

**Hello, this is the Geheimagentur speaking.**

[lecture, delivered at the casino of tricks # zagreb, 15.06.2007]

Welcome to the Casino of Tricks.

Normally Casinos are about money, and if you have seen the movie Casino by Martin Scorsese you know, that there are a lot of tricks to make the most money out of a casino. So, usually, Casinos transform tricks into money. But this time it's different. Our casino transforms money into tricks. We mean to spend all our financial resources, limited as they are, and convert them into tricks. So let me explain why tricks are so valuable to us. I will try to do this in 7 sidesteps.

First step - performance as trick:

First of all tricks are at the core of our understanding of performance. As Dwight Conquergood, one of the founders of performance studies, said, performers are basically tricksters. To be a trickster in this sense means to deny certain bourgeois qualities of art. For example: Bourgeois thinking states that art is never to be used as a tool for a certain purpose. In difference to that tricksters view everything as a potential tool usable for a certain purpose - including art and including the purpose itself. That means that in the end the purpose the tools are used for may turn out as yet another tool for something else. That is why - as you may also know from the movies - you can never be sure, if a trick has already reached its end or whether another curtain is going to rise, to expose a completely different scenario. In real life this means that you never know whether you are inside or outside the trick, whether you are mastering the trick or whether the trick masters you. We are all accomplices in this situation. And this, after all, applies to performance, as well: performers may be tricksters, but they are never mastertricksters.

Second step - extending the real.

One thing that springs from understanding performance art as basically tricky, is, that we cannot confine ourselves to the restrictions of fiction. Bourgeois theatre tried to make fiction look like the authentic real. We on the contrary like to make the real look like fiction while it is still real. In other words: The trick is to use the resources of art to extend the real along the paths of wishproduction. In the past this has lead us into a strange series of reality-extensions. When my friend and co-agent Kati came home from the clubs early in the morning the day bevor we left Hamburg she thought: I have been one of the founders of the bank of burning money in Frankfurt, I have been a searcher for wonders and miracles in Bochum, just recently I have been an autonomous astronaut travelling through the galaxy on the spaceship earth and now I am packing my things to become the owner of a casino of tricks in Zagreb.

What all these extensions of the real have in common is a certain drive, we like to call it the improbability-drive, that enables research into the potentials of the real. And this relates to another reason why tricks are so valuable to us: The wide range of tricks we are looking for constitutes a kind of knowledge that is important to us. It is a kind of knowledge that is in itself meant to extend the real. It is less interested in theoretical abstraction than in virtuosity. It is a knowledge that is mostly local, situative, bodily, clandestine and minor in the sense that those who are powerful anyway do not necessarily have to be tricky. According to Michel de Certeau this kind of knowledge could simply be called „The Art of Action“.

Third step - friends and enemies:

To appreciate tricks as this special kind of knowledge also means to counteract the classic alliance of belief and rationalism. The despise for the trick is what rationalism and belief have in common, what joins them and finally constitutes their alliance. From the viewpoint of this alliance the trick is the essence of everything that is opposed to truth and real value. This anti-trick-ideology in the past made us trying to unmask tricks and to raise one curtain after another. What is neglected by this critical practice of exposure is the sheer critical power of the trick itself. The only kind of trick the alliance treasures is the old trick of bridging the gap between law and freedom: Internalize the law and then enjoy to obey it! Still, even this smallest of all possible tricks points to the fact, that the micropolitics of tricks are not so much about exchanging rules for other rules but about changing rules into tools. This is a tradition that at least goes back to the ancient greek sophists. Or maybe to the ancient chinese and their theory of war written down by Sunzi. For Sunzi to be tricky meant to make use of the way things tend to develop anyway. Thus the smallest possible trick is also the biggest one - namely to do absolutely nothing and just let things turn out the way you want them to.

Fourth step - the obligation to become a trickster

For the association of tricksters this might work out these days. Time seems to be on our side. But in a strange way, which is why it is exactly this development that severely challenges our high appreciation of the trick: As, isn't it true that we already live in a universe of tricks? To become someone, to get somewhere by following the rules - things have been like that a long time ago. Today everybody is obliged to become a trickster, there's no choice. The philosopher Paolo Virno states that along with the dematerialization of work that we experience since the time of the big industries is fading we all more and more have to become performers in our professional life. Thus performer and trickster are again morphing into each other, but this time out of economic reasons. The trick is indeed, what ties us together: those who work in, with, against systems. Obviously we have to think again and that is exactly what we do by opening the casino of tricks. And this is the reason, why we decided that this collection of tricks should be a casino, which after all is not the most utopian extension of the real you can imagine. So, can there be rules for tricks? What is a good trick and what is a bad one? And how should we treat each other as tricksters, never knowing if we are accomplices or victims to each other, or both at the same time? What is the end of the trick, and what, in the end, is a trick?

Fifth step - Capitalism and magical tricks

We have to think again about how capitalism appropriates the politics of the trick, and maybe started to do so long ago. As my friend and co-agent Matthias wrote in a text about magic and political performance the character of the gentlemen magician, the kind of modern magician with the black hat and suit we all know, was invented when industrialisation brought a new kind of power to capitalism. Interestingly enough the gentleman magician is a trickster who is proud of his tricks. He, of course, hides and protects them, but he does not pretend to have superpowers. He is a progressive man and appreciates tricks only, if they are declared as such. Tricks are his art and a very special one, as it deals mainly with a certain power over things: making them appear and disappear, destroy them and make them whole

again, exchange one for another. Tie them together and then loose them again. Matthias now states that magical tricks are like this because they reflect what happened to things under the influence of modern capitalism: As things become completely convertible to money, they partly lose their qualities as oldfashioned things and dematerialize. From this viewpoint it is funny then, that the magician also does tricks with money or with cards which are kind of close to money. Money made things dematerialize and is used here itself as a material - thus the magician turns money finally into a thing. This is almost like a fatal shortcut that might work like a virus in the capitalist system. It never really did, though.

#### Sixth step - a different dematerialization

Still, it seems revealing what special kind of trickster is brought forth by a certain mode of society. So, what then is the difference between the trickster, the casino of tricks is going to find or to attract, and the gentlemen magician? First of all the casino of tricks is not about one man standing in the lights and performing his virtuosity for the crowd, standing above them in the dress of the biggest businessmen of his time. Instead it is about the tricks of everybody and it is about making everybody realize that he or she indeed knows a lot of tricks. But these tricks have a completely different range, they are not all about performing power over things and thereby reflecting their dematerialization. What can this different range be called then? We think that it is the range of practice, the range of the art of action, though practice and action are also shifted as terms by this calling. This shift after all is still related to dematerialization, but in our postindustrial times it is not dematerialization of things that is acted out in tricks, but rather the dematerialization of work.

Or in other words - where work dematerializes tricks take over.

#### Seventh step - becoming accomplices

This can be good or bad. Or both at the same time.

It can be good as for example in our case: When we came to Zagreb to ,work' here, we were suspecting, that this might already be the main trick, that we pretend to work here and thus are able to spend two weeks in this city and do what we most like to do namely to extend the real.

But it also can be bad, because it means that to survive or to find a place to live within the society of today you have to apply an art of action that you usually would have liked to use only for something else like leasure, friendship, love, games or political protest.

But then again this also can turn out to be a trick, and maybe we can do this trick together, if we manage to become accomplices in an open association of tricksters. For this open association of tricksters money is a tricky tool like many others, and it can even be a tool to make people come together to share their tricks. The trick behind the trick though is never money but always another trick. So, let the game begin!

Thank you for your attention.