



DECONFINING Arts, Culture, and Policies in Europe and Africa

Thiemo Strutzenberger

Salt & Pillars



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Translated from German by Daniel Brunet

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1 Sidiki

The stage is a kind of recreation of the k&k Hofbeisl. At first, there is only a podium, sliding away from the grasp of the music and fog. The dance floor. A screen is on the podium, showing a jaguar on the prowl. One of the performers.

1

I come here and we say hello and get to know each other. You speak French and I don't even it speak it halfway.

Someone, who is filming us, tells us that we should stand up or go, while we are talking, on a walk through Ischl, along the Traun, along the Pfarrgasse, to the abandone Lehartheater. We can understand each, but it is hard to deal broadly with differentiated, complex contexts without misunderstandings and without throwing in the towel.

Shortly after we have met each other, we are sitting in a bookstore and are being filmed.

I notice that as soon as I want to ask about your circumstances, about that Burkina, the Operndorf, Ouagadougou, your work, your life, your topics that only general questions occur to me.

I don't feel anything when I ask myself what the Salzkammergut region has to do with Burkina Faso. We make plans that we want to make plans.

You say, after you have explained something, *politique, politique, politique*, as if that were not everything that makes up your existence and to what extent is it rude to appoint you the ambassador of your country and its situation, to what extent is it impossible to appoint me ambassador of my country?

We could perhaps be ambassadors to each to a small extent, listeners, reporters.

We converse primarily with silence and I speak in simple sentences, largely alone with the language barrier between us. Toward the end of our time here, you say *cousin*, then *brother*, during the radio interview you say *twin brother*.

As we walk through Ischl and we are given some information about the history of the city and the world, how a signature of the Emperor initiated the First World War here, I say to you often that I do not know how k & k and colonialism in Africa fit together now. And you say that you don't know either.

You suggest that we write a play about the workers in the salt mine and the story begins 750 years before the birth of Christ and then the play keeps on going over the entire course of history, until today. And that is my part of the play and you write your part of the play, beginning in Burkina 750 years before the birth of Christ and then you go through the entire history and, at the end, we are sitting in one of our hotel rooms, in mine or in yours. And you say: that is the connection

You come into my room before I leave. You are there while I am packing, sitting on the sofa. We don't have any burning questions. And there is no job and no obligations and all concerns don't come until after these simple, motiveless. I have to go. And you are still staying.

A dance floor. The five performers gradually ask the individual members of the audience to be their dance partners. They sway to the music "The Little Bar" by Peter Alexander. The stage is covered by fog. A deer appears, standing, mythical and majestic.





2 Peter Alexander

A dance floor. The five performers gradually ask the individual members of the audience to be their dance partners. Each of them begin to dance with the audience. They hold their arms outstretched and high. They sway to the music. Then there is traditional pop music and nothing happens for a while. The stage is covered by fog.





3 Window

The text slowly blends with the music.

1
My feet on the asphalt tap down the steep
path to the sea that I charge into.

3
Sand, clay, stones

4
I leap from the wooden tower into
the velvet green water

1
The reeds and the fish that discover looking
into the water from the shore

2
I recite a poem by Schiller, from a blanket, put
on like a coat, one evening, during one
of our performances or *The Sorcerer's
Apprentice*, something like that

1
I am wearing my cousin's dress that evening,
blue, plain material and walk through
the rows, we are performing sketches
and I am the host, no one is particularly
annoyed, it doesn't upset anyone

4
Between the trees, on an area made of grass,
the fire that we are camped around, the
hut standing by itself and the secret of
the trees, of the forests while wandering
with torches through the night.

2
I am sitting at a table brimming with
stability in the dining hall, in front of
me the old script that I am learning.

3
My grandparents wrote their letters in it before
they slowly changed to the Latin script

1
Twenty years later, I am learning the script again
in order to decipher the letters. They are
about their big German dreams, about their
love, their crises, their hope in the war, their
belief in the Führer and in National Socialism.

4
My grandmother gave me the letters, that she
copied into a book, fifteen or twenty years ago.

2
Even today I still haven't managed to
translate them all the way to the end.

1
Who are they for?

3
She says I should do something with them
sometime, what is she thinking about?

4
I am at the lake in the summer.

2
I come from the path and the
stones under the water.

4
We lift the material. I hold it in my hand like
a log. Like a child, holding another child.

5
We hang the log on the line. And one of
us pulls it up while the other holds it
and watches as the material unfold, see
whether it is hanging properly so that it
can glide upward with no hindrance.

