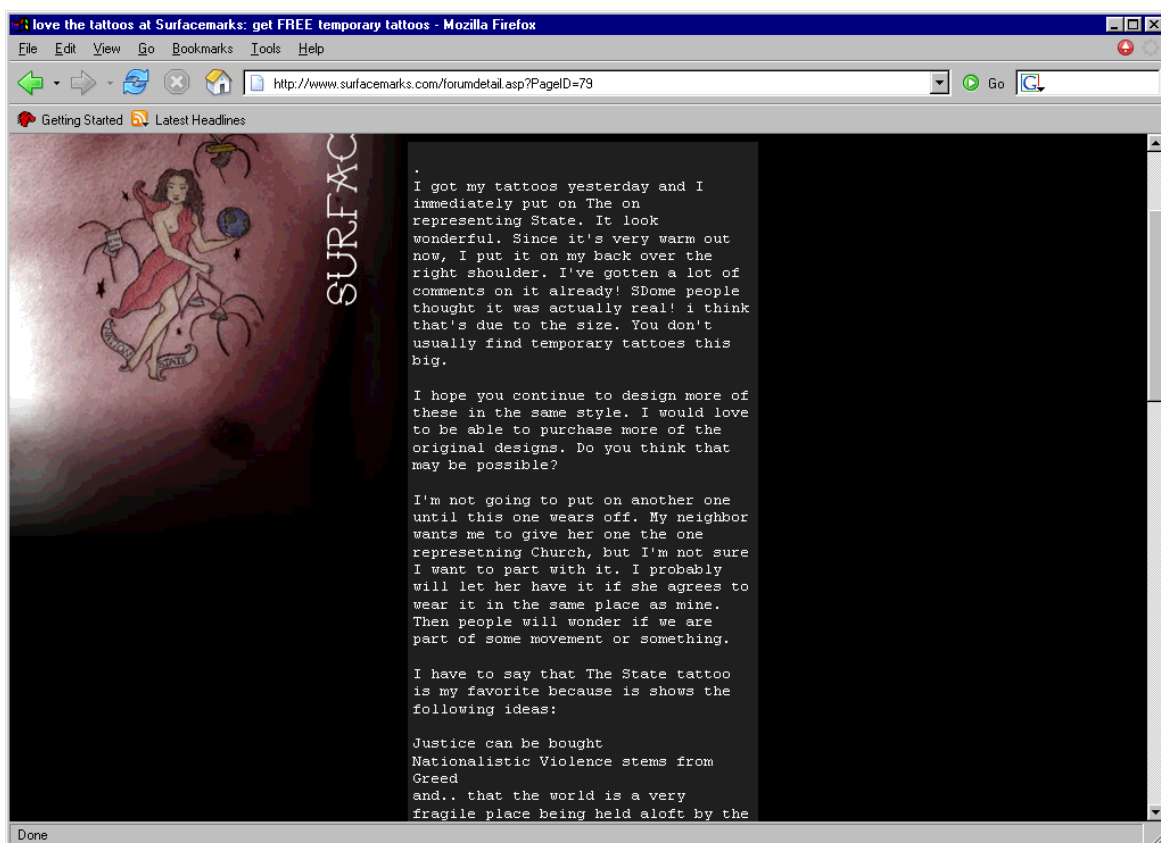
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Minnesota
Emerging Artists
Exhibition



Last Train Out



SurfaceMarks



Free Speech Surrogate



Free Speech Machine



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Werte Bürger, wertete Bürgerin,
im Folgenden ist Ihre Meinung über die Wende und Ostdeutschland gefragt. Wenn Sie im Osten geboren und aufgewachsen sind, möchten wir Sie freundlichst um die Beantwortung des Fragebogens bitten. Ihre Antworten sind anonym und werden als Teil eines Kunst-/Forschungsprojekts genutzt.
Für Ihre freundliche Unterstützung danken wir Ihnen herzlich.

