

# FORMATE DES WIR

Thursday, 12.12.13, 7 pm

## ”Alternative Models for Learning: Student Protests 1988/89 in West Berlin as a Starting Point“

**Guests: Roland Albrecht  
and Birgit Auf der Lauer**

**Venue: Museum der  
der Unerhörten Dinge,  
Crellestrasse 5-6,  
10827 Berlin**

*Start 7 pm – Miya Yoshida and Annette Maechtel present Formate des WIR, and introduce us to the evening’s event. The discussion takes mainly place in German.*

*In the last few years the term “knowledge production” has been used with increasing frequency in almost all corners of the art world. This hype seems to have arisen from the complex social transformations brought about by Neoliberalism, by the Bologna processes in the field of higher learning, by political shifts and by the effects of globalisation on culture. In this context, can the emergence of terms like half-knowledge, negative knowledge or non-knowledge be understood as a sign of resistance against letting educational institutions always have the last word?*

*A starting point for the evening is provided by material which was collected in the course of researching the student protests in West Berlin in 1988/89, and which is presented by Birgit auf der Lauer in the Museum der Unerhörten Dinge [the Museum of Unheard/Unheard of/Outrageous Things].*

*The evening begins with a greeting by the museum’s director, Roland Albrecht.*

*After the event there is conversation with tea around the oven.*

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#00:00:02-1# Birgit auf der Lauer: East Berlin wasn’t mentioned once in all of the documents I looked through. There’s not a single reference to the situation of the students in East Berlin, at the Humboldt University or the Academy for the Arts in Weißensee. I would have thought there would have been more interest in solidarity and some kind of exchange. But even in these critical, left-leaning pamphlets there was nothing to be found.

#00:01:45-4# Annette Maechtel: When did the student protests begin? Was it before or after the Wall came down?

#00:01:37-3# BL: They began in the winter of 1988 and continued until spring 1989. By then the energy was gone.

#00:01:59-6# Roland Albrecht: When the Wall came down the whole thing fell apart. Then for two years there was just too much excitement. During that time the social movements sank into obscurity. East Berlin wasn’t important, because

East Berlin simply didn’t exist for West Berlin. It was more oriented towards New York or London. And within the movement in West Berlin, they took their cues from Frankfurt.

#00:02:47-3# BL: It supposedly started in Frankfurt with UniMut, and the protests at the universities then later spread to West Berlin. One of the triggers was that the academic senate installed a committee from outside the university. That meant that decisions about the direction the university should be taking weren’t being made by students from the students’ parliament, but instead by externals. The students were concerned that it would become a forum to push through economic and political interests, and endanger the independence of the teaching. The worry was that teaching and research would be bound by conditions and political targets. Other reasons for the protests were cutbacks among the professors and the closing down of various departments. Left-wing or emancipatory seminars and other courses were under threat. The Freie Universität [Free University] called itself the “Be-freite Uni” [Liberated University] during the protests, and the largest institute to be occupied was the OSI – the Otto Suhr Institute was brought to a standstill for months by the Political Science students. They slept there and reorganised it as a living and event space. They distributed autonomous lecture timetables which covered teaching offers from table tennis to martial arts for women and the critique of Colonialism.

#00:05:35-2# AM: So fields were included in the teaching programme which normally wouldn’t be found on the curriculum.

#00:05:43-3# BL: Yes, some of it is self-evident today, like the promotion of multidisciplinary studies, that is, that students from different institutes join up to study together on a project-for-project basis. This point was connection to the Academy for the Arts, which had also joined the protests. They had very clear demands: a forum for student plans, in which students from for example Design, Architecture or Visual Arts could work together on independent projects. To get rid of the class-bound system with Masters, and move towards a communal decision-making about what and how to learn – in which there would also be a lot of room for experimentation. And that gave rise to Interflugs.

#00:07:50-3# AM: Project-based studying is also the model today for the reforms which were

introduced as part of the Bologna process. The demands of back then are, to a degree, now obligatory.

