

# Editorial

## Dorothee Richter, Eleonora Stassi, Tanja Trampe

“Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics” is being published within the framework of the Parallel Events accompanying Zurich’s Manifesta 11 devoted to the theme “What People Do for Money: Some Joint Ventures”. Unlike the Manifesta concept, the contributions to this journal relate the changes that have come about in working conditions and circumstances since the early 1990s directly to the multifarious migration movements in Europe.

To this day, changes in working processes and migration movements are usually regarded as mutually isolated “problems”. However, we see the connection between them as a geopolitical reality rooted in political and economic power structures, aspirations to hegemony and the battle for resources, a reality that already began to take shape in the harbingers of neoliberalism. Whereas in the eighteenth century the impoverished working class still found itself directly confronted with a wealthy upper class, today these lines of conflict traverse the globe horizontally.

Work as such, its distribution, and the distribution of the profits it yields have shifted radically over the past thirty years. Whereas planning and organization have remained—well networked—in the so-called First World, manual and mechanical types of work have moved to so-called developing countries. A workforce is thus still needed, but geographically the labour is to be carried out in the labourers’ native countries, because otherwise the low-wage system would no longer function. However, people migrate not only on account of wages that no longer suffice to secure a livelihood, but also owing to the complex circumstances brought about by wars that, at least on the surface, appear in the guise of religious or racial conflicts. Beneath the surface, however, the struggles rage over claims to hegemony and the territorial domination of resources. Owing to its (relatively) democratic politics and relative prosperity, the “West” has become the auspicious destination of migratory movements. When the newcomers arrive here, their situation again becomes complicated. Our democracies do not welcome them with the open arms they envisioned. Here, matters of self-empowerment—for example, by means of paid work—play a key role. Only a small number of lucky people on the organization/management level of the “First World” benefit from the globalization of labour conditions—so-called “expats” who are able to move about autonomously and freely in foreign countries. Mobility and networks are important factors here, and ones that also prove advantageous for the work carried out in the various fields of the creative industry.

The idea on which the Manifesta 11 concept is based—the adherence to the division of the working world into traditional sectors and trades—is one we consider obsolete. Current post-Fordist structures assign only marginal status to the male-dominated professions in the trades that form the foundation of the Manifesta concept. Work processes and the demands made on wage labour underwent

radical change long ago. In the sense of a “new spirit of capitalism” as investigated by Ève Chiapello and Luc Boltanski, we should no longer be content to criticize capitalism, but must also point out the crisis of anti-capitalist critique.<sup>1</sup> Directly correlating the post-Fordist conception of labour and the concrete conditions of (im)migration, we hereby refer specifically to the praxis of the city of Zurich, one third of whose population has a migrant background but no say in political matters, not even on the local level. This is a fact that unfortunately receives no attention whatsoever within Manifesta’s definition spectrum. A further decision, likewise rooted in this traditionalist approach, is mirrored in the list of artists, in which women artists, at a ratio of 30 to 70 percent, find themselves far outnumbered by their male colleagues...

From the perspective of the current discourse on curating cultivated by this journal regardless of the respective specific theme, the Manifesta administrative director affirm a conservative trend inasmuch as she and a committee appointed an artist to act as curator. Within the curatorial discourse, there is a strong faction that deliberately takes a stand against the practice of transferring the problematic genius concept from the artist to the curator (as a meta-artist). It is no coincidence that feminist curators (among others) call attention to this problematic issue. Their stance implies a number of alternative–i.e. discursive and institutional-critique-oriented–approaches to curating; after all, they conceive representation as a power constellation. Our attitude–and thus the outlook that finds expression in this edition–is in keeping with a current interest in non-representative curatorial approaches, long-term processes, intensive knowledge acquisition, and alternative formats. “Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics” has accordingly taken advantage of the comfortable time span of eight months to experience and develop deliberately exceptional curatorial approaches. On the basis of a workshop series and using the interview as a tool, the students of the international Postgraduate Programme in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts examined the multifarious–and, without exception, strongly politically oriented–interrelationships between work, migration, and geopolitical individuality. In numerous intensive discussions, they acquainted themselves with living circumstances in relation to the city of Zurich and reflected on their own positions, but also especially on the status of migrants from less privileged circumstances. One part of the process was to read a selection of texts serving as a framework for the widely varied “personal geopolitics” by offering more general deliberations on migration and labour.

