TOWARDS AN AESTHETICS OF THE CROWD: PUBLICS, POLITICS AND THE DEMOCRATIC SELF IN SCHLINGENSIEF'S *PLEASE LOVE AUSTRIA* (2000)

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to develop an account of the political consequences and operation of public art in Christoph Schlingensief's performance artwork, *Bitte Liebt Österreich*. What, if any, are the possibilities to conceive of public art in a distinctly democratic manner, that is, as enabling a certain democratic – or pluralising – movement? How are we to account for the (perhaps democratic) experience of an encounter with a work of public art, in this case, with *Bitte Liebt Österreich*? Ultimately, what is the central 'operation' of public art that activates its political possibilities? This paper develops exploratory responses to these questions by engaging in a three-way dialogue between Schlingensief's *Bitte Liebt Österreich*, post-foundational political theory, and philosophical aesthetics. It argues that the core operation of public art is in its setting into motion of an 'aesthetics of the crowd'; an experience of polyvocal multiplicity and radical difference that makes possible distinctly democratic modes of re-imagination and self-formation.

Introduction

Rosalyn Deutsche sets up for us the fundamental problematic of public art when she suggests that, at its heart, we have a dual conception of the Public. On the one hand, "a tight authoritative singleness (the public as object of a quest for a universal collective subject or a privileged arena of struggle)", and on the other hand, "a relaxed, comfortable pluralism (publicness as a quantity spread liberally through many different collectivities)." (Deutsche, 1992, p. 48). What precisely then is public art and how are we to conceive of it? What are the possibilities of a public art that pulls in one of these directions more than the other? How can particular works of public art make a movement in a pluralizing direction? This paper puts forward exploratory responses to these questions through an engagement with Christoph Schlingensief's public performance-artwork, *Bitte Liebt Österreich* ('Please Love

Austria'; BLÖ), staged and performed over the course of the Vienna Festival Week in June 2000.

Schlingensief's *Bitte Liebt Österreich* has often been the subject of discussions on public art and aesthetics (Forrest, 2008; Seel, 2008). But relatively little attention has been paid to its operation. How does BLÖ, as public art, constitute a public space, if at all it does? What is the fundamental operation of the work that enables this constitution to take place? How are we to understand the experience and encounter with this work? And ultimately, can we think of BLÖ as political art – and more specifically, as democratic? I explore and map out these aesthetic-political 'stakes', of BLÖ, by building on theories of radical democracy and philosophical aesthetics.

This paper is structured around three claims – broadly reflecting the three sections that follow. First, that against claims of the impossibility of public art, in its very staging, Schlingensief's artwork is innately public when it performs the staging of a public space, a fundamental *mis-en-scène*. This is an active staging, not a staging for, but a staging-amidst; not simply the constitution of a public space as fully-formed, but as exposing the active terrain of its constitution – that is, as what Oliver Marchart calls a 'spatialisation' (Marchart, 2019, pp. 114–115). This leads to the second claim that the constitution of public space as spatialisation is made possible by a particular operation immanent to the experience and encounter with public art. Building on theories of philosophical aesthetics, I outline this operation as the bringing forth of a pre-subjective, indeterminate terrain of play, through what I call an 'aesthetics of the crowd'. The setting into motion of such an aesthetics is an experience of polyvocal multiplicities and radical difference that dissolves the self-unity of the subject into dispersed flows of incoherent energies. And only because the subject is dissolved in this manner, do we have the possibility of radically reimagined, creative modes of self-formation emerging from the encounter with public art. In the third and final claim, borrowing from post-foundational theories of democracy, I argue that it is precisely because Schlingensief's work activates an aesthetics of the crowd that it is democratic; enabling processes of self-formation that draw on heterogeneous and plural energies across lines of difference. This is the political significance of *Bitte Leibt Österreich*: in and by its very staging, it actualises an aesthetics that becomes the ground for the possibilities of democratic self-formation.

1. Situating Public Art

We must begin, then, by first establishing the very possibility of public art as a mode of artistic practice itself. Is it conceivable to think art in terms of a public, or rather as part of, and/or instituting a public? In a word, is public art possible?

1.1 The Adornian Challenge

Here we run in to a particular tension set up by Adorno. For him, art's autonomy is precisely what guarantees its success. That artworks are removed/alienated from society and yet unfold as mimetic repetitions of the violence of a rationalized world is what constitutes their redemptive value (Adorno, 2018a, pp. 54–55). Artworks succeed because they are at once autonomous and involved – and, more importantly, it is their autonomy that is the condition of their 'involvement'. The artwork unfolds immanently in its own form, as negativity, set off from reality.

But, when located within a public space, this immanent, autonomous character of the artwork – so well preserved in a museum – is endangered. As Wheeler points out, "When the primacy of effect replaces that of form, the shared experience and not the artwork becomes crucial to the work's putative 'success'" (Wheeler, 1997, p. 105). The problem for Adorno, then, is that 'public art' in its very situatedness brings forth a set of relations and contexts that threaten the experience of aesthetic negativity immanent to the work itself. Indeed, in place of this redemptive alienation constitutive of aesthetic experience, Wheeler suggests of Adorno, 'public art' introduces a certain social (and, we should add, political) effect. In other words, 'public art' appears to constitute a 'public space' of effects that inhibits aesthetic experience. Art's autonomy, its constitutive condition, is surrendered to an image of art's immediacy to social reality. The very possibility of art's redemptive 'value' is, it would appear, extinguished. Jameson argues precisely this point, when he suggests that Adorno's critique of 'public art' is a critique of a functional view of artworks as operating "within situations of immediacy, and in the realm of the day-to-day struggle and the Event" (Jameson, 1990, p. 223). Adorno's line of argument is a rejection of any claim that the materiality of the artwork has any direct relationship to certain modes of social praxis or effect. Any relational affinity of the artwork to social reality is always mediated by its immanent aesthetic operation.