#00:08:13-0# BL: Yes, project-based studies were later included in the general teaching approach at the HdK, and then later again at the University of the Arts. The impulses which came out of the autonomous student demands were integrated in the mainstream teaching programme. There were then cooperative projects, exhibitions, who knows what else. That caused a crisis within Interflugs and Freie Klasse, because it confronted them with an existential issue. The President of the HdK, Ulrich Roloff-Momin – who was also chairman of the nGbK for years and Senator for Culture in Berlin from 1991 to 1996 – liked this idea of multidisciplinary studies and the project-orientated approach from the start, and so he managed to deflate the student protests pretty quickly. He began talks with the student parliament as well as with other interest groups who were demanding an open platform. Then there was a cash infusion – for the other universities as well – to calm everyone down, and the HdK allegedly received 1,2 million Deutsch Marks, which were used to finance an extremely expensive new course of studies. But 100,000 DM were put aside to promote this autonomous students’ plan.

#00:11:43-5# Miya Yoshida: Let’s talk a bit more about what these 100,000 DM were used for.

#00:11:57-8# BL: This money was used to pay the first tutors for Interflugs. It was quite chaotic, because they couldn’t agree on how to structure this autonomous form for student projects. Some wanted it to be a fixed entity with tutors, rooms and equipment – video cameras, video editing studio –, a small institution within a bigger one. Some others were against this, as it proposed a hierarchy between the ones running it and the others, who would from time to time be engaged and active – so they wanted an open forum, with

shifting roles and protagonists, a space to get together and experiment.

#00:13:02-7# AM: Isn't that a complicated situation. They didn't want to become an institution, they wanted to be a movement or critical mass, and at the same time they accepted the money and became part of the institution. That is maybe the difference between Interflugs or Freie Klasse and other forms of autonomous movement, who didn't want to be part of the institution at all. At that time others organised themselves in spaces outside of the institution.

#00:14:13-4# BL: From the moment they existed, they clearly had a discussion going on. It can be seen in their documents: they're talking about 'the revolution from within', 'adapting to the system' and 'how to change the system from within'. As opposed to changing it by coming at it from the outside.

#00:14:51-3# AM: Isn't that a peculiar time, 88/89? All of a sudden you had all these spaces in the East. There were all these autonomous cells and you even had money to hand – an amazing situation, that you didn't have to work 'from the inside,' from within the institutions. In a sense, the idea of 'changing the institution' is very much bound to the 80s. In the 90s they didn't care anymore – because in a way they became their own institutions. Interflugs is situated somewhere in between.

#00:15:37-1# BL: You can also see it in the publications. From the first to the last editions, it has these chapters: the Interflugs history, the video chapter 'q-sign', a chapter on internet projects and a chapter on the Freie Klasse. You basically have the same components recurring throughout the years. People might come and go, but the structures remain.

#00:16:20-5# MY: Freie Klasse and Interflugs deal with similar topics, right? They were interested in learning to use the new medium, video?

#00:16:31-0# AM: The fact that Interflugs invested in video equipment is typical for the time. Using video to produce your 'own' content, because the mainstream media wasn't talking about these topics. Video made it quite simple to empower yourself in that sense.

#00:17:02-7# BL: During those student protests the HdK and TU students were producing their own video news reports and broadcasting them over the public access channel.

#00:17:33-9# AM: It was the beginning of the internet and these groups became interested in the new possibilities of building networks and mailing lists. Botschaft e.V., for example, was not only working with video as a medium, but was also experimenting with new ways of communicating, for example alternative dissemination of information, via the internet. It became much more about sharing information.

#00:18:40-8# BL: The Freie Klasse came up at the same time, maybe even a bit earlier in its incarnation as the autonomous student projects – which were

later re-named Interflugs. That time reminds me of a situation at the UdK in 2011. Hito Steyerl was invited as a visiting professor. The students really liked working with her, but the decision was made to 'install' Thomas Demand. He had to present himself to the faculty and students, but in the end the academic senate decided. There were protests, just like there were in 1988, the year in which the Freie Klasse emerged from a similar situation. Like the 'autonomous student projects,' they demanded a say in how and by whom they were going to be taught. They started this protest by occupying their studio spaces, which was taken seriously. The president probably recognised the potential inherent in a model like Interflugs to enhance the university's reputation, and so he allocated funding.

