

FORMATE DES WIR

Sunday, 11.8.13, 6.00 pm

“Media interventions and alternative distribution channels in the context of inner city urban change in post-Reunification Berlin”

Guests: Representatives of the video magazine AK Kraak and the project A-Clip
Presenter: Ines Schaber

Venue: Lichtblickkino,
Kastanienallee 77, 10435 Berlin

Begin 6.00 pm – Annette Maechtel and Heimo Lattner present *Formate des WIR* and summarise the first event, held in the Staatsgalerie Prenzlauer Berg.

This is followed by a screening of AK Kraak video reports from 1990-1995, and then by a screening of the second season of A-Clip videos, which was edited into a block of cinema advertisements on 35mm film in 2000.

Later there is a discussion in the communal kitchen at K77. There is a vegetable stew with bread and water. Documentation of the first event is handed out.

#00:02:23-9# IS: I'd like to say something briefly about K77 and the room we're in. When we occupied this house in 1992 we knew nothing, or at least I knew nothing, about the 1980s squatters in West Berlin. The way we approached them was by having a look at the houses which still existed from the 1980s. What shocked us was to see that most of the houses had, within 10-15 years, separated into individual apartments. One decision made for this house then was, through planning and renovation, to make individual apartments impossible. And 22 years later that still works. On the first floor there's a communal kitchen, where a group cooks a meal once a day, and a communal bathroom. In the rooms on the upper floors there are no kitchen fittings.

[...]

#00:06:39-5# IS: Unlike AK Kraak, you weren't a collective. How were you organised as a group?

#00:06:52-7# KW: A-Clip came out of a group of artists. The scene in the Scheunenviertel in the 1990s did have a strong sense of togetherness: the "Klasse Zwei", the "Schroederstraße", the "Dienstagsbar"¹. And incidentally, there was a connection between AK Kraak and A-Clips - AK Kraak also worked with A-Clips. There wasn't such a huge difference.

#00:07:27-3# IS: Does that apply to the audiences as well?

#00:07:27-3# KW: No, not at all. But it applies to the intentions.

#00:07:29-5# IS: When and why did you form the group? What were your themes?

#00:07:39-1# KW: A-Clips was founded in 1997 via a self-organised studio. The idea was to make films and videos. Back then it suddenly became possible to edit videos using just an Apple and simple software. We set up a small video workshop in our rooms in Schroederstraße, where we also tried to teach and learn how to edit, how to film, and also to put all that into practice right there. For the first season the individual films weren't attributed to a specific author. The voices are the same in pretty much all of the reports. You could say that the first season was basically a communal effort. The projectionist was, back then, kind of a venerated figure in the cinema. I was myself a projectionist and I thought, if someone were to knock on my door and say, "Here's a film, can you set it up?" then I would have done it. What we started was kind of a test. We travelled all over Germany, visiting the AstAs [general students committees at colleges and universities] to raise funds.

¹ "Klasse Zwei", "Schröderstraße" and "Dienstagsbar" were project spaces in the 1990s consisting temporary use contracts and occasionally overlapping participants.



Lichtblick Kino/Cinema at K77, 11.08.2013, Kastanienallee 77

#00:00:12-4# Ines Schaber: There are a lot of people here who were very active in the 1990s and who knew most of the films, or who had worked on them, and who have now seen them again. And there are some here who weren't in Berlin in the 1990s or who don't know that much about these themes. The idea behind this event is on the one hand to initiate a historical record, and on the other to ask which themes are still relevant today, and which have completely vanished?

#00:02:10-4# K77 Resident: Sorry, we have to close the door downstairs, or people just walk in.

#00:04:39-5# N.N.: You disconnected the cables and lines?

#00:04:39-6# IS: Yes, exactly. My question is, to start things off simply: Who were AK Kraak and A-Clips? How did you work? Who were you trying to reach? When were you active?

#00:06:11-9# Klaus Weber (A-Clip): The origins of A-Clip were in the art scene. But we felt the need to open this up. The first season mostly involved artists, but in the second, which we just watched, we had people from other fields, for example journalism or politics.