Adorno is setting up a powerful problematization for any conception of 'public art'. Indeed, the term itself appears oxymoronic. Art, *as art*, cannot conceivably be public. The immanent character of artworks that Adorno proposes, is diametrically opposed to the external socio-political character of artworks presupposed in an account of public art. Public art appears impossible. Naturally, we could argue that this present impasse proceeds only once we presuppose and work from within a particular reading of Adorno's aesthetic theory. Several post-foundational social and political theorists, and public artists – as we will see more fully in what follows – put into question art's autonomy. But even so, I believe this Adornian tension reveals something of the problematic character of public art – even if we do not follow him in proclaiming its impossibility. Because what Adorno enables us to see most clearly is the public-ness of public art. This is a public-ness that lends itself well to occupation (Deutsche, 1992, p. 37; Ehsani, 2014, pp. 160–161). Public

art, precisely on account of its public character, is monopolized, centralized, and transformed into an internal (and crucially, for Adorno, unmediated) moment of a certain hegemonic formation.

Post-foundational thinkers, on the other hand, are keen to identify public art as constituting a certain public space or a "site of enactment" (Phillips, 2003, p. 35). But this is, from Adorno's point of view, precisely the problem. That public art constitutes a space of staticity, sedimentation. A public space of the State, of hegemonic stability. This is the central issue for our discussion – the possibility of public art, not simply as artistic practice, but as a distinctly democratic possibility. The possibilities of public art as democratic praxis. And the consequence of this Adornian problematic is this: how do we start rethinking the constitution of public space engendered by public art? Is there a sort of different way to public art? A different kind of constitution of space – one that is an opening up? Schlingensief's seminal *Bitte Liebt Österreich* (BLÖ) can help us take the first steps towards such a rethinking.

1.2 Schlingensief – Total-mobilisation and the reactivation of public art

In order to fully appreciate this seminal work and its significance to our discussion here, we must first acquaint ourselves with Schlingensief and his approach to art. Right from when he emerged into the limelight of German film and theatre in the 1980s, Schlingensief has been the target of mainstream media and art critics. His works have been subject to ridicule, abuse, and even violence (Briegleb, 2010). Yet, it is difficult to speak and think of contemporary German art without a reference to Schlingensief and the fundamental reactivation that his work enacts. Hardly any of his contemporaries are, or were, as directly in the public eye, or indeed, the subject of as many dinner party conversations. But this publicity is hardly the central import of Schlingensief's work – only a measure of his works' ability to excite, to activate and provoke. The real significance is precisely that his work can do this.

Part of the reason Schlingensief is at the receiving end of often vile invectives is his rejection of conventional boundaries between high and low aesthetic values; his interweaving of the holy and the profane, beauty and revulsion, joy and disgust. Obscenity, trash and hysteria parading as beauty (Briegleb, 2010). It is precisely this blurring of boundaries that he so artfully deploys in his film, *Das deutsche Kettensagenmassaker* ('The German Chainsaw Massacre'), where a slaughterhouse on the very border between East and West Germany, in its very setting, reactivates questions over German reunification. Equally, however, Schlingensief's work also blurs epistemic boundaries for its viewers. Truth and false, reality and fiction, life and theatre seem to blur into an indistinguishable mass. With his stage productions, this is always the case – audiences are left stranded, 'Do I believe what just

happened?', 'Is this really happening, or is this just an act, pre-planned and orga-nized?' (Löhndorf, 1998). Nothing can be taken at face value, because there is no face value. Perhaps for this reason, mainstream media and consumer television provide a fertile terrain for Schlingensief – their sensationalism enacts precisely the blurring that he wants to draw our attention to.

Disavowing disciplinary and aesthetic boundaries also enables the disavowal of narrative forms and strictures. Schlingensief is loath to tell a story. His works do not 'say' anything, they are not there to convey a message. Only excite, only provoke. As Löhndorf points out, "He produces…speeches and performances…in which it is always given the impression that something decisive is about to happen right now, as if what is just being announced is the essential all-clearing message. That little is clear and nothing is important is the secret tragedy it contains. Worst of all, however, is that nothing happens." (Löhndorf, 1998). Improvisation is the name of the game. The work is always evolving, transforming and supplementing itself as it progresses. There are sudden twists and turns, such as when an actor on stage announces their birthday (Löhndorf, 1998), or protestors spontaneously become part of a performance artwork on a busy square in Vienna.

His work appears chaotic, but that is precisely the point. Dismissing linear, pro-gressive, compartmentalized narratives induces a chaotic and jarring hysteria. It is confusing, overwhelming and even, to some, distasteful, but it is nonetheless part of his attempt at provocation. Stripped of any aids or certainties, Schlingensief forces the viewer to decipher, to wade through the chaos, to seek. It is worth quoting at length a description of one of his works in order to fully grasp the chaotic mood Schlingensief puts into motion:

> The action is chaotic. Actors run through the auditorium. Schlingensief is among them; he encourages audience members to join an attempt to get away. Over and over, he shouts: 'Try to escape! Try to escape!'. It is unclear what to escape from and where to escape to. On stage, an actress grabs a microphone and explains that every year she and her husband and kids travel to Bergen Belsen, the former Nazi concentration camp, which is now a museum. They cook, the children make wreaths, and her husband reads out the names of all six millions murdered Jews. From the auditorium, an actor then begins to read out Jewish names. The lights go dim, artificial snow begins to fall, orchestral music fills the room. More and more names are solemnly read out, some of them now recognizable as those of German celebrities. (Koberg, 1998).