1. Als was fühlen Sie sich? Bitte kreuzen Sie je Begriff ein Kästchen an.

	Ja, vollkommen	Ja, etwas	weder ja noch nein	eigentlich nicht	Nein, absolut nicht
Europäer					
BRD Bürger					
Ehemaliger DDR Bürger					
Deutscher					
Ostdeutscher					

1a. Wenn Sie einen Begriff wählen müssen, welcher wäre es? (Bitte nur ein Wort umkreisen)

Europäer BRD Bürger Ehem. DDR Bürger Deutscher Ost Deutscher Sonstiges (Bitte eintragen)

2. Ordnen Sie die Daten vom wichtigsten Tag bis hin zum belanglosesten Tag. Benutzen Sie dazu die Zahlen von 1-6. 1 ist am wichtigsten, 6 am unwichtigsten.

9.10.1989 9.11.1989 18.3.1990 18.5.1990 1.7.1990 3.10.1990

3. Findet der Einheitsprozess sein Ende?

Ja, es schon passiert Ja, in _____ Jahren Nicht wahrscheinlich Überhaupt nicht
(Bitte Zahlen eintragen)

4. Bitte entscheiden Sie sich jeweils für eines der folgenden Statements:

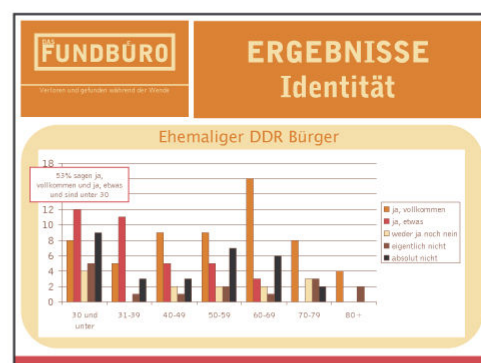
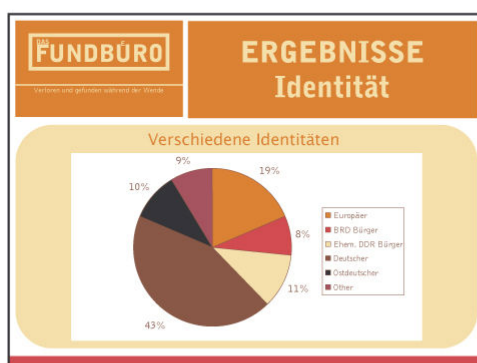
	stimme absolut zu	stimme etwas zu	stimme weder zu noch dagegen	stimme weniger zu	stimme überhaupt nicht zu
Ich bin optimistisch über Deutschlands allgemeine Zukunft.					
Ich bin optimistisch über die Zukunft der neuen Bundesländer.					
Der einzelne Bürger hat einen Einfluss auf die Politik.					
Die Erfahrungen der Ehemaligen DDR Bürger werden oft in Frage gestellt.					
Die Gewinne der letzten 20 Jahre sind größer als die Verluste.					
1989 war eine Gelegenheit, eine neue Gesellschaft aufzubauen.					
Alles in allem bin ich zufrieden mit meinem Leben.					

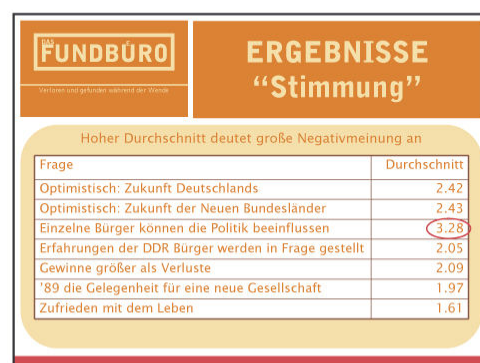
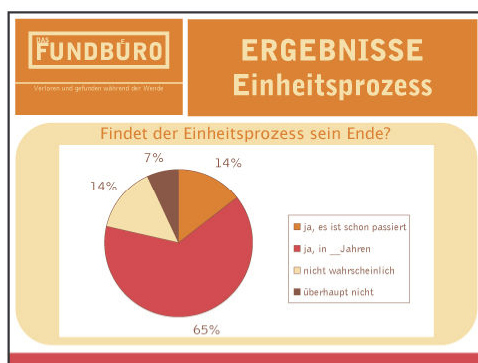
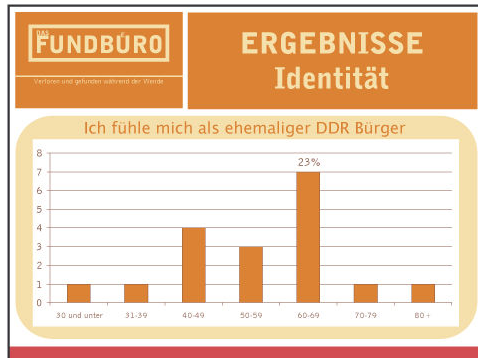
5. Diese Fragen sind nur zum Zwecke der Einordnung. Sind Sie...


