Committed Receptacles

Schlingensief's Usage of the Container
in Respect to Its Implementation in the Visual Arts

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In June of 2000, the German artist, film and theater maker Christoph Schlingen-
sief carried out his action "Bitte liebt Österreich" (Please love Austria).[1] (Cf. pics.
1–2 at end of article.) Patterned after the TV show "Big Brother",[2] Schlingensief
interned several asylum seekers in a living complex built out of containers, and
then let the home audience decide – also according to the "Big Brother" model –
who should leave the house one by one, and, consequently, be deported (pic. 3).
This action, accompanied by appearances made by prominent persons engaged
in the cultural sector, angry or sympathizing politicians, as well as an extraordinary
media turmoil, constitutes a current and undoubtedly important example for the
usage of containers in political artistic projects; the second part of the following
text deals only with the status of this container in the sense of a game site, and
less with content and otherwise dramaturgical aspects.

The question as to why Schlingensief implemented containers, however, does
not lead us very far if we seek out containers or the container-like as a compo-
nent or leitmotif in recent *theater* productions for comparison, particularly if we

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1. Recent positions on Schlingensief in Marion Löhndorf, "Christoph Schlingensief. Lieb-
lingsziel Totalirritation", *Kunstforum International* 142 (Oct.–Dec. 1998), 192–201; J. Finke and
M. Wulff, eds., *Chance 2000* (Stuttgart 1998); literature relevant to the Viennese action: Matthias
Lilienthal and Claus Philipp, eds., *Schlingensiefs Ausländer raus: Bitte liebt Österreich* (Frankfurt
a. M. 2000); as well as Christoph Schlingensief, "Liebe Freundin, lieber Freund", in Rudolf Friel-
ing and Dieter Daniels, eds., *Medien Kunst Interaktion: Die 80er und 90er Jahre in Deutschland*
(Vienna; New York 2000), 286 f. On the Viennese action, cf. *Falter* 25 (Vienna 2000); *Theater
heute* 8/9 (2000), 5 ff. On the internet: <www.schlingensief.comwww.heise.de/tp/deutsch/inhalt/
co/8261/1.html>; <www.auslaenderraus.at/heimat.phtml>; <http://de.../resort_article.asp?chan-
nel=newsroom& id025 6077&ressort=SCHLINGENSIEF> (Thomas Trenkler summarizes Wolf-
gang Zinggl's criticism); ...253614... (critical position by Konrad P. Liessmann); ...255484...
(Michael Chalupka, seen by a refugee counselor).

2. Cf. Lothar Mikos, Patricia Feise, Katja Herzog, Elisabeth Prommer and Verena Veihl, *Im
Auge der Kamera: Das Fernsehereignis Big Brother* (Berlin 2000).

look to the stage – for Schlingensief's usage of the medium "container" finds its decisive parallels as well as its previous history in the *visual arts* – inasmuch as these, for their part, already take recourse to and enhance general ideas and clichés regarding the container. This, by the way, is also the case for the TV show "Big Brother", whose paraphrasing in the Viennese action could lead us to assume too hastily that Schlingensief's containers are to be understood simply as one of the many different quotations of this show, rendering further interpretation superfluous – for, in the first place, we'd simply be passing the buck in this case, and would now have to inquire into the significance of the implementation of containers on the "Big Brother" show, which surely wasn't accidental; and secondly, if Schlingensief's container quote also certainly provided a guarantee for the show's recognizability, it's of no great importance, because in adopting its *procedural structures* – for example voting out the inhabitants, live camera surveillance and the like – this recognizability was already sufficiently warranted. Beyond this, essential differences existed between the containers in the Viennese action and those of "Big Brother" in respect to their context, usage and form.

The first part of the text will discuss meanings of the container in the visual arts. And although it can be taken for granted that Schlingensief neither knew all the examples discussed in the following, nor that he would have otherwise referred to them explicitly, it will become possible in the second part to provide evidence of typically recurring implications – in part consciously addressed by the artists, but also in part simply put up with or not at all reflected upon – of an art using the container in Schlingensief's case, as well. For in any case, the implementation of the container occasionally *betrays* more than it *expresses* – a point which we will come back to later, when the question "What is Schlingensief doing with the container?" might be accompanied by the question: "What is the container doing with Schlingensief?" In a shorter third part, I will be commenting on a prominent statement on the container with reference to the results of this study.

Containers are used for storage and for the flexible transportation of goods; people are deported in them, or they wind up as refugees in a reception station comprised of container buildings. The live-in container offers montage workers the possibility to spend the night at the workplace. Provided that we're referring to containers in respect to transported or stored goods, we tend to, from a modern perspective, emotionlessly register the container's indifference to the special properties of its contents, but if it's a matter of transporting or sheltering human beings, one associates this with the lower classes or even with dire need. That con-

tainers, on the other hand, serve as an outside base for the mobile special mission elite of a military, cinematic or humanitarian origin can lend them a snazzy and positive image – it all depends on the context.