As we will see later in this paper, shorn of certainties and cognitive 'anchors' the chaos Schlingensief induces provokes visceral responses that remain ordinarily

concealed beneath the veneer of liberal society. In this sense, Schlingensief's work eschews categories of aesthetic form, seeking instead an anti-form, or a counter-form (*Gegenform*) that pushes against certainties, disciplinary limits and conventional practices or rules.

Perhaps it is then appropriate to think of the ultimate task of Schlingensief's work to be a total irritation. In his bringing together of life, art and media, Schlingensief is not providing us a straightforward, artistic image of life, or artistic critique of media practices. Rather, his works combine, in a syncretic way, practices of art, life and media that uncover their chaotic, hysterical and often obscene character. Precisely because of this, questions of politics are closely intertwined with Schlingensief's works. Yet, it is clear that what interests him is not the stoic, polite deliberations of liberal democracy, but the churning currents hiding below the surface – not the neat and organized narratives of bureaucratic society, but the mad drives and forces of the chaos always lurking just under our feet. As we shall see more fully below, his work carries, then, a certain exposing dimension, and this, ultimately, is the ground of its total irritation: Schlingensief opens up for us a groundless terrain in which we find ourselves falling, desperately grasping but unable to hold on.

It is within this context of total irritation that we must locate *Bitte Liebt Österreich* and explore its insights for our thinking the possibilities and operation of public art. Staged over the course of a week during the *Wiener Festwochen* in 2000, on the Herbert-von-Karajan-Platz in Vienna, Schlingensief's work closely imitated the popular TV show, *Big Brother* (Schlingensief, 2000). Twelve asylum-seekers were placed in shipping containers retrofitted to act as small homes. Each container was fitted with a set of CCTV cameras that captured and recorded all occurrences within (Schlingensief, 2000). Video feeds from these cameras were streamed live, and free to view, on a website set up specifically for this purpose. At the site of the performance a series of peepholes in the containers allowed passers-by to peer in at any time and watch the asylum-seekers go about their day. This voyeurism – where audiences are invited to actively peer into the lives of others – was precisely the mirror-image of the format of the consumer TV show *Big Brother*. Just like the TV show, Schlingensief's performance work allowed and invited viewers to vote – through the website – on who their least favourite contestants were. At the end of each day, the two asylum-seekers with the least votes would be escorted out of the containers and into a black car, ostensibly to be taken to the Austrian border and deported. At the site of the performance, Schlingensief erected a large stage from where he directed proceedings, like a conductor of a gigantic orchestra. Above him, a large signboard read '*Auslander Raus*' (Foreigners Out!) the infamous slogan employed by the anti-immigration, right-wing FPÖ party which was a part of Austria's governing coalition at the time (see Figures 1-4).

Figure 1. Schlingensief on the Stage
Source: Baltzer, 2000

Figure 2. The Stage
Source: Baltzer, 2000

BLÖ was a direct response to the rise to power of the right-wing Jörg Haider and his FPÖ party. Both Haider and his party were notorious for their xenophobic and anti-immigrant propaganda – often using slogans and statements that echoed Nazi propaganda (Forrest, 2008, p. 91). Indeed, it is precisely such slogans and the violent affective contagion that Haider and his party let loose – often called the Haider-show (Tweraser, 2003, p. 320) – that secured their rise to power. Large sign-boards that read '*Auslander Raus*' above the containers housing the asylum-seekers

invoked and brought attention to the affective and discursive power that Haider and the FPÖ actualised.

At the same time, Schlingensief's work is also situated within a larger body of artistic and activist practices created and sustained by several artists, activists, and thinkers in response to Haider. Tweraser locates these similarities between Schlingensief and other artists performing/demonstrating during the *Wiener Festwoche*, when he suggests, with Elfriede Jelinek in mind, that "Schlingensief's container action and Jelinek's dramolette shared a common purpose: both intervened in the public debate by exposing not only the hollowness of Haider's political persona but also the more immediate danger of the rhetoric of resentment becoming policy." (Tweraser, 2003, p. 323).

That these artworks – and in particular, BLÖ – activated and enlivened public debate through their interventions is clear in the huge public outcry and mobilization that accompanied them. Thomas Mießgang described BLÖ as a "total mobilization" of the Austrian public sphere (Mießgang, 2000). The stage on which the work is set, and atop which is a large banner reading '*Auslander Raus*', becomes a nodal point, a space for a multiplicity of political articulations to emerge. As Forrest notes:

Throughout the duration of the event, large crowds gathered in the Herbert-von-Karajan-Platz itself to debate the policies of the FPÖ in the public realm: an elderly man sporting war medals emerged to vocally support the expulsion of foreigners from Austria; a middle-aged man and his children carried a sign registering their shame about the slogans displayed during the event' an angry local was arrested for trying to pull down the signs; an arsonist attacked the containers; Schlingensief was berated for wasting taxpayers' money; a hacker temporarily shut down the web server; and tourists and locals alike gathered around to discuss and try to make sense of the event. (Forrest, 2008, p. 96)

As these events make clear, however, BLÖ does not activate public debate simply in terms of a disinterested, rational-instrumental conversation around policies of the Haider government. It is a 'total mobilisation'. Schlingensief's explicit aim with the work is to engage audiences and viewers in active practices of meaning-making (Forrest, 2008, p. 96). The central task of BLÖ, then, as a work of public art, is to constitute a space for this participation. In this sense, just as much as it activates public debate, BLÖ enlivens it – demanding participation and involvement from its audiences. Constituting a space for a certain '*Selbstprovokation*' (self-provocation), which as Forrest argues, is "a process in which it is the responsibility of the viewer to both work through – and try to make sense of – the feelings, ideas, concerns, and prejudices aroused in them by the event" (Forrest, 2008, p. 97). This is precisely the 'exposing function' of public art that Tweraser sees as central to BLÖ. It constitutes a space of emergences, a 'site of enactment', a public space of self-provocation. The

Figure 3. Schlingensief in action
Source: Poet, 2000

Figure 4. Public in action
Source: Poet, 2000

stage on which BLÖ is set, is, therefore, at once the enlivenment of the physical (ontic) space (Herbert-von-Karajan-Platz) where it is situated, as well as a fundamental, ontological staging of the grounds of political being and becoming itself.