#00:21:08-7# AM: Do you think marketing played such a big role at the time?

#00:21:30-0# BL: Maybe. Supporting multidisciplinary projects is not too much of a political hot potato. They didn't demand critical art studies, they wanted something 'innovative' like you were starting to have in research.

#00:23:13-7# AM: It seems to be mainly about structures: hierarchies, participation in decision-making, what is taught, collectivity and so on... A multidisciplinary approach, as it was being demanded by the Freie Klasse, has to do with 'not being separated,' allowing crossovers within a fluid structure. That's what they took with them when they left the institutions.

#00:24:16-5# BL: I'm not so sure about 'leaving' – the FU people occupied the university.

#00:25:06-7# AM: That's an interesting point – living and sleeping in the institutions, working with their materials, instead of opening up their own space as was common later on in the 1990s.

#00:25:43-2# BL: I guess there was no space. You couldn't just go and start something. So it must have been a radical change, with a lot of new perspectives being opened by the fall of the Wall.

#00:26:33-5# RA: Kind of, yes. I came to Berlin in the 1970s. Who wanted to come to Berlin back then? Apart from the usual suspects. That was the mood, too – like a big family. But Berlin was itself a very artificial biotope. You got money to come here. I didn't come to Berlin to study, for example, but to work as a nurse, and I got the Berlin Bonus and flights to West Germany for the first four years. Art was really happening in Cologne. A lot of artists actually moved to Cologne from Berlin because they couldn't make a living here. Well, OK, the wild young things could... I saw these student protests back then as trying to reclaim the energy and impetus the squatter scene used to have.

#00:34:40-7# BL: Yes, only they were occupying universities instead of houses. They would barricade themselves in lecture halls. It was pretty violent at times, and students were being dragged out and beaten up. They were territorial battles.

#00:35:15-8# AM: That just makes it even more astounding that the cash was flowing here at the HdK.

#00:35:28-0# BL: That was the HdK, where it was more of a pillow fight when compared to what was happening at other universities. Amongst the artists it was more kind of cuddly.

#00:35:40-9# Miya: How much is 100,000 DM?

#00:36:00-0# BL: It wasn't that much, they wanted to finance six tutorial positions with it, buy some video equipment, set up an editing room and invite guests.



#00:37:14-9# RA: In the FU they already had an editing room in 1978, and also the Medienoperative, which was open for all. And the public access TV station. If you wanted to, back then, you could get access to editing facilities.

#00:37:38-8# AM: But we're talking here about an extension of Arts teaching. It was conforming to a different artistic methodology.

#00:37:48-3# RA: Yeah, sure, the HdK was lagging behind.

#00:38:00-9# BL: Today you can learn by yourself using online tutorials. You're not limited to what's on offer at the colleges.

#00:38:40-1# RA: That was also the idea back then, that you could film your environment, the people around you, and release it – exactly what everyone does these days with their mobile phones. There were already courses like this back

then at the Academy for the Arts in Hamburg.

#00:38:41-2# AM: Wasn't it also important back then to include the medium itself in the practice of art?

#00:40:35-1# Miya: I would say that the emergence of 'video' as a medium has truly shifted the paradigm of moving images: whereas film was directed towards 'the outside' - social issues and so on - video as a medium became a tool of identity

#00:49:49-7# BL: - but not the students from the East.

#00:49:53-9# AM: Yes, the collaborations were very rare.

#00:50:08-0# RA: There were various reasons why it didn't work. For the East Berliners it was a liberation, particularly for the artists. At the same time it was a catastrophe for them, because artists in the East had a lot more room to manoeuvre in

the West. At a congress once I got in a row with a woman from Lithuania because she had said "an artist isn't allowed to orient him or herself on anyone else," and I said "but you're always in some kind of context" and she said "no, the artist is entirely autonomous and a personality like that provides its own nourishment and inspiration."

#00:52:29-8# AM: In the 1990s the term 'autonomous' also appeared, 'autonomous zones' were established.

