



Photo : Gülsen BAL

HOW LATITUDE BECOMES FORM

In conversation with Gülsen BAL

Derived from contemporary creative practice to the issue of intercultural dialogue, the visual artist, curator and theoretician Gülsen Bal initiated Open Space - Zentrum für Kunstprojekte in early 2008. The experimental framework of Open Space aims to create the most vital facilities for contemporary art in the city of Vienna on non-profit base, concerned with bringing the current developments of the enlargement of Europe to the fore through generating interconnected routes. In the following interview Gülsen Bal talks about the means of contributing a model strategy for cross-border and interregional projects on the basis of improving new approach.



Photo:Christoph GROTHGAR

Franz Thalmair: What is your approach toward the meaning of 'cosmopolitan'?

Gülsen Bal: Well... The new cosmopolitan position offers the means to benefit from a new existence afar beyond by the nation-state where the shared spaces measured in relation to mobility at a conjuncture of a meeting point that resides a "temporary home for many" inhabiting the key word: border/boundary...

This reflects the paradoxical settings of the differential structures, a dark adventure which suggests a certain discursive shift related to a new conjunction of 'the transition' consisting of its potential at the edge of new outlines of the possible. Here what is momentarily unclear may later make perfect sense or perfect nonsense when explored in a critical approach. I guess this designates my subject-position in the very "in-betweenness" where 'nowhere' meets with settled map through multiple entrances and exits.

Thalmair: With the program of Open Space(**Link: <http://www.openspace-zkp.org>**) you are countering "current developments of the enlargement of Europe" by "building and facilitating new forms of dialogue and cooperation." Then, what are the parameters of the discourse that is built upon?

Bal: To answer this question I have to address certain issues that is related to having an understanding on a different kind of creative journey in its mode of production. This is manifested within its reflection of culturally specific conditions that focuses on making invisible "visible" by attempting to entail a structure of positions or positionality which exposes the ambiguity of the situation. This is what makes it possible to identify some specific and determining characteristics that compile the different practices taking place at Open Space.

Yes... As you have mentioned, the creative exploration at Open Space is built around at the intersection of creating an interconnected routes concerned with European space as well as building a cross border dialogues within its multi layered constituents. The initiation led by me intends to bring diverse creative practice together as well as creating real and virtual collaborative forum and opening spaces to encourage exchange and joint projects with aiming to explore the future, generating new ideas and implementing them in a collaborative effort to improve trans-national network as well as creating network of networks, a zone of communicative transfer in a particular socio-cultural setting.

The designation of “one always searches for some symbolic point from which one can claim that something ended and something else began” maintains real life case studies and reveals how cultural specific conditions in and/or afar its trans-locality. This sets in motion new kinds of creative connections around the boundaries of ‘New Europe’. Thus the issue commence here introduces an experimental dynamic that define the space of current relations to be problematised.

This formulates the special attributes of Open Space that lies in its input towards the “production of subject.”

Thalmair: How would you characterise your approach to the program of Open Space as curatorial or artistic practice? Do you think there is a clear cut difference between these two practices?

Bal: At a time of increasing debate around new forms of exhibiting and how we consider of curatorial practice and the situation in which curatorial practice is exercised beyond the traditional role of an exhibition organiser; your question bears its weight on to what replaces the archetypal format and how one can articulate a coherent position relative to the current state of creative production. In this realm the question concerns a practical approach to creativity. This mirrors the ambivalent position that embraces “art [as] the production of different/ciation”¹ where the mechanism of methodology designates an inter-relationship between art production and divergent lines of encounters.

In short, this is to assert breaking with the old forms of creative practice pertaining productivity that is leading to pluralistic approaches instead.

Thalmair: Besides social and/or networked projects; the program of Open Space includes video, performances, documentation of discursive projects and even Internet-based works of art: is there any special interest in New Media?

Bal: I aim to put across different creative production in each individual project which is engaged with a continual research on contemporary art in search for new outlines of the possible practices where each project remains as a new subject at the threshold of 'urgency'. This suggests the possible trajectories in formulating what 'institutional creativity' entails.

Unlike other small or major institutes, Open Space offers a place for exploration of space of current relations associated with a generative process of a transitory characteristic: the "in-between-ness." Mindful of these issues and current conditions in art; works that has been presented at Open Space keeps the form of multi/trans-disciplinary pattern from installation, video, performance to an online platform: Internet-based works. This helps to identify some specific and determining characteristics that compile project-specificity within multi-directional models that behaves "rhizomatically."



ON XENOPHOBIA REDUX PROJECT
Photo : Anne - Britt RAGE

At this intersection encountering situations with a set of circumstances; the virtual environments, the social networks and the multiple ways of connecting through the World Wide Web comes into play at a constant expanding of rigid boundaries within structural methodologies as it forms a special territory in having the capacity for seeing what is at stake in today's world. In other words, we should not underestimate its possibilities.