5a. Männlich Weiblich


5b. Student Hausfrau/mann Arbeitnehmer Selbständiger Arbeitslos Rentner
5c. Unter 30 31-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80+

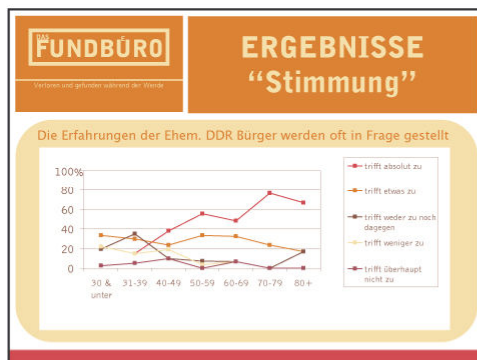
Wenn Sie weitere Kommentare schreiben möchten, benutzen Sie bitte die Rückseite.






<div> <div>  </div> <div> ERGEBNISSE "Stimmung" </div> </div>		
Verloren und gefunden während der Woche		
Unterscheidungen zwischen den Geschlechtern		
Frage	Männer	Frauen
Optimistisch: Zukunft Deutschlands	2.28	2.54
Optimistisch: Zukunft der Neuen Bundesländer	2.42	2.43
Einzelne Bürger können die Politik beeinflussen	3.11	3.43
Erfahrungen der DDR Bürger werden in Frage gestellt	2.03	2.05
Gewinne größer als Verluste	1.89	2.27
'89 die Gelegenheit für eine neue Gesellschaft	2.06	1.85
Zufrieden mit dem Leben	1.67	1.52

<div> <div>  </div> <div> ERGEBNISSE "Stimmung" </div> </div>		
Verloren und gefunden während der Woche		
Unterscheidungen zwischen den Geschlechtern		
Frage	Männer	Frauen
Optimistisch: Zukunft Deutschlands	2.28	2.54
Optimistisch: Zukunft der Neuen Bundesländer	2.42	2.43
Einzelne Bürger können die Politik beeinflussen	3.11	3.43
Erfahrungen der DDR Bürger werden in Frage gestellt	2.03	2.05
Gewinne größer als Verluste	1.89	2.27
'89 die Gelegenheit für eine neue Gesellschaft	2.06	1.85
Zufrieden mit dem Leben	1.67	1.52





FUNDBÜRO

Verloren und gefunden während der Woche

ERGEBNISSE
“Stimmung”

Form der Fragen

Frage	Durchschnitt
Optimistisch: Zukunft Deutschlands	2.42
Optimistisch: Zukunft der Neuen Bundesländer	2.43
Einzelne Bürger können die Politik beeinflussen	3.28
Erfahrungen der DDR Bürger werden in Frage gestellt	2.05
Gewinne größer als Verluste	2.09
'89 die Gelegenheit für eine neue Gesellschaft	1.97
Zufrieden mit dem Leben	1.61



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<div> <div>  </div> <div> WAS PASSIERT ALS NÄCHSTES? </div> </div>		
Verloren und gefunden während der Woche		
Die Umfrage		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wird Teil des Archivs des Fundbüeros <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bald verfügbar auf der Website Basis für weitere Projekte 		
Das Fundbüro		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bildet eine Arbeitsgruppe für ein weiteres Projekt in Weimar Sucht nach Leuten die archivieren helfen und ihre Geschichten erzählen 		



Documentation of "Das Fundbuero": Minutes and Summaries of Meetings

First Meeting - 7 May 2009 (no official minutes taken)

This meeting was held during the day as one (very eager) potential member of the group had said this was the only time he could come. He of course did not show up.