3
We hang up the wood and one of us reaches for
the line. We are children in a photograph.
My twin sister and I hoist the flag.

2
One holds the wood and, during this, the other
pulls on the line and the material unfolds.

4
I am wearing Lederhosen and watching
reverently. And she is in a Dirndl.

5
The wood holds the material,
valiantly, full of reverence.

3
She raises the material. She unfolds
the material by hoisting.

4
It hangs on the line

1
like the stones spread out between the feet and
like the sand under the water while I am
surrounded by it and covered and I dive
under the surface to hold my breath, dive
until I can hold my breath for a long time.

4
Below the surface over which the moon is
rising, which will be extolled because it is
rising. And we sing all of the other songs.





2

The stall aroma of the songs and dances,
the equipment upon which we do
gymnastics, the rows in which we stand,
the looks and images, the big and the
little, the community surrounding the
families, in them, between them

4

I don't know what the people doing
gymnastics are thinking about

1

The materials rises like an inverse no
driving sign and it rises and many
people have stepped into the square

5

When the customer left one who drowned
in the lake while swimming, like he often
swam, once over the lake, every day.

2

I don't know why I am ashamed about that

4

The little bit of nationalism, the little
bit of great German dreams. The
little bit of glorifying the past

5

The material is hanging, the air is
standing, the people are standing and
looking at each other. We raised it.

2

The sun has risen.

5

My twin sister and I raise the flag so that
it blows in the wind, for the day and
it is lowered again at night so that it
can be raised again the next day.

1

There are streamers and the streamers
from the neighboring regions are
supposed to be stolen. They are made
out of velvet like the water and have
insignias, probably embroidered from
golden threads, bears and deer

5

It is about the game of the misappropriation
of the honor of the territories for
which the streamers are a symbol.

3

A game for boys who are going hunting.

2

So that they, who are standing around
them can look at the them, see them.
Immerse themselves in them.

1

Black red yellow.

5

Holy Ernst. My Lederhose, her Dirndl.
Or in white shorts and tank tops.
Or in blue synthetic suits, the girls
and women, with leggings.

4

I roll with my cousin over the mattresses to
explore our bodies, her refreshment, but I
believe this cousin was actually never here.

3

The climbing through one's sweetheart's
window in folk dancers. Four arms that
contort so that boys and girls can look
through the arms that form the window.

4

The talk of war, across the border, not far from
here. The splashing, the glittering of the sun
on the water, the green of the endless area
between two forests, how far can on go?

3

And so lay down your brothers in God's name

3

As we raised the flag in the morning, the
news circulated that a visitor to the family
camp had drowned in the lake during
their morning crossing of the lake.

4

We approach the moor

1

In swimming trunks to the reef, maybe we
have backpacks with drinks in them

5

There we plunge into the earth

3

Out of the moor, black faces and arms and upper
bodies of the children and we rub ourselves
with liquid earth, white around the eyes

1

We sit on clumps that you don't sink on, but
instead quietly stand. You must respect the
sharp cutting reed, the broken off stalks.

2

We are standing on clumps of earth, they are
Mohrenköpfe, the heads of moors, as they say





3
 No one asks where the moors left their bodies
 4
 There are no Jews where we danced in
 our folk costume and raised the flag
 5
 I saw the bodies of the gymnasts
 Like statues, busts
 4
 Someone has drowned.
 2
 It hangs and drags, I pull it up.
 4
 I am the one hundred millionth of the
 descendants and it is normal for everyone
 and it works for everyone and it is nothing.

Interlude Uno

3
 I am thinking about the images of masculinity in
 Hollywood films from the 1940s.

And I ask myself the extent to which they elaborate a specific non-German form of masculinity.

George Mosse suggests, I believe, that genealogically hardly any difference can be found between masculinity and militarism.

Mosse wrote: “No matter whether they were Christian or Greek or both, military virtues were always present: at the end of the day, the masculine stereotype was created in revolutions and wars. Heroism, death and sacrifice were just as much associated with masculinity as discipline [...] The soldiers of France came, just like the volunteers that fought in the Prussian army against the French, from all classes of the population [...] The so-called martial ideals themselves were disseminated by the intelligentsia, primarily officers who came from the upper and middle classes. The modern soldier was now, together with the Greek young people and athletes, the model for masculinity.”

The soldiers, the mass of weapons, used up their history, their hope and pains

I am sitting with a friend in a bar and we are talking about these archetypically good male figures as they appeared in Hollywood films from the 1940s. The three returning soldiers in *Best Years of Our Lives*, the US-American soldiers in *Battleground*, Rick in *Casablanca*, the miners in *How Green Was My Valley*, the priest in *Going My Way*, the journalist in *Gentlemen's Agreement*.