Then we produced a video. The initial method was very primitive: we borrowed a 35mm camera and shot a television monitor. The film material was as a result very pixelated. We managed to improve things for the second season. We had the videos transferred, and we were getting footage from Munich as well. The films were then distributed in Berlin and Munich. For the third season, in 2003, we had Los Angeles as well, and at that point the joint editing work came to an end, simply because it had become too complicated to discuss the format and content of everything. The distribution became quite chaotic. The format was good, but it had reached its limits. You don't need to flog something like this to death. Cinema had completely changed by that point and the projectionist had been an important figure in the project.

AK Kraak Kompilat Formate des Wir:

1. Ein fragmentarischer Zusammenschnitt aus den ersten fünf Ausgaben vom Sommer bis Herbst 1990: u.a. eine Neubesetzung in der Oranienburger Str. und die erste Räumung durch Volkspolizei, die erste Demonstration der besetzten Häuser, der 3. Oktober am Brandenburger Tor, die Räumung der Mainzer Straße und der Büßbergang zur Abschwörung von Gewalt vor dem Rathaus Friedrichshain.
AK Kraak Magazine 1 – 5, 1990 - 91
2. Die Häuserbewegung kurz vor der Vertragsunterzeichnung: Wieso, weshalb, warum? Bericht von der "gesamtberliner besetzerinnen VV" im Frühjahr 1991.
AK Kraak Magazin 6 08.91
3. Wo ist hier die Badewanne?
Unter Polizeischutz mit der neuen Eigentümerin zu Besuch in der Linienstr.158.
AK Kraak Magazin 13 10.95
4. Die Beerdigung der Puppen. An der Fassade der Auguststrasse 10 dürfen keine Puppen mehr verschraubt werden. Kule e.V trauert, auf seine Art.
AK Kraak Magazin 8, 01.93
5. Die Berlin Invest AG. Der gefakte Kongress für Sicherheit und Freizeit in der leerstehenden Möbelfabrik Höffner am Weinbergspark. 1.10.94
AK Kraak Magazin 12 03.95
6. "Wir bleiben Alle" Mit dem Raumschiff Enterprise zur Rettung des billigen Wohnraums und Volkseigentums. Aufruf zur WBA-Mietendemo am 09.09.1992.
7. Demokratiesimulation am Potsdamer Platz. Knetgummifilm zur Infobox.
AK Kraak Magazin 14, 03.96
8. Such die PKK Fahne. Das Ak Kraak Ratespiel für die Berliner Polizei.
AK Kraak Magazin 13, 10.95

Without a projectionist the whole thing wouldn't have worked. This space where the commercials are screened, this time has been sold and doesn't belong to the cinema. The projectionist has no control over this time. He makes himself and the cinema liable if he interferes at all with it. But there was still a projectionist there, someone you could talk to. These days in the multiplexes there's nowhere you can knock to talk to someone. The idea behind A-Clips had to find a new form of expression.

#00:12:21-9# IS: Was there a need to extend the involvement in local issues to other themes?

#00:13:29-0# KW: Back then it was a political idea to say "we're going to concern ourselves

with our immediate surroundings".

#00:14:12-5# Manuel Zimmer (AK Kraak): In the 1990s the issue of globalisation came up during the first international WTO summit. For the first time the point was raised that things were changing in the global economy. So there had to be a change in the resistance, as well. Suddenly people were thinking, politically, in international terms. In the 1990s this was not at all well-developed. In the beginning AK Kraak was a purely internal news service about the squatters. When the squatter scene dried up the magazine looked for other themes, like for example the refugee problem, or anti-nuclear waste transportation.

#00:15:22-0# Susanne Dzeik (AK Kraak): [...] AK Kraak was never only shown locally. It was screened in thirty different occupied houses and social centres, etcetera. And, from the start, it was distributed to information centres

around the country. The network kept on growing.

#00:17:07-4# IS: How many editions of AK Kraak were there?

#00:17:13-9# MZ: The magazine still exists. We're up to 25 editions by now. But nowadays AK Kraak produces longer documentary films.

#00:17:14-7# IS: The production rhythm was irregular, wasn't it?

#00:17:17-6# SD: In the beginning it was bang, bang, bang. Production was fast. Then our own demands on the quality of the reports increased. Because it was all voluntary and very labour-intensive, the gaps between the

editions became longer and longer. But at some point the growth of the internet also caught up with AK Kraak. [...] It became harder to put out a magazine with topics which had been current six months ago.

#00:19:11-9# Bri Newesely (AK Kraak): In the beginning our work was necessary because there were no images to counter the images being shown on the news. Then handycams got so cheap that even students could afford one and film things themselves.