Attending at various points in the meeting were Jana Zündel, Michael-Jörg Kallenbach, Kristina Ehrenreich and Rudolf Kessner. I had emailed Michael Fricke to submit something to be included in the exercise we would be doing this day, which he did. Herr Kallenbach was working, so he only came for about 10 minutes and did not participate in the exercise. Herr Kessner had stopped "just to say hello" but stayed for at least an hour. A conversation about the proposed Grundeinkommen (a basic wage idea similar to a citizen's wage) began, led by Herr Kessner. I was in the uncomfortable situation of not wanting to tell someone I felt respect for to shut up but knowing that we were moving significantly off topic and losing time. Herr Kessner's attitude toward Frau Ehrenreich was also a source of stress as he made it obvious how little respect he had for her or her ideas largely because she was on Hartz Vier (unemployment/social welfare). I was pretty taken aback by this behavior from someone who is generally well respected and considered to be a humanitarian. Frau Ehrenreich shows an amazing resilience to this sort of treatment, though I felt in the end that should have stood up for her more.

Eventually Ann-Kathrin and I were able to move the topic back to the group and its work, and we were able to continue with the exercise. Herr Kessner left the meeting. For the exercise, each person should write down his or her three most important questions in relationship to GDR history. We then grouped these questions by theme to form a sort of mind-map of what topics were most important to people. Through this exercise we came up with 4 categories: life in the GDR, working through and building on the past, the telling of history and political utopia. These categories were still quite broad, but it provided at least a general sense of what was drawing people to the topic. This would give us a framework to start thinking about who the group was interested in reaching and how that might be possible.

The challenges evident at this meeting were those tied to the idea of "mediator" and how much I need to interfere when a discussion starts. It was also clear that both Frau Zündel and Frau Ehrenreich had ideas for the final form of the project, and it was hard to explain the necessity of stepping back and thinking about audience and content before form. This also made me think about why I think that that is the correct procedure, and whether it would be possible to proceed in the direction I would consider "backward" (from form to content and audience).

Documentation of "Das Fundbüro": Minutes and Summaries of Meetings

Das Fundbüro
Treffen Arbeitsgruppe, 11. Mai 2009

Protokoll

Ablauf/Struktur:

- Einführung Monica Sheets
- Vorstellungsrunde, Möglichkeit sich näher kennen zu lernen
- Erwartungsrunde: Was habe ich für Erwartungen an das Projekt? Welche Fragen beschäftigen mich?

Individuelle Erwartungen:

1. Jana Zündel - Dynamisches Archiv aufbauen. Gestalterische Workshops organisieren (z.B. Begriffe sammeln und diese auf einer Leinwand gestalterisch umsetzen. Fundstücke zusammentragen und diese in den Vitrinen des Lokals ausstellen. Geschichten aufschreiben und archivieren.
2. Michael Fricke - Webseite fördern, Forum ausbauen. Gezielte Werbung machen. Ergebnisse der Master-Arbeit ebenfalls auf der Webseite öffentlich machen und präsentieren.
3. Hans-Werner Martin - Webseite ausbauen und einen Weg finden diese längerfristig zu betreiben.
4. Heike und Walter Koch - Persönliches Erleben während der Wende erforschen. Dokumente, Zeitungsausschnitte sowie Bildmaterial sammeln und archivieren. Vorhandene Dokumente digitalisieren und auf Webseite hochladen.

Allgemeine Ziele für das nächste Treffen:

- Überlegen was für einem wichtig ist und die betreffenden Dokumente mitbringen. Welche Fähigkeiten und welche Infrastruktur kann ich anbieten und mich so optimal ins Projekt einbinden?

11.05.2009, Nicolas Vionnet

Documentation of "Das Fundbuero": Minutes and Summaries of Meetings

Second meeting - 11 May 2009

This meeting was like a first meeting because of the number of people who had not attended the prior meeting. What was meant to be a quick introductory round turned into an extended and heated discussion on the topic of GDR history, the nature of democracy and communism and capitalism. Herr Martin took a hard-line position against the GDR and against any possibility of a different system than the parliamentary democracy with capitalism that currently exists in Germany. Though he tried to dominate the discussion and often belittle the opinions of others who did not agree with him, the number of people with differing views helped to maintain a better balance. While I think this conversation is important to the project, it is not something that is going to be resolved, and after some time I tried to move the conversation onto the track of how we can develop the project with the question of people's expectations. Again people answered with their ideas for the form of the project rather than their personal expectations or their reasons for engaging in the project.