Both can turn up as a mixture, as well, when young artists, for example, agile but not yet established, take recourse to the container or to container-like flat structures for their projects, not merely because they can't get their hands on anything better, but rather because they're trying to signalize indifference regarding the shelter: that it's not about the shelter itself, but rather about the brand-new activities going on inside. Mervin Jarman's mobile media laboratory[3] for Jamaica, which is currently stationed in Palmer's Cross, offers a good example for this: the container, equipped with several Macs and a mini-office on the reverse side, forms the base station for a project in which aides schooled in crash courses are supposed to provide the Jamaican population with access to the internet and basic skills. The container is not merely put up with in the absence of a more costly solution, but rather fulfills an expressive function, as well, in that it expresses the agility and up-to-dateness of the enterprise.

Added to this is that the mobility and stackability of the living container, although in itself of an older origin, joins the dynamic and individualized form of late functionalism that moved the ambitious architectural debates of the seventies. This era, however, experienced a revival in the nineties, which has, in the meantime, died down again. It's no accident that Vito Acconci's works from 1980,[4] for example, in which the sum of these already aged ideas seems to take on an entirely didactic form, are today being perceived with indulgence and renewed interest. Without his spacial encasings, which could be raised by means of cords and the muscular strength of the interacting viewers/users, or his telescope-like expandable metal sheds, Adam Page's "Executive Box"[5] from the last documenta would hardly be thinkable (pic. 4). Nevertheless, in the case of Page – and we're talking about 1997 – it's hardly about anything more than the implementation of the body in constituting the architecture: the object, reminiscent of a container

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3. Cf. Matthew Fuller's report in the internet (4/3 2000): <www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/inhalt/sa/3507/1.html>.

4. Cf. Kate Linker, *Vito Acconci* (New York 1994); here ch. 3, 111 ff. Cf. e.g. "High-Rise" (1980), 126 ff.; "Mobile Home" (1980), 118 ff.; in reference to this, the considerably later work "Mobile Linear City" (1991), in which living container-like cabins issuing from the bed of a truck can become pulled apart to form the prototype of an oblong dwelling.

5. Cf. *Short Guide / Documenta X* (Ostfildern Ruit 1997), 178 f.; cat. *Executive Box*, ed. Dresdner Kunstverein, 1997.

in a closed state and expandable in an accordion-like manner, instead aims at a praxis-oriented usage of the communication infrastructure installed within it. The extended, and as a result partially roofless space renders the proffered usage none the more attractive, though; furthermore, thanks to the continuous throng of visitors during the documenta hours, one would have found oneself on view, so that, actually, the point here is only a model and its exemplary application on the part of interested visitors. That, by the way, doesn't speak against this work, which paradoxically, precisely in the aberration from the shoe-box principle of the container, brings the container itself to expression, or in other, more exact terms: it expresses selectively those characteristics of the container that warm artists' hearts today, namely: mobility, mutability, renouncement of a hierarchy in construction, and finally a thin skin or a blurry line between the inside and the outside.

Nevertheless, the special meaning that the container or the container-like evinced for the architectural concepts[6] and art of the seventies and once again for the nineties cannot be separated from general currents in popular culture, although I don't wish to be the one to decide who influenced whom. For this reason, if one can also assume that an attitude exists today of container-like establishments being cool, at least among younger people, then it would still have to be observed, however, that containers don't count among those things whose aesthetic or lifestyle-oriented rehabilitation led to a more recent insight into their *beauty* or *appropriateness*, as it was, for example, sometimes the case with the revival of certain hair styles or fashion articles of the seventies. Rather, a *distinguished pledge of allegiance to the shabby* also plays a role here, which of course not all, but, so it seems, more and more people possess: in the same way that garden dwarves on fenced-in lawns signalize aesthetic failure whichever way you look at it, but alongside Wolfgang Joop's swimming pool an aesthetic independence, the container of the small-town youth club signifies having to make do with an emergency

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6. Cf. Marc Mer et al., eds., *TRANSLOKATION: Der ver – rückte Ort. Kunst zwischen Architektur* (Vienna 1994); here particularly M. Mer, "Ort Ort (Ort) ( ) – pathologische Belichtungen zur Translokation", 155–245, where the author tells of the reproducibility of the location, which finds its complement in containers (p. 237), evident, moreover, in Luc Deleu's architectonic container sculptures (cf. ibid., interview with the artist, 126 ff.); furthermore: *Luc Deleu: Stellproben*, cat. Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund, 4/24–6/12 1998. On the paradigm of the container-like, cf. cat. *Containerize*, pub. by "plattform", concept and organization: Ulrike Kremeier, et al., in cooperation with Kunst-Werke Berlin e.V., in the context of the annual program Jan.–Dec. 1997; here, Andreas Ruby's essay, "The Container as Heterotopy-Machine for a Post-utopian Achitecture", 24–28.

solution, whereas it appears ultra hip in the ambitious projects of young Berlin artists.