#00:20:50-5# IS: Do the rooms still exist in which you first screened the magazine?

#00:20:52-5# SD: The locations still exist. But by the end there were fewer and fewer people coming to attend and it was no longer an event.

#00:21:34-2# MZ: We played with the medium. At the event, the screening, there were always lots of people coming together from various scenes and areas who hadn't known each other beforehand. So there weren't just reports and scenes coming together in the films, but in the cinema too. We enjoyed playing with these formats. We re-dubbed scenes, we parodied cookery studios and we translated television for our scene. And the more infrequently the magazine was produced, the longer the editions became. At times it was up to three hours long. Sometimes the length was too much for the audiences. By the end, no one could remember how it had begun.

#00:22:39-7# SD: There was so much material, no one could have dealt with all of it. So we just edited in half an hour of blank screen as a break.

#00:22:52-4# MZ: The blank screen wasn't just a break to interrupt the event though, it was part of the screening. On the screen was the word "Pause". The audience would get up to get a beer and so during the break something else would take place. We enjoyed experimenting like that.

#00:23:24-6# IS: The history of the 1990s hasn't been written yet. I was astonished at how much your "Here and Now" magazine functioned like a documentation of the times, because it shows situations and discussions we'd forgotten about ourselves. A lot of people you meet in Berlin these days think it's great that rents are so cheap. But no one knows why the rents are so low. The relevant political conflicts weren't recorded or passed on - which would be important.

[...]

#00:27:20-2# KW: Back then we were looking for rooms and we considered squatting. But we had a different strategy. We said we'd rather rent legally than waste our energy, and use it instead to do something. Jutta (Weitz), who's sitting here, was very important for the development of the Scheunenviertel. She had an "office for misappropriation" in Dirksenstraße [audience laughs].



Production of first season, A-Clips, 1998

#00:27:26-4# Jutta Weitz: Together with Dolly¹.

#00:27:24-8# KW: You could go in there and say: "We need a room, we've got plans. It might take four or five years, but then it'll be finished and we'll move on." That was our mentality.

#00:27:53-5# MZ: Now that I've seen the A-Clips again, I'd like to talk about the shared vision of the time, which remains relevant today. The transition to the digital age, digital surveillance, gentrification, globalisation. These topics were new back then. We were trying at the time to grasp what they meant.

#00:29:04-5# KW: It was interesting to see the A-Clips again today together with the commercials. Tobacco ads back then were practising something close to a critique of the market. This kind of resistance, in the aesthetics and the content, was increasingly present in advertising in an atomised form.

#00:29:41-2# IS: You also screened the A-Clips without ads, didn't you?

#00:29:45-6# KW: Actually we didn't. The format was 35mm, that's cinema format. If the clips aren't in dialogue or conflict with the advertisements then they don't work – they can actually be quite annoying.

#00:30:33-0# N.N.: How extensive was your reach? Did you smuggle the clips into the cinemas via the projectionists? How many cinemas worked together with you? How often were the clips shown?

#00:31:00-8# KW: Distribution was usually handled by the projectionists. They know

each other. So the clips were passed around. We couldn't even follow it. Someone from A-Clips knocked on the door and if he was convincing, it worked.

#00:31:47-7# N.N.: How many copies did you make on 35mm?

#00:31:45-9# KW: Ten copies of each film. There was never a programme booklet included, nothing you could read up on.

#00:31:21-7# N.N.: Did you then pick up the reels and take them to the next cinema?

#00:32:41-6# KW: Sometimes, but quite often the projectionists themselves would pass the reels on to other cinemas. York Kino for example, that was a group of ten cinemas. The reels were passed around even though we had only talked to one projectionist.

#00:32:54-4# Tine Neumann: How did the A-Clips get into the ad blocks? Who edited them in?

#00:33:57-9# KW: There was a specific day – back then it was Wednesday – when the new ad reels were delivered, and the projectionists edited everything together. That was the wonderful moment in which A-Clips slipped in amongst the ads. [...]

#00:34:53-6# Asa Sonjasdotter: At the time they suddenly wanted to reach the "creative types" as a target audience, that's why it was so important to integrate this self-criticism in the advertising.