With Schlingensief, public art is not simply the delineation or segmentation of a stratified public space as a sedimented totality. It is instead a constitution of public space as a space of emergences, a space of self-provocation(s). Schlingensief's public space is a multiplicity; it is a public space constituted "against the authoritarian character of new physical public spaces – spaces of exclusion – and against the authoritarianism inherent in the concept of the public as a homogenous group – a coherence achieved by expelling conflicts…" (Deutsche, 1992, p. 43).

1.3 Staging, Provocation, Spatialisation

The crucial point here is staging – BLÖ is a particular staging (physical and ontological) of public space that opens a political terrain of multiple articulations. We can think this staging, following Lefort, as a fundamental *mis-en-scène* (Lefort, 1988, pp. 11–12). Lefort's point of departure is a distinction between a 'scientific view' of politics as a particular sphere of human experience and activity, and a primordial experience that constitutes and shapes this view (Lefort, 1988, pp. 10–11). In other words, Lefort draws our attention to an ontological moment where the social, society as such, is first instituted/grounded. Society is not a preconstituted totality, it is to be constructed. The social is a negativity that is to be filled in. This is precisely what Lefort refers to as the 'empty place of power' in democracy (Lefort, 1988, p. 17). But this empty place is also constitutive of a public space – since, by its very emptiness, it opens a terrain of contestation and antagonism in which multiple, dissonant articulations can emerge – each laying claim to filling-in the emptiness (Deutsche, 1996, p. xxiv; Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 137). And is this staging not precisely what is enacted by Schlingensief's BLÖ? As a staging, it constitutes a public space because it stages the ontological empty place – the contingent and open character of the social. And in this way, it demands participation – in terms of a self-provocation – because it demands a filling in of this emptiness. BLÖ as public art constitutes a public space by a staging of social negativity that admits of heterogeneous articulations and enactments.

These Lefortian considerations also call on us to rethink the nature of space constituted by public art, in our case, BLÖ. To be sure, BLÖ does not constitute public space as a static, totalizing space. But it also does not constitute any substantive space of multiplicity either. For, if public space is nothing but the staging of the empty ground of the social, it stands to reason, that public space itself is nothing but negativity, an emptiness that opens itself – and remains open – to radical plurality. Marchart captures the point succinctly when he argues that "public space itself is not a space at all (nor a space among spaces), but rather a principle – of reactivation, of the political dislocation of social sedimentations…" (Marchart, 2019, p. 136). It is in this sense that we can now re-think the 'exposing function' of BLÖ, and public art in general. Perhaps we should speak of BLÖ as constituting what

Marchart calls a 'spatialization' (Marchart, 2019, pp. 114–115) . That is, constituting a public 'space' (a non-space) that is the ontological ground of the construction of space (as fully formed totality) itself.

So, we find ourselves some way from Adorno's concerns about public art and the space it constitutes. Against the wariness of the homogenizing, rationalizing, totalizing tendency that drives public art, we have Schlingensief's BLÖ that demonstrates and enacts, as public art, a spatialization. BLÖ allows us to reconceive public art away from an image of occupation and towards one that imagines it "… as a practice that constitutes a public by engaging people in public debate" (Deutsche, 1992, p. 39). Public art, then, takes on an ontological function that vitiates art's autonomy in an Adornian sense. The large-scale confusion surrounding BLÖ (who set it up, is it performance or demonstration, is it real or satire, so on) is testament to a certain self-transgression of art. The lines of division, or alienation, from social reality are blurred and it becomes impossible to tell art apart as an autonomous sphere. For Deutsche, this self-transgression is the positive condition of possibility of public art (Deutsche, 1992, pp. 42–43). Art transgresses itself and links up with other sites and energies that can then constitute a public space as spatialization.

Yet, this prompts a different set of questions. What is the precise operation of public art? For sure, it constitutes a public space/spatialization, but in what manner exactly? How and in what sense does public art constitute its public? The argument that public art stages a public space is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough, unless it analyzes the means by which its operation – its 'exposing function' – is carried out. My contention is that a response to these questions is conceivable from the very terrain that – at least in Deutsche's view (1992, p. 37) – inhibits public art: aesthetics.

2. Force: Aestheticization and the Crowd

The turn to aesthetic theory is not a turn towards a straightforward philosophy of art. It is, instead, to draw our attention to a sensuous mode of perception and experience in human activity in general. Aesthetics reveals to us a different way, uncovering possibilities that are concealed by established modes of knowledge and representation (Bernstein, 1993, pp. 5, 9; Menke, 2008, p. 61). Following Menke, I argue that aesthetics enables a critical reflexivity towards ordinary modes of cognition, reason, experience, meaning and agency (Menke, 2008, p. 64). In this sense, aesthetics enables a distinctly non-cognitive-rational experience of objects – drawing our attention to their very presence/being.