Facets of the non-artistic and pop cultural usage of containers can also be found, partly with the nuances described above, in the exhibition projects of the last several years, for which usually a larger number of containers were temporarily placed at the disposal of young artists. In close proximity to one another in the inner-city park area in Freiburg,[7] set up in rank and file on the occasion of the 700-year celebration of Switzerland in St. Imier,[8] or spread around the center of Cologne,[9] the white boxes awaited the artists' interventions. Often, installations were packed into them that could just as well have been exhibited in a museum, just as often works that merely addressed the narrow room, and more seldom, the works involved themselves with the features and functions of the container. An exception of this kind was the Berlin project "Containerize" (1997),[10] which, proceeding from the already mentioned older architectural debates, but also taking more recent ones such as globalization, networking and mobility into account, contributed to an experienced discussion. That this success could also be seen as being due to the fact that only a *single* container was used – even if on three different locations throughout the course of the project – was made clear by the container which Raimund Stecker and Michael Krajewski concurrently made available for seven consecutive usages in Düsseldorf (pic. 5):[11] not without a certain elegance, thanks to a glass facade divided into a triptych, and immediately nearby the Kunsthalle and the Kunstverein, it became their external showcase. To this was added a bonus of status inconsistency: if the Kunsthalle building was viewed together with the container offshoot, the mixture of solidness and Spartan chic guaranteed a reciprocal transfer of prestige, in principle comparable to the Portikus in Frankfurt – with the difference that, in the case of the latter building, the contradictions merge into "luxese" (a German neologism combining the words for "luxury" and

7. *Kunst im Container: IV. Freiburger Symposion Stühlinger Kirchplatz*, cat. Freiburger Kunstverein, 1989.

8. *EX AEQUO: 24 Schweizer Künstler in St. Imier*, festival pub.: "700 Jahre Confoederatio Helvetica" (Bern 1991).

9. "Brückengang: Kunst im öffentlichen Raum – Köln", 11/8–11/15 1998, art project and curatorship by Alexander Pey and Claudia Calzolari.

10. Cf. cat. *Containerize* (note 3).

11. Cf. project "Windows", in the course of the summer program, which went by the motto "Umsonst und draußen" (For free and outdoors), of the Düsseldorfer Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen; cf. *Kunstforum International* 137 (June–Aug. 1997), 484.

"asceticism"): the classical facade on the river Main, and behind it the white box. Exhibition projects usually run on strict time limitations; the budget's tight; subsequent projects are already waiting; at any rate, attention can only be attracted for a short time; and, anyhow, "durability" in regards to art in the public sphere has sunk to the level of a curse word. What, then, could better illustrate *temporary toleration* than the container? That was something the politicians of Baden-Württemberg also recognized when they were able to decide, on the occasion of the 1993 World Championship in Light Athletics, to invite the artist Wolfgang Flatz to realize his "Container City",[12] consisting of 400 modules, on the Stuttgart Palace Plaza. They expected a "provocation to dialogue" from the calculated ugliness of the tract, without having to seriously fear a lack of acceptance on the part of its recipients from athletics, politics, business and fun culture: the plaza in front of the improvised open staircase was generously trimmed with a row of 90 black and white Porsches – the so-called "black and white horse parade" that would counteract the arte povera understatement of the event center with a wink of an eye; the lively program for everyone's needs had its effect, as well, in that the container construction offered exactly what one expects from containers: it demonstrated that one didn't wish to make one's appearance in a palace, but rather close to the people, yet at the same time with an avant-garde touch – and that one placed value on the contents alone, the happening. And whoever couldn't tell from the containers themselves that it was about a *temporary* joke, would at the very latest become conscious of this thanks to their contrast with the architectural environment.

Containers are not only implemented for protection, for the transportable collection of *goods* comprised of smaller parts, but also for *garbage*, which often – but not always – entails a changed form, slanted on both sides and commonly known as a *dumpster*. Such large-scale dumpsters are often open on top, so that an ordered arrangement isn't possible, but rather an indiscriminate filling with the remnants of a wealthy society. Gordon Matta Clark's "Open House" (1972),[13] an interior architecture made out of bulky refuse, found wood and discarded doors

12. Material can be found through "communication united", Stuttgart; cf. Wolfgang Flatz, *Physical Sculpture* (Ostfildern Ruit 1997).