This evidence itself clearly within the current as well as prog with 2008... We opened our doors with **Tempoary Zones** last January 2008 and carried with Interface, **On Xenophobia Redux, World-Expo, FOLDED-IN, I MYSELF AM WAR!, Networked Cultures** and the year has finished with the project **Structures of Radicality.**

Thalmair: What does make political art "successful" in your opinion? Is it necessary to have any measurable effects on the society by what you are doing and endorsing?

Bal: I certainly think this is one of the issue that worth pondering as this evidence other questions opened up, such as: what are the elements that traverse art and it's politic?

This articulates the biased mindscapes where everything progress towards the transformations of "demographic politics" and politicisation of life. However, here a question pose itself as Christian Kravagna puts it: "to what extent is 'social action' political, to what extent does a social interest take the place of the political"?

Thalmair: Your background is Turkish, you grew up in London and your artistic and curatorial practice is concerned with trans-national topics. So why did you decide to initiate Open Space in Vienna and not anywhere else?

Bal: As I am somebody who was born in Turkey and grown up in London, I always interested in understanding the new forms of articulation derived from the issues: the "difference of identity" and "difference," minority and exilic discourse and border phenomena in trans-local and/or trans-national location within cultural geography. To a certain degree, this traces to questioning the dynamics between habitual durations and what is already operative within the staggering proliferation and constant expanding of rigid boundaries. What follows is to begin with addressing an account of a transformational processes occurring on social, cultural and "identity" construct that reveals itself in between 'belonging' and 'refusal' given where the political engagement is cited.

The direction of this reasoning leads towards how one can describe the constituency of the entry of almost impossibility of transcending an intersections and mechanism through the axes of trans-cultural practices which engender a new space formed by a space of production. Now then... the question of why Vienna... Obviously, location wise Vienna has retained its rich history and culture while extricates itself as the most important gateway to Central/Eastern Europe and neighbouring countries. This brings a rupture that engenders the temporary systems concerned with bringing different modes of manifestation onto the surface which allows for different intensity and contents to be challenged. So, here I am...

Thalmair: Does a city Vienna at ease on opportunities for this kind of projects?

Bal: One of the flaws of progressive movements as indicated by Walter Seidl:

"With the inauguration of Open Space by Gülsen Bal at the beginning of 2008, Vienna's art scene saw an important enrichment of exhibition space after a number of crisis-ridden institutional changes in 2007. The merger of Generali and Bawag Foundation into one exhibition space saw the end of a decade-long exhibition program concerned with a stringent focus on conceptual practices. The latter abruptly came to a halt due to the decisions made by the groups' CEOs, which demonstrated how global capital dominates artistic representation and its social reverberations.

With the initiation with "Open Space", Bal exactly confronts this onslaught of capitalist-driven exhibition projects..."²

I believe this brings us to the emergence of the structure / agency dilemma with the entire range of problems encompassing the issues resides. To some extent, to be based in Vienna allows to hold an empirical foundation brought into an "intercourse with society", where the catch-phrase is: „Wer ist der Verkehr? Wir sind der Verkehr!"

Together with this, the discourses that we bring internationally on monthly basis are something in lack in the art scene here in this very city... Apparently this fills a big gap while introducing certain dynamics through operating beyond white cub context and at the same time functioning as a kind of 'institution' serving like a hub linking all the complexity of strands.