#00:36:37-6# KW: Yes, during the few years that A-Clips existed there was this shift. During the first season in 1997 advertising was still quite stoic and boring. When we did the first season everything was pretty pixelated because, like I said, we were filming from a monitor. That was a total disruption, visually and formally. During the next season already,

in 2000, advertising had started imitating low-tech. That was also the period when this witch film, "The Blair Witch Project", was in the cinemas, and that was shot with a hand-held camera. Low-tech had become a format that was being shown in cinemas. With the title A-Clip it was very clear that it was about aesthetic categories like A and B movies. You're talking about exactly the point when this was merging, formally, strategically and in the content. When advertising itself was becoming more complex and beginning to reflect a critical awareness – to introduce the internal conflict of the consumerist world into advertising.

#00:37:31-0# AS: In the early 1990s it was important to attack advertising. Maybe these days other areas are important for these conflicts.

[...]

#00:40:10-7# N.N.: Can you place the seasons briefly in a chronological context?

#00:40:43-9# KW: The first ran in 1997, the second in 2000 and the last one in 2003.

#00:41:58-1# IS: I have the impression that around 2000 there was a clear withdrawal of artists in Berlin from the field of politics. Before then there was a much closer connection between artists and politics. I think that this is occurring again now: there's a larger movement concerned with the Liegenschaftsfonds [real estate management trust]. There are the demands about the City Tax, and also about asylum policies – everything has become much more active than it was five or ten year ago. I think it's great that Jutta Weitz is here. She made it possible for all of us since the early 1990s. She often showed us when we had to change our strategies. Jutta, you worked in the "office for misappropriation" at the WBM [housing association for Berlin-Mitte] which enabled temporary usage and rental contracts. And, later, you began to work with co-operatives. In Rungestaße in 2000 you supported a house which had become a co-operative. When did conditions change to such a degree that other forms of collaboration became necessary?

#00:44:16-1# JW: I also think that things have changed since 2000. Locations vanished. A lot of people still had the chance to work using temporary use contacts, but with the changes in ownership a lot of these opportunities have disappeared. I had the feeling that I wasn't getting any further with the methods I had been using. The case in Rungestraße was that the WBM wanted to sell this large house. I had made an effort to form a kind of community with the people living there, which had tried to acquire or purchase a lease in perpetuity. I didn't want to have the people sitting in my office again and have no way of finding space for them. The available spaces were becoming fewer and further between. That's why I thought that it would be better now to save the whole place. That was indeed a change of strategy.

¹ Dolly Leupold was employed by the Cultural Bureau of Berlin-Mitte and was responsible for the "Culture Office", which managed the allocation of subsidies for decentralised cultural work from 1991-2004.

#00:45:16-1# Annette Maechtel: There was a definite shift in 1999-2000. The restitution process was largely over and done with, and cases of unclear ownership had been clarified. Afterwards, the real estate branch began to develop in a completely different way.

#00:45:37-9# JW: The fundamental decision "restitution before reparation", which had been part of the unification contract, obviously played a large role in this development. And also the decision that 100% of the investments were tax-deductible, which was a gift for everyone who had the chance to buy houses. There was a huge wave of redistribution.

#00:46:13-9# IS: You left the WBM in 2007. The "office for misappropriation" has been closed.

#00:46:54-8# JW: For a while you had the feeling you could find a place for everyone. But after a certain point you knew that the old buildings were all gone. For a while it worked with the high-rise buildings, because the city has a lot of high-rises which had been youth clubs, libraries or kindergartens. That was an option for a while with temporary use contracts. This feeling that you had to secure the entire location instead of just closing individual contracts, that was around 2000.

#00:47:25-2# IS: The first attempt to secure an entire house – that was in Rungestraße?

#00:47:30-3# JW: Yes, and also the ACUD¹. It was different with the Schwarzenberg house [studio house in Rosenthaler Str. 39]. They were lucky enough that at the same time the Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand [memorials for the German resistance] became interested in the house. The federal government and the city agreed to maintain the house, not because of the artists, but because it was home to Otto Weidt's workshop for the blind². At the end of the day the artists were one part of the deal. The federal government had very clearly and specifically only mentioned the historical relevance of the location in its decision to support the grant, leading to a peculiar situation: the house is supported by two grant decisions, and both of them, the Schwarzenberg House and the memorial for the German resistance, have leases which run until 2015. And at that point everyone has to start re-negotiating. But of course there's nothing you can say against the memorial, and they need more space. When it becomes clear that it's about lease negotiations then the artists are going to have to square off with the memorial, and that won't be easy.