13. Cf. Friedemann Malsch, "Gordon Matta Clark", *Kunstforum International* 117, 172–183, here p. 175; cat. *Gordon Matta Clark*, IVAM Centre Julio Gonzàlez, Valencia / Musée Lantini, Marseille / Serpentine Gallery, London, 12/3 1992–8/15 1993, ill. and text p. 155 ff.; Pamela M. Lee, *Object To Be Destroyed: The Works of Gordon Matta Clark* (London 2000), 198–201.

which found room inside a huge garbage container on the street (pic. 6), seemed – in the same manner that an architectural model made two years earlier from compressed garbage already did – to pick up on a problem oppressing New York at that time and to call its characteristic slogan, "garbage is politics", into action.[14] What spoke against the assumption that "Open House" was nothing more than a mere sarcastic commentary on this, however, was the fact that the temporary garbage architecture owed its foundation and cohesion to the very *container* in which it in any case belonged, according to the opinions of most passers-by.

The ambivalence of the dumpster, which attests to the worthlessness of its contents and which nonetheless presents them in geometrical, plastic and visual containment, was something which Matta Clark recognized and used, and which finds its echo in Martin Kippenberger's varying usage of this "medium". (Pic. 7.) Thus, on the occasion of the Cologne exhibition "Heavy Burschi" (1991),[15] paintings which had been made by his assistant, Merlin Carpenter, were stuffed into an imitation dumpster built out of plywood, which did not, however, await the garbage collection, but rather stood in the room of the Kunstverein, where it could unfold its full effect as a sculpture on a large scale. The carefully built-in viewing strips on the side walls allowed a peek into the interior – as though to prove that something was indeed inside, because a dumpster normally contains things that don't seem worth looking at, but also in order to challenge the view in the first place.

What seemed right to artists like Kippenberger was good enough for those who implement art as nothing more than a means of protest, such as Claudia Rogge, whose action "Restposten" (Leftovers)[16] recently opposed an intensification of a public order for street usage applied for by the Düsseldorf city council – namely in reference to "loitering in streets and public locations". For the first part of her performance, 25 homeless people crowded into a dumpster; the second part was terminated by officials the next day because, according to official information, the heads of the slaughtered pigs filling the dumpster were too bloody.

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14. Cf. Lee, *Object To Be Destroyed*.

15. In *Der Stand der Dinge*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, 10/29–12/23 1994), Kippenberger's work could be seen again; cf. reviews by Renate Puvogel, *Kunstforum International* 129 (Jan.–Apr. 1995), 290–292; further, in MOMA San Francisco 1991; cf. ill. (p. 158) and interpretations (pp. 159–161) by Roland Schappert, *Martin Kippenberger: Die Organisationen des Scheiterns*, Diss. Bochum 1996 (Cologne 1998).

16. Claudia Rogge, "Restposten", performance, Düsseldorf, 2/18 2000; cf. *Kunstforum International* 150 (Apr.–Jun. 2000), 481.

Independent of its politically or artistically motivated usage, the *open garbage container* unites two principles that are otherwise difficult to convey in one work. While the overflowing or loose *filling* stands for the illegitimate, junk, garbage, the socially and otherwise devalued, the *container* itself can still appear as a plastic, geometric block, at least as a thing being emphasized. If this qualifies it for approaches involving social protest, self-criticism or criticism of context, then the clinically sterile, *closed* container can lead to an adamant rhetoric of containment; for example, Manfred Stumpf's icons (pic. 8)[17] – which create their own religious mythology through computer drawings – are hoarded away, in considerable contrast, inside a container, and perhaps it's no accident that Anselm Kiefer once announced that the paintings he placed in a container in the yard "continued to work there on their own".[18] This strategy always becomes restorative wherever the *representation* characteristic for images – that is, presence fulfilling itself merely in the sublimated mediation – is transformed through a container functioning as a kind of temple or reliquary vessel into the assertion of a cult *presence* of the represented. A presence of this nature can be suggested precisely by the hermetic container, whereby it's also possible that one is taking a step behind that literalistic presence that Michael Fried[19] once ascribed to the mute blocks of the minimalists, which he had criticized as being "theatrical" and "waiting for the beholder". If Jean-Pierre Raynaud's cubic "Container zéro" (1988),[20] entirely tiled in strict quadrature, adopts this minimalist rhetoric of the literally present, which coerces the "beholder" as an "audience in one", then at the same time it demonstrates, by virtue of the possibility to lock it, the *revocability* of the insertion chosen by the artist (pic. 9). The container contributes to the object's fetishism in that, on the

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17. Cf. Manfred Stumpf, *Sketchbook for the Icon "Entry into Jerusalem"* (Eng./Ger.), pub. by Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt a. M. (Ostfildern 1996).