Migration movements call the order of an economic system into question. Giorgio Agamben takes this circumstance as his point of departure when, in his text “Beyond Human Rights”, he describes the transcultural as an oppressed concept. “In the face of state sovereignty, which can affirm itself only by separating in every context naked life from its form, they [intellectuality and thought] are the power that incessantly reunites life to its form or prevents it from being dissociated from its form.”<sup>2</sup> A vague form of existence not bound to any borders gives migrants a subversive power; their fluctuation raises questions about nationalist definitions. For this reason, migration is often combated, although it is in no way economically or socially sensible to combat it.

Inspired by the concepts of interculturality and transnationality, “Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics” takes a look at the omnipresent post-migratory existence and seeks to arrive at the most concentrated possible descriptions with the aid of the broadest possible field research. The subversion inherent to the migratory per se moreover mobilizes humorist forces that defy the drastic nature of many real political situations. One popular satirical device is the meme, a

type of commentarial image-text collage currently spreading like wildfire on the web. Memes are a sociocultural phenomenon disseminated in the social media and capable of constant reproduction and reinterpretation. The message can be of a humorous, satirical or revelatory nature; the intention can be the artistic pleasure afforded by memes or the advertisement of a product, but also self-representation or propaganda. Usually the author remains anonymous, and copyright aspects are evaded. A meme that plays with popular motifs can burst the bounds of its circulation framework and reap attention outside the Internet as well. The memes we are publishing in this edition are commentaries developed by the students and results of a thematic workshop headed by the Zurich media art duo !Mediengruppe Bitnik.

Individual tableaus from the comic *The Glorious 7* produced by the Viennese collective MigrafonA constitute another illustrative intervention. The variable collective condenses debates on migration policy into comics from the migrants' perspective. *The Glorious 7* of 2011 has lost nothing of its topicality to this day; it addresses processes of transformation in wage labour, borders and national states, casualization, impoverishment, and control and discipline measures affecting large portions of the European population.

The interviews were conducted by the students individually or as a group, wherever possible in person, or via e-mail dialogues or Skype. This multitude of possibilities helped bridge distances and put some students on the road. They approached artists, curators, activists, institutional and non-institutional organizations, social workers, architects, and theorists in the context of Zurich or on the international level. Every submission took on a shape of its own.

Mariana Bonilla Rojas, Cordelia Oppliger, and Silvia Savoldi dedicated their contribution to the Sans-Papiers centre in Zurich (SPAZ). A multiplicity of voices emerges from the discourse: not only that of Bea Schwager, a representative of SPAZ, but also that of Fany, an ex-Sans Papiers.

In the case of Grandhotel Cosmopolis, the interview is not just a conversation but becomes a place. Frédéric Bron and Silvia Converso spent twenty-four hours in Augsburg, and their report and the dialogues with Susa Gunzner and Sibil Sattler together recreate that particular microcosm of the overall context.

Ludovica Parenti and Emilie Bruner worked on an artistic dialogue with the founder of the school Autonome Schule Zürich (ASZ), Sadou Bah, based on a 1961 conversation between Alberto Moravia and Claudia Cardinale for *Esquire Magazine*.

Hana Cisar conducted two important interviews relating the topics of migration and work to the territory of architecture: one with architect Anne-Julchen Bernhardt on urban projects mirroring changes in migrant issues, and the other with political scientist and geographer Mathias Rodatz on the concept of urban citizenship, a political discussion that has recently emerged in the city of Zurich.

Tim Zulauf, Vreni Spieser, and Martin Krenn, interviewed by Katya Knoll, Silvia Converso, and Petra Tomljanović and Katrijn Van Damme respectively, examine their artistic practices in depth. Theatre, migration and post-colonial struggles, production of knowledge and memory, ELDORADO, and the public space are just few of the issues addressed.