#00:52:43-4# RA: Yes, but as a group, and this other thing was "I - I am the only one." I had a lot of contacts in East Berlin, certainly beforehand, and afterwards as well. But when I opened this museum, for example, some of them would come to visit and they'd say "well we've come to visit but now we're leaving - we feel uncomfortable here." And ten years after the Wall came down it was still like that.

#00:55:02-5# BL: You're in the 'old' West.

#00:58:03-5# [Laughter]

#00:55:02-5# RA: There was a great article in the Berliner Zeitung saying I refused to open myself to the East and move to Mitte. I opened the Museum der Unerhöhten Dinge here in this space in 2000 because it was offered to me for free. The museum had existed already since 1998, but only on the internet. Seven shops were vacant in the street and everyone was pleased when I did something here. Later on the people who lived here bought the house and they wanted me to stay. The room is actually registered as a passageway.

#00:56:08-0# AM: It can't be sold?

#00:56:08-0# RA: I wanted to buy it, or rather, I should have bought it, but it's just not possible. It's not strictly speaking real estate. It's a passageway between house numbers five and six.

#00:56:26-3# AM: So it's literally an interstice, a space in between.

#00:56:29-9# RA: An interstice or an empty room or an empty vacancy like a unfilled, unused space, or something like that.

#00:57:05-2# AM: The room can't be clearly identified. We talked about this earlier, that one of the demands during the UniMut strikes in 1988/89 had to do with multidisciplinary approaches and project formats. They didn't want to be limited to working within the boundaries of one discipline. Isn't that also an important aspect of this room, that it isn't house number five, or number six, but that instead it fills precisely the interval between the two which would otherwise, without a clear division, not even exist. It makes a space out of the concept of not being divided.

#00:58:41-6# MY: It is not symbiotic, it is really in-between, an autonomous in-between.

#00:58:51-9# AM. Yes, exactly, not dividing or mixing, but in-between.



politics - 'filming' yourself.

#00:41:27-0# AM: You're right. The videos often dealt with a critique of representation - gender topics were coming up, and German national identity was a big topic.

#00:45:25-6# BL: Now we've returned to the start of our discussion: where is East Berlin in all this, looking at the protests at the UdK and all the other universities in the West? They were mostly concerned with their own issues and didn't have an eye on the big picture. The UdK was busy with its own structures and couldn't respond to the big political issues of the day. I would have thought the students would have contacted the Academy in the East, but there's no mention of that having happened...

#00:49:32-6# AM: But a lot of people back then - particularly after graduating - moved to the East to open self-organised spaces.

than they did in the West. They had a little formal job, for example there were potters who had ten employees even though they weren't producing anything. You had to prove that you were working, but otherwise you were left in peace. After the Wall came down that was gone, you didn't have this economic space in the West. And the other thing was the attitude, 'Now we can do West art, too.'

#00:51:24-0# MY: What is 'West art'?

#00:51:24-0# RA: What they meant was: finally we can work abstractly. And there was a completely different understanding of what art is, particularly among the generation which had been socialised in the East.

#00:51:54-2# AM: How do you mean?

#00:51:54-2# RA: This concept of autonomy, this 50s Bohemian thing - I'm an artist and I drink a lot and aaaah. That was over and done with in

#00:58:51-7# RA: You shouldn't forget that back then was the heyday of Postmodernism. The end of history, Rhizome, removing hierarchies, Deleuze, Foucault, etcetera. The Merve Verlag – incidentally, they're also here in this street. Everyone referred to these sociological and philosophical contexts. Then there were the first ring lectures at the FU by Dietmar Kamper which anyone could attend, not only students. That was the time just before Reunification, 85-89. And after 1989 Postmodernism suddenly had this problem, "oh shit, history's back again." That was a real turning point.

#01:03:12-4# BL: It happened in the student protest movement as well, during the 1990s, events slowed down in the period following the fall of the Wall and Reunification, at least that's the impression I got from the FU Asta's 'Gegendarstellung' pamphlet [*Translator's note: An Asta is a Students' union Executive Committee*].