18. A. Kiefer in conversation with A. Hecht and A. Nemeczek in *Art* 1 (1990), 30–48; here, paraphrased from p. 46.

19. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (initially 1967), in Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley; London [reprint] 1995), 116–147, here pp. 125 and 140 f.

20. Jean-Pierre Raynaud, *Container zéro*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris 1988); ill., p. 46 in cat. *Jean-Pierre Raynaud*, The Menil Collection / Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago / Centre International d'art Contemporain de Montréal, 1991; cf. also Jean-Luc Daval, "The Monumental Works", ibid., 25–52. That J.-P. Raynaud would come under Fried's criticism was already seen, although defended in another context: Raynaud is concerned precisely with the theme of a psychic tension aggressively addressing the viewer. Cf. Nicolas Bourriaud, "The Psycho-Objects and Seriality ", in cat. *J.-P. Raynaud*, De Port, Tilburg, 3/6–6/27 1999, 15–22, here esp. 20 f.

one hand, it emphasizes its real presence, and, on the other, can also lock it away, in a kind of safe.

If a container of this kind – or a receptacle similar in structure – contains *pictures*, or whether one of its walls is replaced by an image, then representation threatens to regress into a presentation striving for effect – a trick which Patrick Raynaud[21] flirts with, for example, when he lets life-sized cibachromes of naked men shine out from correspondingly scaled crates, creating the impression that real people were frozen here or were cast in acrylic glass.

That a reflected, ironic approach to this principle is also possible is something that Anna Anders[22] (pic. 10) proved when she stacked two additional containers on top of the living containers already present on a large construction site and portrayed a huge naked young woman at the "window" of the uppermost container by means of a video projection from within. If everything at first seemed to hinge on the simulation of *real containment*, then the size of the woman, which entirely dispelled with the illusion, together with the constant reference to the "window pane" she was pressing up against, could also be understood as a hint at her pure *pictorial* status.

Many of the facets and characteristics of the artistic implementation of containers discussed thus far – the rhetoric of containment, the nomadic/mobile, the Spartan to impoverished exterior, the devalued or disdained contents of the container, etc. – return in the case of "Big Brother" and, in a different way, with Schlingensief's action. The same applies to the features which were primarily analyzed in reference to exhibition projects with containers, to scene clubs or to Flatz' Stuttgart project, and finally also to forms of usage in the service of political protest –

21. Cf. cat. *J.-P. Raynaud*, Kunstvereine: Freiburg / Mannheim / Siegen / Tiroler Kunsthalle, 1/15–7/15 1993; cat. *Patrick Raynaud. Die 90er Jahre*, Ursula Blickle-Stiftung, Kraichtal / Ludwig Museum im Deutschherrenhaus, Coblenz, 1996, esp. Lóránd Hegyi ("Die verborgene Katharsis: Bemerkungen zur Kunst von Patrick Raynaud", pp. 9–13), who concedes to the artist a distanced game with the options re-presentation and presentation (p. 9 f.). Gérard A. Goodrow discusses Raynaud's "Body Builders" in regards to the stillife, refers however only to the aspect of "being frozen". But he would have had to have also made clear the aspect of simulating the actually present, which is so closely connected with this genre! ("Vanitas vanitatis: Eros und Thanatos im Werk von P. Raynaud", 14–17).

22. With her work "Frau im Kasten" (1998) – installed at the Heumarkt – Anna Anders participated in the Cologne project "Brückengang" (see above); cf. also Jürgen Kisters' review in *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* 11/7 1998, as well as the press text/laudation by Dr. Ulrike Lehmann from 9/21 1998 (w/o cat.).

whether we're talking about the cool image comprised of elitist activism and a renouncement of aesthetics, the status inconsistency effect, the signalizing of an urgent matter, or the temporary in general. It will be crucial to a final observation, however, *how* and *to what end* these obvious or concealed implications of the usage of containers become effective.

Schlingensief's usage of containers has certain predecessors, however, where it refers to the aspect of *protest* and not yet to that of the artistic/theatrical expression: along with Claudia Rogge's previously mentioned action, Hans Jürgen Breuste's "Container für Gnadenunwürdige" (Container for those unworthy of mercy)[23] (1988) should be remembered, a somewhat bashed-in container which is open towards the front and equipped with various evident attributes of state power, but also with the signs of individual resistance against the life sentence passed against the RAF terrorist Peter-Jürgen Boock, in reaction to which he submitted a petition for pardon, but in vain. Winfried Baumann's recently planned "Instant Memorial für Nürnberg" (Instant memorial for Nuremberg)[24] should be cited here as well: a simple living container meant to symbolize the "abandoned home country, the abandoned house". Although the thematic frame laid down by the free city of Bavaria only referred to the "flight and expulsion of Germans after the Second World War", Baumann wants to comment on the global misery of all refugees.