2.1 An Aesthetics of Force

Aesthetics, then, can be conceived in terms of a general philosophy of Sense. This is the line of argument Menke develops – re-conceiving Sense in terms of the

category of Force. Building on Herder's aesthetic-anthropological project, Menke suggests a fundamental ontological division between Faculty and Force – a division that tracks the divide Cognition/Sense (Menke, 2013, p. 12). By faculties, Menke draws our attention to rational-cognitive, determinate practices of which the fully-formed, self-transparent subject is a repository (Menke, 2013, p. 20). The subject thus exercises and deploys its faculties in particular ways to achieve practical success. Counterposed to faculties, Menke draws our attention to the operation of Force – a distinctly aesthetic operation, precisely because it is not rational-cognitive or determinate. Following Heder, Menke conceives of this Force as a pre-subjective terrain of multiplicity and play that is the condition of possibility of subjective fullness (Menke, 2013, pp. 60–61). Indeed, as Herder himself notes, "Thinking is not the first thing in the human being…The human being, the animal first senses; senses obscurely himself; then senses himself vividly…and only now does he have cognition." (Herder, 2006, pp. 41–50; Menke, 2010, p. 556). Force is the ground of subjective faculties – but, all the same, it is not an ordinary ground, in terms of some foundational 'aesthetic nature'. Force is a ground precisely as that which both makes possible subjective faculties and that into which the fully-formed subject dissolves into pre-subjective multiplicity (Menke, 2013, p. 80). It is not a concealed substratum or hidden ground, but an always-there, always interrupting and transforming presence – expressing and irrupting into the segmented stability of subjective faculties (Menke, 2013, p. 50).

Menke's account of force as rupture allows us to see more clearly several dimensions of its operation that are particularly pertinent for our discussion. First, that the aesthetic force is not a determinate state, or disposition. Indeed, Herder argues that the concept of force points to a fundamental form of apperception that philosophy must presupposes when it does what it does: "to observe, order together, elucidate" (Herder, 2002, p. 194). So not only is force not a primordial state, it only ever exists as/in relation; in the irruption into and transformation of subjective faculties. Moreover, the rift introduced in the subject by force is one that is brought forth over and over. A process that is endlessly repetitive (*wiederholen*); each interruption building on and supplementing the last (Menke, 2010, p. 560, 2013, p. 43). We can therefore think of aesthetics as a generalized process of aestheticization – a process that is always unfinished, constantly underway.

Second, that force is a bringing-forth of a pre-subjective, pre-rational terrain. The subject as a fully-formed wholeness is dissolved into a multiplicity of force. Menke argues that force brings forth a terrain of play – of endless and myriad possibilities that are enabled by the breaking down of subjective totality (Menke, 2013, pp. 44, 47). We can think this play, following Nietzsche, as a certain intoxication; as "the collective release of all the symbolic powers" (Nietzsche, 1968, pp. 40–41). For Menke, this intoxication is also at once "the primal condition of the human

being…a condition of regression, a relapse into the pre-subjective condition of sensuous activity" (Menke, 2014, p. 250).   With play, Menke aims to identify two complementary elements of the operation of force. One, that play enables an openness to heterogeneity, and two, that play is also at once constructive in that it is aimed at a reconstruction (in a novel, different way) of the dissolved subject. This dual aspect is captured in the category of the Imagination (*Einbildung*) as a formation of unity (*Einheitsbildung*), "in which we receive, transform and communicate…not only images, but also sounds, words, signs and feelings…A process by which the soul can receive and transform itself" (Herder, 2002, pp. 192, 206; Menke, 2013, p. 42). This dual-aspect is crucial to our discussion – because what it uncovers is that aestheticization, as the operation of force, is not simply a dissolution of the subject, but a dissolution that always seeks to recover subjective unity in a different way; by way of (self)transformation.

At the same time – and this is the third dimension – recognizing force as an interruption (irruption) also allows us to recognise its Evental character. To be sure, my point is not that the operation of force is itself an Event – that would put into question its processual character. My claim is simply that the operation of force is encountered by the subject as an experience in the order of the Event. The processual operation of force, its repetitive bursting-forth is, from the subjective perspective a rupture of an Evental form. The operation of force is an Evental encounter that interrupts and dissolves the segmented unity and totality of subjective being. A rupture in "the continuum of biographical and historical time" (Seel, 2008, p. 100). One that is surprising and overwhelming precisely because it is the breakdown of linearity and determinacy. The surging forth of drives and forces that form the wellspring of radically different modes of self-formation. And does not this Evental character suggest precisely the manner in which public art, as aestheticization, constitutes a public 'space' as a principle of reactivation? It is because of the Evental character of the subjective encounter with force, an Event made possible by an aestheticization that constitutes the operation of public art, that public art constitutes public space as a spatialization, a reactivation. The operation of force is encountered as an Event because the operation of force is a dissolution of the subject into a pre-subjective terrain of multiplicity. This dissolution is at once a certain reactivation, for it dissolves and puts into question structuration and segmentarity – the fully-formed subject of faculties is dispersed. And here is the central point – it is this reactivating possibility carried by aestheticization that uncovers the precise operation of public art as a constitution of spatialization.

