

Time Travel, Tracks in the Making

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What to do in a famous city like Magdeburg, with a strong scientific tradition culminating in Otto von Guericke's Magdeburg hemispheres in 1663; the place where Martin Luther went to school; the city that was 70% destroyed in the Second World War and subsequently jointly reconstructed; the city that has a current unemployment rate of 25% and is gripped by disappointment at the failure of a resurgence to take off after the Wende. What to organise in a city that has been going for 1200 years and refuses to give up?

The first time I visited Magdeburg was in October 2004. I had received an invitation to provide the overarching concept and the Dutch contribution for the fifth International Art Festival there. This festival, an initiative of Galina Brieger, a Ukrainian who has been living and working in Magdeburg for seventeen years, has facilitated encounters and dialogue between artists from Eastern and Western Europe for the last five years in a unique way, thereby making an essential contribution to the cultural climate of the city and further afield.

Travel takes place in space and time. It is a physical and mental stimulus. Travel seems to entail a search for the 'ultimate' environment, conditions or experience in which everything you are and want to be can coincide. Perhaps there is a mental blueprint that determines the urge to travel. To me a journey through time means a world of one's own, an environment in which there is complete freedom for everything conceivable to exist. It entails a space with its own sensation of time in which traces of people, things or moods can be perceived, erased, and remade. In this environment there is a natural connection between past, present and future. It is a field in which tracks are in the making all the time. Time travel emphasises the mental blueprint of the 'ultimate' place. However, this haven does not exist unless we break our journey now and then to see what is going on in the parallel

world, in the 'real' world. Time travel has no existence without a reflection on the history that we have recorded, the present that we all experience, and the future that we imagine, with a range of possible variants. Time travel exists precisely by adopting a position on these issues at certain moments and making it known. 'Time travel, tracks in the making' is not just a concept, but an attitude that enables self-exploration and dialogue. The International Art Festival 2005 is a result of this process.

Both the city of Magdeburg and the various backgrounds of the festival organisers have been a source of inspiration. In addition, the ideas of the cultural philosopher Gilles Deleuze, especially that of thought as a rhizome,¹ have also stimulated my thinking in relation to the chosen concept. The world cannot be controlled, everything is in movement, in flux, in the making. His description of thought as creation is also important; not the question of whether the answer is important, but the time that it takes to proceed from one to the other — travel. I was also fascinated by the story by the Iranian professor Azar Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Teheran*,² about seven female Iranian students who find freedom in reading and discussing literature and using it in everyday life. The book *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit* by the historian Karl Schlögel came up with a new formulation of the experience of time and space.³ His application of this concept to the 'ordinary citizen' of united Europe and his description of the influence of a specific place on ideas of time and space has been of importance for the development of the exhibition concept.

The drive to adopt a social position is always present in the way I work. This attitude was encouraged by a meeting with Armin Burkhardt, a professor at the Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg and head of the 'Politik in der Sprache' [Politics in speech] group.⁴

Each in its own critical way, these sources put into words several possible positions on what time travel can mean. They create frameworks within which the search for traces, determined by a specific context, is the main activity.

The processing of these sources of inspiration raises several questions: how do you create a concept that can function as a place, an environment, which everyone feels invited to enter? A place where people have the freedom to investigate their own tracks and to familiarise themselves with the positions of others? What is your relation with one another if you come from entirely different worlds? How can a festival concept be a signal in our incomprehensible and confusing but also stunningly beautiful world? These questions gave rise to the concept for 'Time travel, tracks in the making'. It offers scope for divergent interpretations, which are presented in a number of sections.

The development of 'Time travel, tracks in the making' was not the result of solitary reflection. There was a team in the Netherlands with Astrid Vorstermans from Valiz book and cultural projects. She was the one who introduced me in Magdeburg and we collaborated on the elaboration of the preliminary ideas. Moreover, Astrid is responsible for the publication — which is an autonomous project parallel to the catalogue. The concept for the book was developed and elaborated with the graphic designer Luna Maurer. The team was supported by Partizan Publik, an agency for social engineering that was set up by the political scientists Christiaan Fruneaux and Joost Janmaat. I have been engaged in a dialogue with them at the intersection of society, politics and culture for some time. We worked together to draw up a two-day festival programme. In addition, as curator of the exhibition I selected ten artists who live and work in the Netherlands and who I knew would be able to respond to the concept. Many of their works were specially made for the exhibition. In Magdeburg a team was set up with Galina Brieger, the initiator of the festival, and the Ukrainian curators Tamara Lee and Tatyana Zhuravskaya. The latter were responsible for the presentation of the unsolicited entries which have been selected by an international committee. The whole was combined with the Dutch presentation to form an exhibition.

The International Art Festival 2005 is being held in a former tram depot, which under Galina Brieger's direction is to become a cultural centre

— Art-Depot — in the city. The location was only announced after the concept had been formulated, but it fitted the theme perfectly. After all, all the tracks of the city converge and then diverge here. We could not wish for a more suitable spot. We hope that this intersection of tracks will be a temporary site and environment in which the freedom offered by time travel can be experienced to the full for the duration of the festival and the appearance of this publication. Astonishment at this world is a good and should be cherished: it is a weapon, shield and source of energy all at the same time.

¹ Gilles Deleuze et al. *Dialogues II*, Gilles Deleuze/Claire Parnet 1977 and *Mille Plateaux (A Thousand Plateaus)*, Gilles Deleuze/Felix Guattari 1987

² *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, Azar Nafisi, 2003

³ *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit*, Karl Schlögel 2003

⁴ In 2003 the 'Politik in der Sprache' group, led by Prof. Dr. Armin Burkhardt of the Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg protested against the invasion of Iraq.