Finally, Michaela Melián's work for the Munich exhibition "Dream City"[25] directly refers to the customary fenced-off container areas which arriving refugees are temporarily sheltered in. The exact proportions and appearance of two containers placed together became the model for her inflatable jumping gym, in whose enclosed inner yard, however, one neither can nor should jump around. In the catalogue, a committed text of the initiative "Kein Mensch ist illegal" (No human is illegal) is printed over a photographic background depicting an interim camp for refugees.

Regardless of the question as to whether Schlingensief knew the examples cited above or discussed further back in this text, one may assume that he was conscious of the potential *protest effect* of the container in the public arena, and that it

23. Cf. Hartmut Winde, *Kunst und Sakrament: 10 Jahre Konfrontation in der Hamburger Gnadenkirche. Eine Dokumentation 1981–1991* (Darmstadt 1992); here the documentation of the work in text and ill., 86–88.

24. Cf. report in *Kunstforum International* 149 (Jan.–Mar. 2000), 468.

25. Cf. cat. *Dream City: Ein Münchner Gemeinschaftsprojekt*, Kunstraum München / Kunstverein München / Museum Villa Stuck / Siemens Kulturprogramm, 3/25–6/20 1999, here 205 ff.

played a role, just as the reference to the internment of asylum seekers in Austria in container settlements at the airport did. Under this aspect alone, it already becomes clear that a container quote referring to "Big Brother" might perhaps exist, but that it appeared in Vienna in an entirely different context.

With "Big Brother", the usage of containers at first had external reasons, namely the possibility to quickly create an infrastructure, to be formed at will on any arbitrary area, of residential buildings and a yard for the inhabitants, as well as of hallways and rooms for the TV teams. Beyond this, and without ever becoming explicit, the reference was to that quality of expectation comprised of coolness, outdoor activity, (interior) architectural casualness and one-story building atmosphere, whose origins have already been discussed. But all of this has a mere subordinate significance for Schlingensief's action.

In both cases, however, the containers used signalized that it wasn't about them, but only about what took place inside them: the intimate nagging among the Big Brother candidates – as far as RTL 2 didn't overshadow it with the well-known spectacularism – actually became more bearable due to the container atmosphere. What in more imposing quarters would have seemed "studied" and, moreover, embarrassing, appeared "authentic" to many viewers. Structurally comparable with Schlingensief: that the public wondered up until the very end whether the inhabitants were actors or "real asylum seekers" was also due to the decision to use the *container* – for a settling of the action in the *theater* would have allowed doubts to arise as to the identity of role and actor.

Beyond this, the containers in every case visibly convey the *temporary*: it's always a matter of projects limited in time, which became even more intensified thanks to the voting out of the inhabitants in the interior structure of the "game" or "piece".

In both cases, *architectural trash effects* played a role, although with different contexts: the container complex of "Big Brother", thanks to its Dutch model perhaps not all too accidentally reminiscent of a camping grounds, was enriched by miniaturized elements such as the chicken coop, whose perpetuating, and consequently cynical effect contributed to a mélange which, on the whole, was pretty unsightly. The majority of fans didn't mind this, whereas others might have liked it, according to the pattern of an amused, distinguished reception which wide circles of predominantly young spectators already lay claim to, thanks to the TV fun culture. The potential trash effect of *Schlingensief's* containers referred, on the other hand, not to internal irregularities in form – the cheap look of the stacking fit well with the boarded shed and fence – but rather the specific contrast to the

environment: directly next to the Viennese State Opera, on the magnificent Ring-strasse and thus at the umbilicus of cultural and political Austria, the shabby constructions became expressive as an architectonic affront.