At the end of the meeting the mood seemed generally good even after the earlier conflict. Later in the week I received an email from Herr Martin saying he would no longer participate. I was a little bit disappointed. When I had met with him individually he had been very enthusiastic and seemed to understand the goals of the project. However his behavior at the meeting made it clear that he thought the other group members were beneath him. The events of the meeting and his reactions raised several questions for me. If the recognition and acknowledgment of the other person's right to exist is a fundamental condition for democracy, what happens when one of the parties refuses the grant this recognition? If the goal of the project is not about finding consensus for the history, how is it possible to move beyond the basic conflicts between people's points of view?

Documentation of "Das Fundbuero": Minutes and Summaries of Meetings

Protokoll, Das Fundbuero 18.5.09

Anwesende: Kristina Ehrenreich, Ann-Kathrin Rudolf, Monica Sheets

Verteiler: wie Anwesende, Jana Zündel, Walter und Heike Koch, Michael Fricke, Michael Kallenbach

Herr Martin hat Monica eine E-mail geschrieben und sagte dass er nicht weiter teilnehmen wird.

Monica dachte dass sie eine paar Dinge erklären soll:

- Geschichten der Teilnehmer der Arbeitsgruppe als Grundstein/Anfangspunkt des Projektes
- Wende als Spiegelpunkt benutzen um die Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft zu überdenken – eine kritische Perspektive zur Geschichte
- Ein konkretes Ziel für das Projekt ist wichtig, da stimme ich den Wünschen der Teilnehmer zu
- Geduld für den Prozess, offen für den Prozess – es erscheint vielleicht nicht immer künstlerisch, aber ist immer im Kunstkontext zu lesen
- Ich möchte nicht eine komplette Struktur vorgeben. Ich möchte dass Projekt in Zusammenarbeit mit Ihnen entwickeln und denke dass es wichtig ist das Sie sich als Teil des Projektes sehen
- Aller Anfang ist schwer. Lassen Sie sich nicht entmutigen. Ich denke wir sollten uns am Anfang etwas mehr Zeit für die Projektentwicklung nehmen. Dies ist besser um eine klare Richtung des Projektes erarbeiten zu können.
- Ich bin die Vermittlerin des Projektes aber möchte auf keinen Fall die „Leiterin“ sein
- Masterabgabefrist ist nicht unsere Deadline/Ende des Projektes
- Bis zum 8. Juni muss ich meine schriftliche Arbeit abgeben, deshalb habe ich bis dahin nicht so viel Zeit, danach habe ich wieder sehr viel mehr Zeit für „Das Fundbuero“

Kristina fragte, ob wir unser Arbeit nur im Fundbuero machen oder ob wir auf die Straße gehen. Sie möchte persönliche Interviews auf der Straße zu machen und eventuell über Radio Lotte zu präsentieren. Ein Informationsstand in der Stadt für „Das Fundbuero“

Intensives Gespräch mit Kristina über ihre Ideen, Erfahrungen und Meinungen der DDR

Aufgabe für das nächste Treffen:

Schreiben Sie einen kleinen Absatz über Ihre Erfahrungen und Erinnerungen an die DDR.

Denken Sie und vielleicht auch eine Liste aufstellen Sie:

Was ist Ihre persönliches Ziel (für sich) in der Projektarbeit?

Was sollte das gemeinsame Ziel der Gruppe sein?

Die Fragen beziehen sich nicht auf dem Ergebnis des Projektes bzw. auf ein bestimmtes Ziel, sondern auf Ihre ganz persönlichen Erfahrungen, Geschichten, Ideen und Interessen.

Wir werden darüber nächstes Treffen reden.