What I actually find moving in the films is less what happens directly in association with the war, but instead much more the resolute gentleness of the men.

I notice how in these masculinities, a
 kind of archetype of the good
 and reparative is realized
 They move me, perhaps in an
 unreasonable and uncritical way
 Usually so much that I cry
 Differently from the Hollywood
 masculinities of the 1950s.





4 Scissors

2

Children at play stand between trees and bushes. And they run back and forth between the trees. From one tree to the next. In the game *Schneider Schneider leich ma d'Scha* (*Tailor, Tailor, Lend Me Your Scissors*), the children playing change places while a single child watches. While doing so, the child leans against the trunk of the tree with both hands covering both eyes so that the child cannot see. The watching child turns around quickly after having said their sentence.

If, however, another child is moving and has not reached any of the other trees, this homeless, wandering child who has not arrived at any tree has somehow lost and is eliminated.

And thus this child becomes the next child that has to watch.

There is a version of the game where there is no child that watches, but instead the child stands with their back to the others walking around and asks for a pair of scissors that are not giving to them.

The child is told to ask their neighbor.

We have played this thousands of times.

Interlude Duo

5

In David Marton's production of *Capriccio* by Richard Strauss that I see in Munich, some six people are singing in order to decide whether music or text are the most important thing for an opera. A duchess, a composer, a poet, a philosopher, a singer, a theater director or regisseur and so on gush about themselves in self-referential effusions. It is hard to believe that Strauss composed the last of his operas in 1942 without any reference to the political events of the day. The production, however, makes the deportations of old and undesired people visible. The Jewish ballet dancers and the fragile bodies are disposed of, no one notices it and does anything. The sung debate about art continues on, concerned only with itself.

At the end, the deported people ultimately return and are wearing white clothing. Ghosts. The duchess bursts out with questions about which of the two men whom she is standing between she should decide on now. After a while, she notices the murdered people who have appeared. She notices them. They attract her eye. She notices the deported old woman. She is standing next to the murdered young dancer. Does she remember or is she only seeing herself again in the mirror?

She moves as a mirror image with the delicate, fragile old woman who appears to the duchess wearing a silver, silk bathrobe.

The old woman positions herself at the conductor's podium on the stage, which is part of the set design, which the duchess also tried out earlier. The murdered old Jewish woman, very thin, raises and lowers her arms and conducts the orchestra. The duchess comes to her, they hold each other's hands.

It is probably cheesy. It moves me and I cry.

Somewhere, I hear: the dead need our tears in order to reach the other side.





5 Butterfly & Jaguar

2

I am reading Jamaica Kincaid, who is
writing about her brother: which of his
different egos makes him the happiest?

1

A friend left me a note in a book by Proust, a
greeting. On it was a line from a song by
Blumfeld. It said: Butterfly. Come home.

4

In *Responsibility and Judgment*,
Hannah Arendt said, embedded within
complex philosophical argumentation,
that the Holocaust is something
that should not have happened.

2

The simplicity of this sentence is
surprising. I hear it in the car.

3

It is one of my more scary dreams, in which I
am standing near my grandparents' house.

2

Somewhere in the Upper Austrian
countryside at night.

4

It reveals a black figure that is walking around.

1

A black lion.

2

The meadows are lying peacefully.

4

It is quiet

5

The figure goes

1

it makes me dizzy

2

Dizzy is what a friend says about things and
ways of behaving that are difficult to assess
and that do not provide any proper sense,
do not work or are not thought out.

4

A lion is walking around that is pitch black.

1

The Holocaust is something that
should not have happened.

5

I imagine that an entire generation is coming
and it will do not anything other than be sad

2

Out of the dark
Into the light





6 Caterina Valente

The performers dance with each other on stage, they sway to the music. Gold tinsel descends, blue tinsel follows. The song “Play Habanero one more time for me” by Caterina Valente is played.





DECONFINING Arts, Culture, and Policies in Europe and Africa

DECONFINING is a large-scale collaborative project that aims to create improved and fairer cultural ties between Europe and Africa by developing a sustainable reference model of cooperation.

Building on the close collaboration between the two continents and the integration of their Capitals of Culture programmes, this project brings together cultural practitioners, policymakers, performing, media/visual artists, in-field universities, and audiences from both continents to explore and demonstrate new ways of intercontinental artistic and cultural (policy) cooperation, and to contribute to a better understanding of confinement patterns from different points of view from an intercontinental perspective.



Co-funded by
the European Union

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