#00:49:19-9# N.N.: And what was the situation here in K77? This house was occupied through the art scene, wasn't it?

1 The former squat in Veteranenstr. 21 was registered as an artistic and cultural venue in the 1990s by the ACUD e.V. as part of the city of Berlin's self-help building project.

2 Otto Weidt actively supported the Jewish population during and after the Holocaust. His workshop is now a memorial to the German resistance.

#00:49:41-4# IS: The GDR opposition, which had been very active in this area, had organised a street festival around Kollwitzplatz, and the initiators of the squat decided to include this. The local politicians went for a walk around here to have a look at a performance which was happening on the façade of a house here. The idea was to revitalise one house. Suddenly there was a crowd of 200 people who were politically active in the district, and that didn't fit with the police presence for the event. A lawyer for the Association of Visual Artists argued convincingly that the police presence would be in breach of the constitution if they cleared the area, because it was a performance. Art was basically a lever. The group had formed after the clearing of a squat in Mainzerstraße³, to send the message that that was not the end. The group had carried out occupation-actions for two years to uphold the option to occupy buildings. So it was more of a coincidence that K77 could remain, it had to do with the political situation here in the district. The legalisation of the house took a few years, and the land and property was eventually purchased by the "Stiftung Umverteilung" [Foundation for distribution].

#00:52:09-0# N.N.: Does signing contracts signal a creeping submission?

#00:55:05-8# JW: I didn't think it was wrong to close contracts, particularly since you can argue differently from a contractual position and aim for different legal solutions. There were houses which closed three-year contracts, albeit with the advice from their lawyers that these would become unlimited contracts upon expiry. Those who didn't sign contracts were the first to go. Sometimes a good legal consultation might have been helpful. Back then the WBM organised contracts for all the occupied houses, and the result was that no one was ejected. Trade or industrial contracts were always more convenient because they could be terminated. As far as the legal situation is concerned, the houses with individual tenancy contracts, which were nevertheless being lived in communally, were in a much better position.

#00:57:12-7# IS: The attitude of not signing contracts was very heavily influenced by the 1980s when people had often been conned by bad contracts. So there was this idea to have all 150 houses speak with one voice, in order to be able to make other demands.

#00:59:40-2# SD: The AK Kraak reports make it clear that the squatter movement was actually already dead, and that you now had to start talking about a tenants' movement. That's very topical again now, because a lot of tenants are joining together to fight the battle from a different angle, not from a politically left wing position. Very different social groups are

3 On 14.11.1990 the house in Mainzer Str., which had been occupied after Reunification, was violently cleared in a large scale police action. This action was the beginning of the reintroduction of the "Berlin line", which states that occupied houses have to be cleared within 24 hours of the occupation.

coming together. I think it's important today to talk about re-municipalisation, to consider models of where you can begin thinking collectively about how to wrest living space away from the market. This is where we come full circle. Young people in particular, for example around Kotti [tenants organised protests as "Kotti und Co." at Kottbusser Tor since 2012], are interested in what happened back then. That means you have to develop for yourself a sense of place and being as well as a historical understanding of what has gone before, to then enter the next phase with new insights and qualities.

#01:00:55-9# IS: Andrej Horn and others have criticised the 1990s squatters for not tackling issues of tenancy policies. They criticise that if the squatters' creative energy had been channelled into tenancy policies, then Berlin would be a very different city today. The question is posed with an element of self-criticism.

#01:02:16-5# MZ: We all have to struggle with a lack of solidarity these days. But gradually this awareness seems to be returning, because several different social groups are being affected simultaneously. [...]

#01:13:58-2# Tine Neumann: The event has the title "Formate des WIR": after the fall of the Wall there were collective formats of "us/we" which demanded a certain format for living. There were some who wanted a work format without a living format. There were some who wanted both. For the Wagenburgen [communities who live in groups of vans and trucks] for example, being tied to one specific location was not a priority. It was about maintaining a community. Where did the boundaries run between the different formats?

#01:16:06-8# IS: The "us/we" formats are not scientific categories, they are rather suggestive categories. It's not about defining them and thereby fixing them, it's more about asking which formats of production and living they make possible. This event today may once again have made a new intersection possible.

Annette Maechtel and Heimo Lattner give a preview of Part 3.

#01:33:59-6# Event ends.

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