Documentation of "Das Fundbuero": Minutes and Summaries of Meetings

Third meeting – 18 May 2009

This meeting left me very concerned as only Frau Ehrenreich returned and only Frau Zündel had said she had a prior commitment. I had felt there were a number of things I needed to clarify after the last meeting and was disappointed that more of the group was not there to discuss these issues. Most of this was related to the group process as a way of making art and questions that had come up in the previous week about the nature of participatory art. These were not issues that Frau Ehrenreich was most concerned about, though it did provide a segue to talking about audience and purpose of the project as critical to determining the form.

Ann-Kathrin and I set about making phone calls or sending emails to follow up with the other members from whom we had not heard. I already knew that Herr Kallenbach's time was very limited, and doubted he would be able to attend (m)any meetings. I still hope to find a way to integrate him into the project. Herr Fricke had merely had another appointment on that date. Unfortunately, when Ann-Kathrin was able to reach Frau Koch, she said that she and her husband would not be returning. Frau Koch said that the project was not what she had thought it would be, but Ann-Kathrin could not get her to clarify what she meant. I have a suspicion that Herr Martin's behavior also had an influence on their decision, though I cannot say for sure.

Documentation of "Das Fundbuero": Minutes and Summaries of Meetings

Protokoll, Das Fundbuero 28.05.2009, 19:00 Uhr

Anwesend: Monica Sheets, Michael Fricke, Ann-Kathrin Rudolf

Leider kommen Herr und Frau Koch nicht wieder.

Kristina hat ihren Absatz über Ihre Erfahrungen und Erinnerungen der DDR gebracht, aber sie hatte einen anderen Termin und konnte nicht bleiben.

Michael Fricke hat verschiedene Artikel und Schriftstücke mitgebracht.

- Gesetzesblatt: Das wurden das Gesetz geändert um bessere Möglichkeiten der Strafverfolgung von Dissidenten zu gewährleisten.
- In einem anderem Artikel von kurz nach der Wende ist ein Interview mit einem Mann abgedruckt der für beide Geheimdienste gearbeitet hat
- In einem Artikel sind viele Leute mit Namen und Wohnort abgedruckt, alle Menschen wollen zurück in den Osten weil ihnen der Westen nicht gefällt. Herr Fricke glaubt nicht daran.
- Das Theater in Bautzen hat einmal im Quartal eine Zeitung herausgegeben die systemkritisch war. Dies war vor der Wende nicht ungefährlich.
- Herr Fricke war Ende der 80er Jahre in Leipzig und hat dort in einer Umweltorganisation mitgearbeitet. Er brachte eine Eingabe und den Antwortbrief, ein Protokoll, und eine Zeitung dieser Gruppe.

Monica kann die Zeitungsausschnitte vervielfältigen, scannen/kopieren und auf die Website setzen

Intensive Gespräch über wie oder ob man mit Kunst eine Gesellschaft verändern kann.

Monica spricht über ihre Perspektive als Künstlerin. Michael denkt dass die Leute nicht offen für Kunst sind. Monica denkt, dass ist warum Dialog und öffentlicher Raum wichtig und grundlegend für das Projekt sind .

Gespräch über die Möglichkeiten des Projekts

Michael denkt, dass die Zielgruppe des Projektes vielleicht zwischen 40-60 Jahren ist. Er hat die Idee Dokumentarfilme über die DDR im Fundbuero zu schauen. Er fragte was die Arbeitsgruppe wegen ihres Umfangs erreichen kann.

Monica schlug vor, dass wir an unser Zielgruppe und Projektziele denken und danach können wir über einen Form entschieden.

NÄCHSTES TREFFEN: MONTAG, 8.06.2009, 19.30 Uhr im Fundbuero

Documentation of "Das Fundbuero": Minutes and Summaries of Meetings

Fourth Meeting – 27 May 2009 (wrong date on minutes)

Again we had a meeting with only one group member (aside from me and Ann-Kathrin) because of scheduling difficulties. I am reminded of Adam Page's remark to the effect that only the unemployed have time for participatory art and wonder how it is possible to make people feel like a participatory project is worth the time involved. What sort of people would be open to the "experimental" nature of this project and willing to risk that there is no result?