Almut Rembges (bblackboxx, Basel), Philipp Lutz (foraus, Swiss Forum on Foreign Policy), and Katharina Morawek (Shedhalle, Zurich) are the protagonists of a roundtable discussion on collaboration and migration moderated by Lisa Lee Benjamin, Franziska Stern-Preisig, and Makiko Takahashi.

Melanie Muñoz and the non-profit organisation Lysistrada discussed sex-work politics in Switzerland with Diana Padilla.

In what they defined “a formal/informal conversation”, Silvia Savoldi and Paloma Rayón talked to Rayelle Niemann about the concept of “identity” in relation to her stateless status and her curating practice. Niemann’s text “Heimat” (Cairo, 2004) is also included in this publication.

Interviewed by Agustina Struengmann, Esther Eppstein and her message salon, as an important contributor to “making Zurich a home for art and artists”, were a must in this issue.

A survey drawn up by Michelle Geser and Debora Mona Liem Adinegoro, highlighting the importance of personal—often also migrant—backgrounds and geopolitics for this OnCurating project, rounded out and provided a framework for the students’ contributions.

*Translated from the German by Judith Rosenthal*

#### **Notes**

1 Luc Boltanski, Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, New York/London,,2006.

2 Giorgio Agamben, “Beyond Human Rights,” in Paolo Virno, Michael Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, pp. 159-165 (printed as facsimile in this issue).

**Eleonora Stassi** is a freelance curator based in Zurich. She defines herself Mediterranean, because of her mixed origins from Italy, Tunisia, Albania, and Slovakia. Her practice and research focus is on identity issues, digital nomadism, and post-migration. Eleonora Stassi is alumna of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating ZHdK: she developed her MAS project under the title Curating (Post) Migration. She is the initiator of the Migrations-Museum Zürich ([www.migrationsmuseumzurich.com](http://www.migrationsmuseumzurich.com)) and the children's publishing house Die blaue Ampel. She has two daughters.

**Tanja Trampe** is a curator, cultural theorist, writer, and artist based in Zurich. First educated as a graphic designer with extensive work experience, she graduated with a degree in cultural theory and holds an MA in curating from the Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK. For ten years she was the assistant curator of Museum Bellerive, an affiliate of the Museum of Design Zurich, where she also co-curated her first exhibitions. In 2013, she was selected to co-curate the 2<sup>nd</sup> POOL exhibition with artworks from the collections of Maja Hoffmann and Michael Ringier at Westbau/Löwenbräukunst Zurich hosted by the LUMA Foundation. Today, she is a freelance curator whose curatorial practice and research focuses on community-based and relational art, the public sphere, and post-colonial issues. As an artist, she is an accomplice of data | Auftrag für parasitäre\* Gastarbeit (Mission in favour of a para-site guest-work) and investigates urban, rural, and socio-political issues through artistic field research and socially engaged art interventions. As an art mediator, she is currently working for the Cabaret Voltaire and is a guest lecturer at the Postgraduate Programme in Curating ZHdK.

**Dorothee Richter** is a Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading/UK, and head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (CAS/MAS Curating) at the Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK, Zurich/CH. Together with Susanne Clausen she is the director of the Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies/Practice-Based Doctoral Programme at the University of Reading. Richter is further the publisher of the web-based journal *OnCurating.org* and has worked extensively as a curator: She initiated the Curating Degree Zero Archive, a documentation on contemporary curators known for their experimental and critical positions which travelled to 18 venues in Europe. She was further the curator of Künstlerhaus Bremen, where she organised several symposia on feminist issues in contemporary arts as well as an archive on feminist practices, including *Materialien/Materials*. Recently she directed in cooperation with Ronald Kolb a film on Fluxus: *Flux Us Now - Fluxus Explored with a Camera* (2013: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, University of Reading, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst Zurich; 2014: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst Bremen, Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden, Kunsthalle São Paolo; 2015: Ostwall Museum Dortmund, Kibbutz College Tel Aviv, Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Museum Tinguely Basel; 2016: Lentos Museum Linz). Together with Ronald Kolb she is currently working on a video archive on curatorial practices, a project in collaboration with the ZHdK and the ZKM Karlsruhe.