

OUR GOAL IS MOBILITY



X—The federal trade association Schleppen & Schleusen Farida Heuck, Ralf Homann and Manuela Unverdorben

The primary focus in the works of Farida Heuck, Ralf Homann, and Manuela Unverdorben are the roots, forms and depictions of migration and border transgression. Their understanding of border transgression is not limited to immigration or emigration, but is also seen as a method which can be used to explore the possibilities of transfer and cooperation between art, science and political activism. The Federal Association Schleppen&Schleusen (Federal Association for smuggling people), also known as *schleuser.net*, adapts conventional organizational structures. More than symbolic, it is a direct starting-point of practical procedure. For example, they organize conferences and general meetings. Of course, as is to be expected from an open professional organisation such as this, the Federal Association Schleppen&Schleusen also supports the arts. As an artistic enterprise, their subject matter is primarily

based on state-generated images and the intentional or unintentional underlying concepts. They use them, place them under analysis and present them anew. The exposition is ambivalent. Nevertheless, its intention is to question the consolidation of a tacit consensus whereby the freedom of thought is given space or where the reflexive option is left open. The Federal Association Schleppen&Schleusen neither organizes migrants nor demands their representivity, let alone demand attention through victimization or fateful biographies. The declared objective of *schleuser.net* is to serve as representatives of businesses that are active in the market segment of undocumented, border transgressional passenger transportation. The backbone of their projects and actions is the questioning of public spaces. How are the respective public? Who defines the borders of this space? And last but not least: who can stay in

TAKING THE MATTER INTO COMMON HANDS

the public space, where, for how long, and for what purpose? What freedom of movement exists and who has the power to limit it?

The federal trade association Schleppen & Schleusen—*schleuser.net*—is a lobby organization for commercial enterprises active in the market segment of undocumented cross-border traffic in people. *schleuser.net* was set up in 1998—initially as *Schlepper.org*—to satisfy the need to present systematic background data on migrant mobility to the general public and to work on improving the image of the people known as “traffickers and smugglers”. The association’s task consists of combining the interests of its members and representing these with institutions and the media, on the one hand, and of putting right the effusions of governmental public relations work.

We regard *schleuser.net* as a place for action, for giving thought to migration, for examining fundamental as well as current developments for their symbolic context so as to foster a practice for negotiation that will intervene in this symbol-ridden system. Here what primarily interests us is the shifting of terms and images. A word about the background: Until the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe, the human right of Freedom of

Movement was seen as a great privilege, not least in the light of persecutions under National Socialism, the Shoa and flight and exile during WWII. It was also seen as a lesson of history. Since the beginning of the 1990s, government and public administrations in the states of Europe have been acting to dissolve this human right. One of their means for doing so is the re-invention of terms and images, thus aiming to punish activities designed to foster non-documented cross-border travel and to criminalize the profession of escape helper. Prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain, in Germany the communist part of the country (or GDR) treated such activity as criminal, whereas in the west part of the country the profession of escape helper was officially recognized as a regular commercial activity. In the wake of the installation of global migration management, terms and images drawn from Third Reich propaganda are being dusted off, or extreme right-wing figures of thought, are being introduced into public debate in order to generate contexts of legitimation. The public sphere is thus being eroded, and the public space in physical terms radically re-structured. As part of the reorganization of the border regime, official bodies are becoming actors in the creation of images and points of view and are thus intruding into the sphere of art. We as women artists attack this enforced official management of symbols. Our work as artists accordingly becomes inherently interdisciplinary.

We see *schleuser.net* as especially suitable for reflecting the change in the border. There are several reasons for this: European border management has enlarged the national frontier previously organized in the form of a line. The EU’s Schengen Agreement has replaced former frontier lines with frontier corridors and has facilitated the setting up of “frontier control posts” deep inside the state’s traditional territory. These form one element of new, internal borders. At the same time, the external border is being extended outwards. Border



Info Booth *Mobility Is Our Goal!*, takeOFF 2, Forum Stadtpark, Graz / Austria, 2003



*Temporary Office,
Exchange & Transform
(Arbeitsmittel),
Kunstverein München,
Munich / Germany, 2002*

checks are already being imposed thousands of kilometres in outside the traditional state frontier. Airlines and shipping companies are being compelled by law to perform the frontier police function extra-territorially and right at the beginning of a passage. For a specific group of people selected on the basis of origin, the passage will never end, since the frontier becomes absolute. The other reason why we see *schleuser.net* as particularly suitable is the question, discussed in terms of theory but actually very practical, of the representation of migration: *schleuser.net* directs its gaze on the basis of a socially accepted and established commercial organization. Women and men migrants are free agents, *schleuser.net* does not represent them, nor wish to represent them, nor aspire to fill a paternal role in championing their interests. So that there shall be no misunderstandings: even the car manufacturing industry's federal trade association does not represent the interests of car drivers.