The different media as well as the ensuing difference in viewers' approaches to the containers have to be seen in connection with this: apart from the news coverage of the outside situation, which only later intensified, of bawling fans in front of the fence – the containers of "Big Brother" functioned as *interieur* for the painstakingly precise surveillance performance on the part of the *television cameras*. The container walls might have offered protection against the weather, but not from the omnipotence of the cameras, for which these walls practically didn't exist. This was very different with Schlingensief's action, where web-cam footage of the inhabitants' everyday could be followed via internet, after a fashion, but where it was essentially about the *confrontation with the immediate here and now of the theater*. This didn't take place on the inside, however, but rather *outside*, not in, but rather *on* the improvised fort of defiance, which served as a platform for protest and action. This is where Schlingensief and his double acted, where the protesters chanted. On the *outside* walls, FPÖ posters were hanging, political slogans with altered contexts; on the roof, the sign "Ausländer raus" (Foreigners get out) stood resplendent (whose reception had led to foreseeable misunderstandings in the finest Schlingensief tradition). In that the container's contents only reached the outside when an asylum seeker moved out, or, in a limited fashion, via internet and reporting, it remained imbedded in the immediate confrontation essential for theater; the interior of the container remained its sacristy, the reservoir of action, which itself took place *outside*. Schlingensief thus undertook a *division into two* that was rich in consequences and which helped itself to the difference between the inside and outside, which very clearly comes to expression with the container. The theatrical game didn't disappear, but rather polarized itself: into the hidden pledge of the action, the *inside*, out of which opportunities and news could be won – and the *outside*, where things were provoked, reported, discussed, brought onto the tribune, speculated upon and made spectacular.

The interior, although hidden, became more credible through the container, not only as the *really* contained, but rather also as that which was contained *only there*, for the living container in particular, set upon any location, implies a politics of "playing with an open hand". In the same way that a magician's box perhaps rests on an open pedestal in order to do away with any suspicion of dirty tricks that might arise with the public, Schlingensief's container complex remained a foreign body on the location, one that could be walked around and which evidently

wasn't tunneled under, that had a volume and an interior form, which in the case of the container is typically visible and visually controllable from the outside – a principle that we encountered with many of the artistic usages already discussed. In addition, the fluted surface of the metal container walls, which provides a high degree of stability with a minimum amount of material and correspondingly light weight, can at the same time function, in a visual aesthetic sense, as a permanent definition of what was expected from the inside on the outside and vice versa.[26] Thus, although the container boxes themselves could not be looked into, there was no backstage. An asylum seeker couldn't be conjured up out of any stage traps or branched-out theater spaces, but rather always only out of *the* box in which he obviously *really* must have been living in the days preceding. The interior of the container fort could thus – as in the art of Jean-Pierre Raynaud – guarantee the credible insertion of the real and, at the same time, assert it as the foundation of that which occurs behind the scenes, for the game didn't take place *in* the containers, but rather around them and on them, as guarantors of the really contained.

. Thus, to put it simply, the container fort accomplished two things: firstly, it signalized a mixture of alternative game location and temporary protest platform for the *external* activity; beyond this, however, it unmistakably signalized the urgent up-to-dateness and real presence of its inside contents. In that everything now took place *on* this architectural enclosure, the *visible* political and theatrical activism took place on the foundation of an *invisible* containment, which was guaranteed, however, to be real by virtue of the containers.

The play area of the "container" therefore favors, in Schlingensief's case, features of that cult of longing for origin which can also be found in today's theater and according to which "literal presence" is what counts; in any case, the separation between the hidden container interior and the considerably performed-upon exterior, the skin of the container, is to be observed: Schlingensief's political spectacle, which renounces the scenic form in that it takes place upon and in front of, but not inside the containers, could be ascribed to so-called "auctorial theater".

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26. In the visual arts, the membrane of the container wall, jutting out and recessed, signifies the interlocking between the interior and exterior space of the respective sculpture, thus i.e. in the case of Manfred Pernice's containers reconstructed out of wood (cf. Sabine B. Vogel, "Von Originalbehältern und Gedichten", *Kunst-Bulletin* (April 2000), 26–32; Birgit Sonna, "Das Prinzip Dose", *Art* 4 (April 2000), 48–54; Noemie Smolik, "M. Pernice", *Kunstforum International* 143 (Jan.–Feb. 1999), 373 f.).

As Günther Mahal[27] demonstrated in a study dating from the early eighties, this was never a monopoly of Brecht's theater, but always accompanied, and, what's more, even dominated European theater at different times since the Middle Ages, in that it – often in the service of the Church – performed a rhetorical task of persuasion in which manifold references to the public interrupting the scenic flow were sought and employed for the dissemination of a doctrine or moral. Thus, the politically colored *tua res agitur* belongs to Schlingensief's radical auctorial theater. In and of itself, the point is that it's not dependent on deriving profit from "real presence', but rather on argumentation and agitation. That a constant reference back to the largely hidden, yet living content of the containers prevails, however, the progressive/theatrical becomes intertwined with the regressive/theatrical: if, according to Schlingensief's intention, the asylum seekers are transformed in this manner into an expressive means of political activist pressure, then the rhetoric of real containment, which creates an effect via the containers' interior, is structurally comparable to the practice of spiritual theater of the early Middle Ages – in which, for example, in the context of the Easter Mass, the altar area could partially serve as a stage, or single relics as props, with a corresponding power of proof being ascribed to them in regards to the performed matters of belief.[28] Schlingensief uses quite contrary – in light of the already discussed usage in the visual arts – characteristics of containment for a complex synthesis: a form of theater considered to be trend-setting, one which is ready to sacrifice the theatrical itself in favor of a politicizing activity *on top of* the containers, is reassured by means of an archaic form of theater which hasn't yet liberated itself from the cult of the pawn *inside* the containers.