Bitte Liebt Österreich is an instantiation of precisely this Event-character of public art. In my view, this is exactly the self-provocation that Schlingensief's work institutes. It is a provocation of the self – the fully-formed, structured subject – by an emergence of that which disperses it entirely. The encounter with BLÖ is a

surprising, and even shocking, experience. We find a fundamental rupture. On the one hand, this is because the work problematizes neat segmentarities and lines of division through its ambiguity; no one know who the work is organized by, what it means, what its message is. The 'viewer' – or agent – must intervene to make sense of the work, and this intervention entails the operation of force. For, the work's resistance to meaning is a frustration of the subject and a failure of its faculties. All that is left is the processual operation of force. On the other hand, this ambiguity is made possible by BLÖ's form. Schlingensief's work blurs the lines between performance, art, primetime television, and political mobilization presenting itself as a radically different experience of (and encounter with) citizenship, nationalism, belonging, ethics and the 'Austrian public'. In blurring boundaries, the work institutes a terrain of play – in its sense of multiplicity *and* unity-formation (*Einheitsbildung*) – where multiple different possibilities emerge simultaneously and in collusion or conflict with each other. The old man in the Austrian military uniform, as one possibility of 'making sense' emerges simultaneously with the middle-aged man and his children decrying the banner. Each such expression – the old man, the middle-aged man and his children, the arsonist, the angry local, the tourists, Austrian politicians, and so on – is a particular affective-visceral expression of the operation of force as each agent attempts to 'make sense' against the backdrop of subjective dissolution. An operation that is engendered by BLÖ in its constitution of space as a spatialization, as aestheticization. An ontological reactivation and provocation.

At the same time, the manner in which BLÖ blurs boundaries also us to glimpse the nature of the terrain that it brings forth by way of an aestheticisation. To be sure, this is a pre-subjective terrain of play and possibility. A sort of alienation as the subject is removed from 'itself'. Not an alienation from society as a whole, but an element within it (Rebentisch, 2016, p. 81). A fundamental split or rupture in a subjective self-understanding or determination (Rebentisch, 2016, pp. 29–30, 258). Aesthetic experience reveals an essential non-identity; the self is revealed in a radically different way. Juliane Rebentisch argues this split as that between a culturally coded 'outer nature' and the more primordial 'inner nature' of affective-visceral drives, desires and impulses that churns below (Rebentisch, 2016, pp. 38–40).

We can note already the close affinities between her account of 'inner nature', and our discussion of aestheticisation as the operation of force. But what is most important is how Rebentisch sees inner nature, as force, operating. She argues, "the force exerted by these desires is not to be viewed as a substantive essence that could be assigned to a unified subject (or his somatic core). Instead, they develop in constellation, deriving from the mimetic relation of the subject to the external world." (Rebentisch, 2016, p. 37). So, the operation of force, *pace* Rebentisch, is not simply the dissolution of rational-cognitive subjectivity – it is its dissolution in a

particular form. Namely, a dissolution that unfolds itself in relations of constellation and mimesis to the external world. On the one hand as constellation, the operation of force is an encounter with multiplicity – of interinvolvements and resonances between disparate drives/tendencies with heterogeneous sites of 'origin'. Drives and processes that are not simply within a fully-formed subject, but exceed it and flow through it. On the other hand, mimesis reveals the identification and immediacy of the ostensible interiority of the operation of force with a complex, exterior multiplicity. We are therefore, not only dealing with the dissolution of subjective faculties into a pre-subjective interiority. Rather, we are speaking of its dissolution into a heterogeneous and plural terrain of play that subverts and moves freely across boundaries and artifices of subject/object or interior/exterior.

2.2 Towards an Aesthetics of the Crowd

Conceiving the operation of force as a relation of constellation and mimesis allows us to begin to think of aestheticization in terms of an aesthetics of the crowd. What I mean by this is that reconceiving aestheticization as an aesthetics of the crowd reorients, directly and explicitly, the operation of public art towards the heterogeneous and pluralizing energies that are its ground. An aesthetics of the crowd is a recognition of the fact that the dissolution of the subject is at once the problematization of boundaries, of limits – of interiority. An aesthetics of the crowd is an aesthetics of the multiple – of the radically plural, of irreconcilable difference. It is a recognition, in other words, of *publicness*. Certainly, the self-provocation of BLÖ is a *self*-provocation; but an aesthetics of the crowd underscores how this provocation of the self is enabled by forces and drives that exceed the self and move freely between us, the other, and the world. An aesthetics of the crowd brings to the fore the operation of force as relation: a relation that occurs in constellation, that unfolds in a mimetic relation to the external world. It is a recognition of the folding together of social and material realities, affective and visceral dispositions, performative practices, art, and social praxis into the regression from rational-cognitive and practical subjectivity to playful force. It is an attunement to how these heterogeneous and plural drives and impulses play a central role in enabling an exploration of possibilities that pose – for us – what Rebentisch, following Ernst Tugenhadt, calls the 'question of truth' – of who we are, what we can be, and what we want to be (Rebentisch, 2016, p. 31).

And BLÖ, in its self-provocation that blurs boundaries, I argue, sets into motion precisely such an aesthetics of the crowd. As public art, it constitutes, as we have seen, a public space in terms of a spatialization – an ontological reactivation. This, in turn, is in the manner of an aestheticization, so that the operation of public art (and in particular, BLÖ) is an aestheticization in terms of an operation of force. At the same time, however, this force is not a subjective interiority, but on account of

the subject's dissolution, is one that operates in and through relations of constellation and mimesis with the external world in ways that problematizes and erases (subjective) boundaries. In this sense, then, we can think of the constitution of public space (spatialization) by BLÖ as the setting into motion of an aesthetics of the crowd.