#01:18:05-0# RA: But to get back to the Museum der Unerhörten Dinge, my reasons for founding it almost certainly had to do with what was going on at the universities. I mean, I had to laugh when you were talking about the OSI [*Otto Subr Institute*]. For me that was kind of like the Vatican, it used to be the centre for all the Generation '68 types [*Note BL: And the Generation '88*]. I used to hang around the university in Munich, listening in illegally to the lectures. And there was a lot of talk about simulation in those lectures and seminars. We studied paintings at the Picture Gallery and I would tell a story which was actually my story, and not the story in the painting.

#01:21:32-7# BL: And that's similar to what you do with your museum texts accompanying the exhibits, very precisely phrased in in the kind of language familiar from museums, constantly confronting the visitor with the question of whether it's truth or fiction.

#01:21:53-7# RA: That's exactly the thing. I take the language I've heard to the point of exhaustion, and use it in another context, for something literary, but it's not just make-believe.

01:22:53-7# MY: Could you say something about the strange name, the Museum der Unerhörten Dinge?

01:23:05-2# RA: It's a museum for things which don't yet have a history, and for things we haven't yet listened to. The unheard-of is heard and is provided with an outrageous story. [*Translator's note: Unerhört can mean literally 'unheard' as well as 'unheard of' and 'outrageous/shocking'*]

01:24:33-7# MY: How important was it to name the space a 'museum'? Was it a criticism of so-called 'institutions'?

01:25:25-2# RA: The word museum is intended on the one hand to make it distinct from all the galleries and the whole art market, and on the other hand it's also toying with the whole museum concept. The original meaning of a museum was, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a study room, and later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it meant a collection of art or antiqui-

ties. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century museums became accessible for the general public and were intended as places to instruct and educate. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century they became venues for events and pedagogic rehabilitation. The Museum der Unerhörten Dinge deconstructs and reconstructs the museum's mission statement.

01:26:33-7# MY: What is the aim of the Museum?

01:26:55-2# RA: The museum doesn't have an aim in the usual sense of the term, but it fulfils all the criteria of the International Association of Museums: exhibiting, collecting, conducting pedagogic work, research, scientific work.

*The evening closes with a guided tour through the museum's depot.*

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Image caption:  
Front view "Museum der Unerhörten Dinge",  
Crellestraße 5-6.  
Photo: Formate des Wir.

## Research links:

### UniMut 88/89:

<http://www.astafu.de/publikationen>

<http://asta.tu-berlin.de/publikationen/bildungstreik-massenzeitung-talking-is-over-mai-2009>

<http://unimut.blogspot.de/unimut-archivprojekt/besetzt/>

<http://www.uni-protokolle.de/Lexikon/Studentenprotest.html>

<http://de.indymedia.org/2006/07/151758.shtml>

<http://www.interflugs.de/archiv/>

<http://www.interflugs.de/publications/deffektakademie-interflugs-publikation-iii/>

[http://www.projektwerkstaetten.tu-berlin.de/menue/ueber\\_projektwerkstaetten/pw\\_archiv/](http://www.projektwerkstaetten.tu-berlin.de/menue/ueber_projektwerkstaetten/pw_archiv/)

[http://de.pluspedia.org/wiki/Freie\\_Performance-Klasse](http://de.pluspedia.org/wiki/Freie_Performance-Klasse)

### 2003 Protests:

<http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/wunderbar/eins-in-die-presse-der-tag-an-dem-die-asta-druckerei-verschwand-a-499063.html>

<http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/studium/streiks-an-berliner-unis-dann-koennen-wir-den-laden-dicht-machen-a-273501.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oe6yvx5j1NM>

<http://de.indymedia.org/2003/11/65629.shtml>  
(AKTIVE Verslummung)

### 2007 Protests:

<http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=2007/07/18/a0161>

### See also:

Interflugs publications 1994, 2001, 2009

Archives of the TU/FU Berlin Astes [*Students' Union Executive Committees*]

Archive of the UdK/Interflugs "Archiv"

[www.museumderunerhoertendinge.de](http://www.museumderunerhoertendinge.de)

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nGbK project group: Matthias Einhoff,  
Heimo Lattner, Achim Lengerer, Annette  
Maechtel, Miya Yoshida

**ngbk**