This practice of *schleuser.net* also entails forgoing moral criteria or holistic solutions. *schleuser.net* does not enquire into a person's reasons for making a journey. This becomes all the more important in that governmental

agencies wish to place travel in some rational context, projected as they please as moral, utilitarian or culturally racist, depending on how the greatest acceptance by society for repression and regulation can be achieved.

It is just these figments of the imagination that *schleuser.net* takes up, in reflexively addressing the audience that we as women and men artists can reach. So our interest is not to reach some "alternative" element of the general public or to define a target group. We prefer tactical communication with those who are accessible in the given situation. This can be done, for example, by the appropriation of the hegemonial symbolism in each case, so as to attain an equidistant, vague, equivocal, yet all the more productive attitude, on the basis of which the daily idiocy of border management can be questioned and recognized. This is essential in that the cliché of border criminals active globally and organized in a mafia is also being accepted in circles that tend to see themselves as critical, liberal and also cultivated. On this, we would draw attention to the image transfer affected by the global migration regime, for example by outing undocumented cross-border traffic in the same context as terrorism, slavery, prostitution

TAKING THE MATTER INTO COMMON HANDS



*Switzerland Cares for Others,
Colonialism without Colonies,
Shedhalle, Zurich / Switzerland,
2006*

and arms and drugs dealing. The companies branded “people traffickers and smugglers” are construed as the scapegoats responsible for the horrors of globalized capitalism or total dominance. Model solutions are presented in order to protect governmental dealings and human worries.

In running *schleuser.net* we assume that migration is autonomous, or in other words that each person decides individually as to why he/she wants to go from point A to point B, to use passage C or to cross border D. Every ABCD of travel is as a matter of course laden with connotations, whether these consist of yearning, denial, utopia, resentments, *joie de vivre*, poverty, sickness, gaining distinction, making sense, etc. Aside from their reality, such connotations exercise influence. In the *schleuser.net* concept, we are interested by this symbolic charging if it generates outcomes that take the form of force or administration and most especially, when they are pursued precisely in order to achieve such outcomes. The point of departure for our work is the observation already mentioned, that political processes are shifting further and further into the realm of the symbolic approach. This becomes clearly apparent in the field of representation in the media, in constantly recurring patterns of thought and threat scenarios that have been uncoupled from reality in order to create a new reality

representing, as it were, an attack by the virtual world on reality.

With the Schleppen&Schleusen trade association we are on the one hand taking on the border and all the symbolism attached to crossing it, and extending this into the appropriation of hegemonial strategies, whether neo-liberalism’s jargon and patterns of thinking, on the one hand, or belief in the lobby policy of internationalist “scenes”, on the other.

schleuser.net is not an NGO plunging in where state agencies cannot reach, nor is it a group of artists bent on accumulating cultural capital. It is a working platform. The women and men artists involved form the association’s communications team. Depending on current questions and emphasis of the work, *schleuser.net* works together with additional, active persons, women and men experts. They proceed on the basis of a division of labour. That applies to specific campaigns into which the association’s know-how or at least its point of view constitutes productive input, e.g. for creating the prerequisites for joint action, or also for generating knowledge. One concrete example of this is the International People Smugglers’ Convention that was held for the first time in Graz, Austria. The convention brought together women and men academics, artists and curators, so that they could acquaint themselves with different approaches to the work and discuss these.

OUR GOAL IS MOBILITY

Here it was once again apparent that undocumented travel is a growth market with a potential that has by no means been exhausted. It is notable, moreover, for a very elastic price structure. *schleuser.net* naturally champions the immediate and unmistakable deregulation of the border regime. As always, namely, regulation only leads to excessive prices, distortion of the market and a loss of quality. Deregulation is just as urgent here as in other fields of the economy, since the development of border management is readily presented as a four-stage model in economic terms:

1. Deregulation, e.g. of the Iron Curtain and for the purpose of globalization;
2. The demand for state regulation to secure markets captured;
3. A demand for subsidy to avert the mistaken decision embodied in regulation;
4. Finally, insolvency owing to lack of competition.



More interesting for *www.scleuser.net* than this economic platitude, however is the process of acceptance and ostracism set in train with the border regime, that may admittedly be implemented and indeed manifested at the national frontier, yet range far and have as their target the entire social sphere. Just as territorial mobility is confined to a physical space, the attempt is also made to constrict social mobility within the field of society. With the organized passage across the border, not only is human dignity replaced by an administrative-style attribution of identity, but such concrete attributes as professional qualifications or also social links such as family connections come to be freshly determined by the state.

So passage is a third space that arches above a border disseminated into a larger space. It is here that the power of defining people is lodged and that the real conflict takes place.



Only Ministers for Internal Affairs are dynamic!, Flexibilität, Kunstverein Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg / Germany, 2004

„Undocumented travelling is a growth market. I could provide new jobs immediately. As an entrepreneur I demand: We need just a Heave Ho! towards legalisation.“