Even so, BLÖ points up an internal limit to any account of an aesthetics of the crowd – limits that triangulate the specificity of public art's operation. First, that by crowd we do not mean any valorized account of community. An aesthetics of the crowd finds no refuge in any totality, any notion of community, nation or *Volk*. It is an aesthetics of the crowd, and not the mass. An aesthetics of the crowd as pure multiplicity – always (n-1), always less than totality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 5). An aesthetics category of the crowd is the opening up to the assemblage-character of the operation of public art; its ontological reactivation as a process of pluralization. To return the crowd to the mass, to the community, is to undo precisely what the operation of public art first sets up. Schlingensief's work recognizes this essential limit – BLÖ is not only for Austrians, it is also not only for the Viennese. Schlingensief routinely addresses tourists during the performance, prompting even Vienna's Mayor to declare about the work, "*Das ist ein Spiel…Österreich ist anders.*" ("This is a game…Austria is different") (Forrest, 2008, p. 98).

So, this is the operation of public art: setting into motion an aesthetics of the crowd. It is by this operation that it constitutes a public space (spatialization). This, then, is the import of BLÖ – that as public art, it gives us an insight into its very operation – into the ontological reactivation it institutes by its very (public) presence. All the same, Schlingensief's work espouses a concretely democratic project, but is this true of all public art? Grasped as the setting into motion of an aesthetics of the crowd, is public art innately democratic? What precisely is its relation to democracy and democratic politics? We must now turn to these questions.

3. Democracy and Public Art

On the one hand, as we have seen, public art constitutes an ontological opening up to multiplicity in terms of a spatialization. On the other hand, it is because public art puts into motion a distinct aesthetics of the crowd that folds these multiplicities within itself that public art is 'capable' of carrying out its spatialization. Now, this spatialization, however, is nothing other than the activation of several, even dissonant and disparate, possibilities; each carrying within itself the potential of actualization in and through this 'space' of play. Spatialization as the constitutive function of public art is an essentially indeterminate process – nothing is guaranteed in it. It is riven with an inescapable contingency.

'Public space' is always a construction, a particular articulation – a contingent and political category that is inseparable from the conflictual relations that mark

its contingent and political character (Deutsche, 1996, pp. xiv, 274). Public art as a spatialization is, therefore, only the unmasking of this contingent ground. With public art, we have a primordial moment of opening up – what we have earlier seen to be a certain Event or rupture – but there is no second moment that follows from the operation of public art itself. There is an exposing moment – an exposing function – to public art, but no moment of closure, no determining function. This is not to say that the operation of force as play is not also to strive for determinacy; it is, instead, to recognize what Laclau calls the constitutively incomplete nature of the social (Laclau, 1996, p. 37). Any claim to totality/unity is only always partial, any attempt at grounding or 'stabilizing' is only a partial attempt (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, pp. 135–137). Play as an *Einheitsbildung* is perpetually pushing against play as the dissolution of unity into multiplicity. Marchart reinforces this contingent nature of the 'space' constituted by public art:

> What this articulation creates is, quite simply, a common space (one space among many). This space has no substantial base that a priori distributes and determines all positions in it…; rather, it is the contingent result of an articulatory practice that links up all positions to form a topography in the first place. This practice is simply politics; it is…a practice of spatialization. (Marchart, 2019, p. 129)

Indeed, space as spatialization, is conceivable only in terms of this contingency and indeterminacy. Public art, if it is to be a constitution of spatialization, a reactivation, must then be irredeemably contingent and open to articulation. This has a significant consequence for the relation of public art to democracy. For, if public art constitutes a spatialization then there can be nothing essentially democratic about it. Nothing flows of necessity from this contingent terrain (Laclau, 1996, pp. 43–44). In the encounter with public art, a democratic actualization is just as likely as an undemocratic one. So, what then of the link to democracy? What, then, of BLÖ?

One set of responses emerge when we reconsider democracy both as a project and as an ontological 'condition'. On the one hand, it is clear that there can at best only be a tenuous link between public art and democratic politics, so long as the latter is understood in terms of a concrete, particular political project or articulation. This is because any such project articulates a totality, a fullness that conceals the very multiplicity that public art activates. In this sense, then, it would appear that the operation of public art, and that of democratic politics are diametrically opposed.

As ontological 'condition', on the other hand, democracy is no longer a concrete project or image – it is instead a fundamental orientation to the world – a certain world-picture (*Weltanschauung*). A fundamental mode of relating to processes of

being and becoming; a way of attuning oneself to the contingent, and so hetero-geneous, ground of being. As Laclau points out, "…I see democracy as a type of regime which makes fully visible the contingent character of the hegemonic link" (Laclau, 2001, p. 5). Deutsche drives home the point, tying together and building on themes identified in the preceding discussion:

> Democracy and its corollary, public space, are brought into existence, then, when the idea that the social is founded on a substantial basis, a positivity, is abandoned. The identity of society becomes an enigma and is therefore open to contestation. But, as Laclau and Mouffe argue, this abandonment also means that society is 'impossible' – which is to say, that the conception of society as a closed entity is impossible. For without an underlying positivity, the social field is structured by relationships among elements that themselves have no essential identities. Negativity is thus part of any social identity, since identity comes into being only through a relationship with an 'other' and, as a consequence, cannot be internally complete. (Deutsche, 1996, p. 274)

As the preceding discussion on Lefort makes clear, with democracy – grasped as an ontological condition – we have the end of any theological-metaphysical grounding of society as such in some universal law or principle. Democratic soci-ety seeks no grounding other than itself, its own self-institution (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 137). But this necessarily involves coming to terms with plurality – with the plural possibilities of foundation, of institution. Democracy, then, is the culti-vation of an openness towards a multiplicity of beliefs, projects, and interests; and towards the heterogeneous processes of being and becoming that constitute them.