As can be surmised from the examples discussed, the container must be described within artistic, politically artistic or other culturally creative usages as a chameleonic figure. It appears all the more urgent to distance oneself from concepts

27. Cf. Günther Mahal, *Auktoriales Theater – Die Bühne als Kanzel: Autoritäts-Akzeptierung des Zuschauers als Folge dramatischer Persuasionsstrategie* (Tübingen 1982).

28. Cf. Manfred Brauneck, ed., *Die Welt als Bühne: Geschichte des europäischen Theaters*, here esp. section on "Die Theatralisierung der Liturgie: Ostertropus und Osterfeier", 293–296; essential is Thomas Kirchner, *Raumerfahrung im geistlichen Spiel des Mittelalters* (Frankfurt a. M.; Bern; New York 1985). Cf. here the connection between early theater bound to the liturgy with the nave architecture of Christian churches (p. 30), the addition of consecrated vessels, the strategically significant inclusion of the main altar (33 ff.) and the crypt (91, note 1), indirectly also the relics stored in the altar (52 f.). Generally on the cult status of objects, in modern days termed "props" (67 and 115 f.).

which screen out such approaches, believing they attain to allegedly fundamental insights regarding the nature or characteristics of the container in sole reference to the containers implemented on a daily basis in technology and business.

Hannes Böhringer's[29] theses on the container can be situated in the latter category, and an involvement with them is appropriate here because, for one, we're dealing with the first larger and concentrated excursion on this subject from a philosophical and culturally critical perspective, and secondly because his theses – or even just some of his brilliant formulations – have already found entry into the diverse art critical statements on the subject of containers.

Böhringer chooses "cask" and "container" in order to characterize presumably irreconcilably opposite – and, in the train of Western intellectual history, irreversibly alternating – ways of thinking. Characteristics which, according to the general cliché, are associated with the container – i.e. an indifference to its contents, its mere "capacity for containment', flexibility due to standardizing, lack of location, etc. – form for Böhringer the foundation from which he stylizes the container into that pessimistically lamented leitmotif of a modern way of thinking, which rests nowhere, quantifies everything, is spiritually promiscuous and, in this, latently nihilistic.

That Böhringer's reflections seek less to probe into the container itself here than to instrumentalize it in a metaphorical, partially symbolic way might appear just as legitimate in an essayistic respect as it is, in a scientific respect, doubtful and refutable in terms of the polarization lying at its base – what is crucial in this context, however, is that essential possibilities of the container are being ignored here which are intrinsic, at least to its artistic implementation. That Böhringer's pointed reflections on containers now and again lead us to an insight which is more useful than any obvious cliché which he might have derived it from is one thing; the other is that the container, oddly considered to be "lacking in being', is reflected upon *under the renouncement of the contexts of its implementation*: here, a reality that assumes many forms avenges itself upon the attempt to ignore the connections that the container, of all things, can and must enter into at all times. As could be demonstrated with certain examples from art, and especially with Schlingensief's work, the container, precisely due to its predominant neutrality, can also become a proxy for or catalyst of that metaphysics of presence following a rhetoric of "real containment', which according to Böhringer, wouldn't be allowed to establish it-

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29. Hannes Böhringer, "Der Container", in his *Orgel und Container* (Berlin 1993), 7–34.

self here, even though he admits that it *tries*, for: "The container is the space in which invention and imagination have to become productive in order to fill the emptiness".[30] In other words, according to Böhringer, meaning does not *reside* in the container, but rather only *visits* it for a short while. This, however, one would like to counter, is not only the case for the container, but for works of art in general and for the aesthetic constellation constructed through them – the view that meaning is a fountain bubbling out of the works beyond this revisable constellation, or something that had ever been deeply hidden within them would be reactionary, or mystical at best.

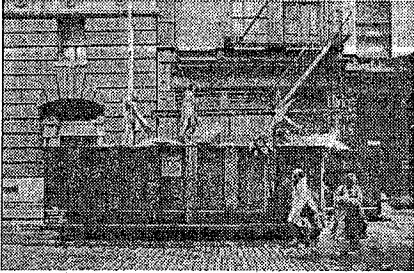*Translation: Andrea Scrima*

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30. Ibid., 27.

Pictures

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