We had a long discussion about the nature of this project as an art process and how it was possible for art to have an impact on society. I felt in some way as if I was explaining what I had been writing in my thesis, of course doing this much less articulately and in German. Again the question came up of why we needed to think about audience and goals before we decided on a form. There was also the question of how long the project would continue (it is clear several people are/were interested in something long-term) and what we were capable of accomplishing as such a small group. These are of course the questions that I also have for myself, and the only answer I have at the moment is that doing something, even if it is small and temporary is better than doing nothing.

These questions bring me back to the idea of my role in the project. While I am the initiator of the project, I have tried to make it clear that we should be reaching decisions as a group, however, it is also clear I am the "leader" in the sense of being the person who feels compelled to try to push things forward. I have tried sometimes to do this through formal exercises, but have not found this to be a productive method with this group. They are much more comfortable with informal conversation. At this point I feel that my role is often to take the subtext of conversations and make it the text, something that creates mixed feelings for me. I do feel that the group is making progress, but it is slower than I originally envisioned. I am hopeful, though that now that we have had these various discussions on fundamental questions of art and group work that within the next two to three meetings we will be able to focus more specifically on a possible project.

Documentation of "Das Fundbuero": Photos



Fundbüro unterwegs

Studentin sammelt Geschichten zur Wende

Weimar. (tlz) Seit Montag ist das Fundbüro in der Innenstadt unterwegs. Monica Sheets, eine amerikanische Masterstudentin der Bauhaus-Universität, will ein lebendiges Archiv zusammenstellen, das die Erfahrungen der Menschen während und nach der DDR sammelt. Dabei soll bei diesem Projekt nicht einfach Geschichte nacherzählt, sondern individuelle Erlebnisse und ambivalente Gefühle kommuniziert werden.

Das Fundbüro ist morgen zwischen 15 und 17 Uhr in Weimar West und am Mitt-

woch zwischen 11 und 13 Uhr am Goetheplatz anzutreffen. Des Weiteren können bis Freitag im ACC-Café, in der Stadtbibliothek, der Tourist-Information und im Atrium Umfragebögen ausgefüllt und in den dortigen Fundboxen abgegeben werden. Eine öffentliche Präsentation des Projekts mit Auswertung der Umfrage findet am Sonntag, 19. April, im mon ami statt. Das Fundbüro-Team hofft auf viele aktive Weimarer, die ihre persönliche Geschichte zur DDR und zur Wende erzählen.

Die Stimmen des Volkes

Monica Sheets aus den USA betreibt in Weimar ein „Fundbuero“ zu Geschichten aus der Wendezeit

Persönlichen Wende-geschichten der Weimarer ist die Künstlerin Monica Sheets auf der Spur. Für ihr „Fundbuero“ ist sie derzeit auf Umfrage-Tour.

Von Michael HELBING

WEIMAR. Eher zufällig war Monica Sheets im Oktober 2007 in der Tourist-Information am Markt mit jemandem über die DDR ins Gespräch gekommen. Es wurde, von heute aus betrachtet, ihr erstes Interview für das Projekt „Das Fundbuero – Verloren und gefunden während der Wende“. Sheets, Masterstudentin der Kunst im öffentlichen Raum an der Bauhaus-Uni, fand nämlich, die Wendezeit 1989/90 sei zwar akademisch aufgearbeitet. Es mangle aber an individuellen Geschich-

ten und sei daher an der Zeit, Volkes Stimmen einzusammeln. Die Künstlerin möchte ein Archiv der persönlichen Erfah-

run-gen aus der DDR und der Zeit danach anlegen. Die Wende betrachtet sie „als Spiegel-punkt für Vergangenes und Zu-

künftiges“. Monica Sheets, die in Minnesota lebt, wurde zwar erst in Weimar mit dem Prozess der deutschen Einheit konfront-

tiert. Allerdings spürt sie Parallelen Ostdeutschlands zu ihrer Heimatstadt Toledo/Ohio im alten „Rostgürtel“ der USA.