Conceived in this manner, public art is essentially and inescapably connected to democracy. For, this democratic cultivation is precisely the operation of public art. Public art's institution of a spatialization through the setting into motion of an aesthetics of the crowd is the opening up of a terrain of multiplicity in which we can find "a proliferation of social movements organized around irreducibly dif-ferent political identities, a heterogeneity ungovernable by predetermined norm." (Deutsche, 1992, p. 51). In other words, public art is an instituting of democracy. On the one hand, then, public art shares at best a fragile and indeterminate con-nection to democratic politics (as a concrete, particular project and articulation), but on the other, it is essentially and fundamentally connected to democracy as an ontological condition or principle. For, it is with public art that we have the possibility of encountering and experiencing a contingent and antagonistic terrain of multiplicity and play that can become the ground for radical self-transformation and reimagination. This, ultimately, is the import of *Bitte Liebt Österreich*.

Conclusion

So, public art is at once the possibility and the impossibility of a democratic politics. And here we return to a distinctly Adornian moment in our discussion. For, it appears, in one respect, that public art is nothing other than the mimetic return of that which is suppressed by instrumental reason (Adorno, 2018b, pp. 25–28). It is nothing other than the return of a conflictual and antagonistic terrain of contingent articulations that is suppressed by democracy – in both its liberal and authoritarian varieties. Not only then, from this Adornian perspective, is public art impossible – it is the very condition of art itself!

Naturally, my discussion of Adorno here is more heuristic than systematic. Yet, I suggest this discussion – brief as it is – points to an important characteristic of public art that it has been the aim of this paper to argue for. Namely, that public art is the constitution of public space only in terms of a particular exposing-function. That is, as an opening up of a contingent, political terrain of contestation. Against totality, public art – when conceived in this form – points up the limits of absolute fullness, and in doing so enables heterogeneous and plural possibilities of being and becoming. It does this – I have argued – through an essentially aesthetic operation which I have described as an aesthetics of the crowd. By setting into motion such an aesthetics, public art activates – or reactivates – potentialities for radically re-imagined and creative modes of self-formation. This is its democratic character. I have attempted, through the course of my discussion, to substantiate this argument through a dialectical involvement with Schlingensief's BLÖ – drawing from it as an exemplar of an aesthetics of the crowd, while simultaneously also enriching our understanding of the work and its operation.

At the same time, my point here is not that an aesthetics of the crowd is the essential character of all public art or is somehow its historical form. It is merely a particular operation within a particular mode of existence of public art – that is, a mode in which public art constitutes a public space as a spatialization. We can think of an aesthetics of the crowd, then, as the operation of public art that is in the Schlingensief-ian manner (though of course, this operation is not exclusive to his work). In any case, it is by no means a universal character of public art. That this exemplarity distinguishes some works of public art from others allows us, in my view, to reinforce the specificity of public art (in the Schlingensief-ian manner) and its emancipatory-democratic possibilities.

With this in mind, we seem to have come full circle. We cannot escape Deutsche's problematization with which this paper began. But perhaps we can, as I hope to have done through this discussion, locate the possibilities not only to 'make sense' of BLÖ, but to 'provoke' the actualization of political and artistic practices that draw their energies from an aesthetics of the crowd; energies that are, in my view, distinctly democratic.

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KA ESTETICI GOMILE: PUBLIKA, POLITIKA I DEMOKRATSKO BIĆE U ŠLIGENZIFOVOJ DRAMI *MOLIMO VAS DA VOLITE AUSTRIJU* (2000)

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APSTRAKT:

Iako je Šligenzifova drama pod nazivom *Molimo vas da volite Austriju* često predmet rasprava o javnoj umjetnosti i estetici, gotovo da se uopšte o njoj ne raspravlja kao o takvom djelu. Kako ova drama, kao javna umjetnost, tvori javni prostor, ako ga uopšte tvori? Kako da razumijemo to iskustvo i kako da se suočimo s ovim djelom? Na kraju, možemo li razmišljati o ovoj predstavi kao o političkoj umjetnosti, odnosno, da budemo precizniji, demokratskoj? Autor istražuje i detaljno razrađuje estetsko-političke „uloge" ove drame tako što ih razmatra u kontekstu teorija radikalne demokratije i filozofske estetike. Ovaj rad zasniva se na tri tvrdnje. Prva tvrdnja jeste da je ova drama, uprkos stavovima da je nemoguće postaviti javni prostor na scenu, duboko u sebi javna kada izvodi upravo taj čin, istinski mizanscen. Ovo je aktivno postavljanje na scenu, ne postavljanje za nekoga nego usred nečega. Ovo nas dovodi do druge tvrdnje da je takva tvorba javnog prostora omogućena određenim radnjama koje su priroðene tom iskustvu i susretu s javnom umjetnošću. Naglašavam ove radnje kao iznošenje na vidjelo jednog presubjektivnog, neodređenog područja drame kroz ono što nazivam „estetika gomile". Ovo pokretanje jedne takve estetike jeste jedan od izraza polivokalnih raznolikosti i radikalne razlike koja raspršava sopstveno jedinstvo subjekta u tokove nekoherentne energije. Upravo zbog toga što se subjekat raspršava na ovaj način javljaju se mogućnosti da se kreativni oblici samooblikovanja, iznova zamišljeni u potpunosti, pojave tokom susreta s javnom umjetnošću. Treća i posljednja tvrdnja, zasnovana na post-fundacionalističkim teorijama demokratije, govori o tome da je ova predstava demokratska upravo stoga što podstiče estetiku gomile, te što time omogućava proces samooblikovanja koji se oslanja na raznolike i mnogostruke oblike energije duž linije razdvajanja. Ovo je politički značaj ove predstave; tokom samog predstavljanja na sceni i samim tim činom, ona u prvi plan stavlja estetiku koja postaje osnov za mogućnost demokratskog samooblikovanja.