I MYSELF AM WAR/ THE FITTEST SURVIVE
 OLIVER RESSLER / PRODUCTION STILL
 Photo : Oliver RESSLER



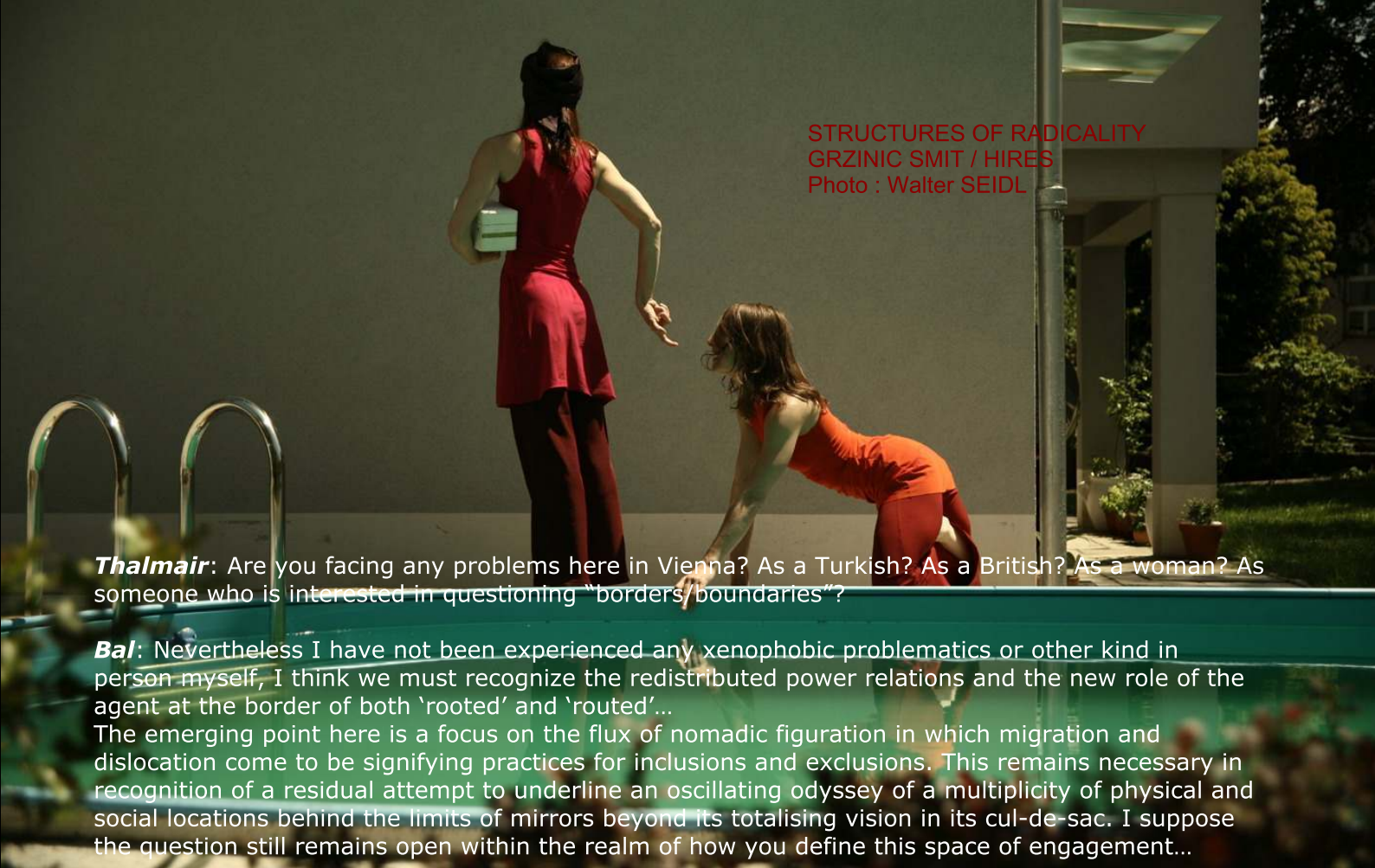
I MYSELF AM WAR / MOIRA ZAOITL
 IT IS COLD OUTSIDE / INSTALLATION DETAIL
 Photo : Gulsen BAL



NETWORKED CULTURES
 JUDITH AUGUSTINOVIC
 SKINSHIP N° 1 - HAUTNAH
 Photo : Judith AUGUSTINOVIC



NETWORKED CULTURES
 URSULA BIEMANN / SAHARA CHRONICLE
 Photo : Helge MOOSHAMMER



STRUCTURES OF RADICALITY
GRZINIC SMIT / HIRES
Photo : Walter SEIDL

Thalmair: Are you facing any problems here in Vienna? As a Turkish? As a British? As a woman? As someone who is interested in questioning "borders/boundaries"?

Bal: Nevertheless I have not been experienced any xenophobic problematics or other kind in person myself, I think we must recognize the redistributed power relations and the new role of the agent at the border of both 'rooted' and 'routed'...
The emerging point here is a focus on the flux of nomadic figuration in which migration and dislocation come to be signifying practices for inclusions and exclusions. This remains necessary in recognition of a residual attempt to underline an oscillating odyssey of a multiplicity of physical and social locations behind the limits of mirrors beyond its totalising vision in its cul-de-sac. I suppose the question still remains open within the realm of how you define this space of engagement...

Thalmair: What does "border/boundary" mean to you, on a personal and on a global level?

Bal: In the issues of inhabitation and creating your own space, the specificity of location within "I-other" disparity of divergent lines of encounter; the question poses itself as: do 'borders' and 'in-between spaces' exist? What happens here within this realm? Furthermore what is still 'missing' in trans-local and trans-national location within cultural geography?

Thalmair: Crossing borders by "integration"?

Bal: Well... Let's drift a bit further and dispatch this as Guattari³ puts it: **"The individual and the group cannot avoid a certain existential plunge into chaos. This is already what we do every night when we abandon ourselves to the world of dreams. The main question is what we gain from this plunge: a sense of disaster, or the revelation of new outlines of the possible?"** I guess this seeks how latitude becomes form.

References

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