Diese und nächste Woche ist Monica Sheets mit Fragebögen in Weimar unterwegs, um eine Stimmungslage einzufangen, so gestern in Weimar West. Dort trafen sie und ihre Mitarbeiterin Ann-Kathrin Rudorf nicht nur auf schlechtes Wetter, sondern auf stark mitteilungsbedürftige, aber erst einmal recht zurückhaltende Menschen. Heute versuchen sie ihr Glück 11 bis 13 Uhr am Goetheplatz. Öffentlich ausgewertet wird die Umfrage am 19. April um 14 Uhr im mon ami. Bis dahin ist Sheets noch auf der Suche nach fünf bis zehn Projektpartnern. Mit ihnen will sie das Experiment weiterentwickeln.



FINDIG: Monica Sheets (l.) und Ann-Kathrin Rudorf sind mit Fragebögen unterwegs.

TA-Internetservice:
www.dasfundbuero.org

Die Vergangenheit kritisch überdenken

Kunstprojekt „Fundbuero“: Umfrage unter rund 160 Weimarnern sorgt für emotionsgeladene Debatte

Von Jana Zündel

Weimar. (tlz) Hitzige Diskussionen über die deutsche Einheit: Anlässlich der Präsentation ihres Kunstprojekts „Fundbuero“ lud die amerikanische Studentin Monica Sheets am Sonntag zu einer Gesprächsrunde ins mon ami. Grundlage für die Debatten bildete eine Umfrage unter rund 160 Weimarnern Bürgern zu ihrer DDR-Vergangenheit.

Im Verlauf zahlreicher Gespräche mit Deutschen war Monica Sheets aufgefallen, dass die politische Wende für die Deutschen ungefähr so prägend war wie der amerikanische Bürgerkrieg für die Vereinigten Staaten. Fortan beschäftigte die Studentin die Widersprüchlichkeit dieser Geschichte und die Frage, wie man sie darstellen könne.

„Die Idee des Projektes ist es, ein dynamisches Archiv zu erschaffen“, erklärt Monica Sheets. Ein Archiv, das ständig erweitert werden soll. Dafür sei die Umfrage der Startschuss gewesen, eine erste Gelegenheit, ehemalige DDR-Bürger mit dem Thema zu konfrontieren und ihre Geschichten zu sammeln. Stadtrat Rudolf Keßner zeigte sich erfreut über das Interesse ei-

ner Amerikanerin an deutscher Historie und beteiligte sich an der Auswertung der Umfrage. Monica Sheets widmete sich besonders der Identitätsfrage. Dabei sollten die Befragten angeben, wie sehr sie sich als Europäer, Deutsche, Ostdeutsche, BRD-Bürger oder ehemaliger DDR-Bürger fühlen. Zwar geben insgesamt 43 Prozent an, sich vollkommen als Deutsche zu füh-

len, doch in einigen Altersgruppen dominiert die Identität als früherer DDR-Bürger. Sie stellte heraus, dass besonders die 60- bis 69-jährigen und auch ein hoher Teil der unter 30-jährigen sich vorrangig als ehemalige DDR-Bürger fühlen. Sheets nahm das zum Anlass, nach dem elterlichen Einfluss auf die letzten DDR-Geborenen und den Gründen für die Nostalgie unter den

Älteren zu fragen. Die Diskussion zeigte, dass die Einheit noch lange nicht abgeschlossen ist. So gibt Kristina Ehrenreich dem Einigungsprozess noch 18 Jahre bis zu seiner Vollendung und schlägt vor, noch einmal ganz neu anzusetzen. Besonders der Austausch zwischen Ost- und Westdeutschen sei für das Zusammenwachsen wichtig: „Man muss es auch wollen.“

Eine umfangreiche Forschungsgrundlage für das „Fundbuero“ ist durch die Umfrage geschaffen worden. Monica Sheets sucht jetzt Helfer, die mit ihr und Mitarbeiterin Ann-Kathrin Rudorf eine Arbeitsgruppe zur Erarbeitung des Archivs bilden. Auf experimentelle Weise möchte Sheets dazu anregen, „Vergangenheit und Gegenwart kritisch zu überdenken“.



Diskutieren über die deutsche Einheit: Monica Sheets (links) zeigte sich sehr erfreut über die aktiven Gespräche unter den Gästen. Foto: Jana Zündel