

INTERVIEW WITH

THOMAS  
PLISCHKE

+

KATTRIN  
DEUFERT

FRANKFURTER KÜCHE

The frankfurter küche (FK) / deufert + plischke was founded jointly by Katrin Deufert, Pirkko Husemann, and Thomas Plischke in 2001. deufert + plischke took on the artistic direction and Pirkko Husemann produced (FK) from 2003 on. They have created a variety of text, audio, and video publications since it was founded, while internationally staged theater work and artistic actions were developed.

**Relâche:** How was the group frankfurter küche created?

**Thomas Plischke and Katrin Deufert:** Three people met each other more or less coincidentally at a crossing where it was illegal to take some moments together to think about something impossible. They immediately conspired. They knew that they had been waiting for that moment too long so that it would be fatal for their lives to hesitate a single instant. They started to work and since then just continued.

**R:** “More philosophy than aesthetic” was one of Katrin’s first statements at Casa Hoffmann. Is this a work principle that you follow at frankfurter küche? Is it possible to say (FK)’s work approximates itself from conceptual art?

**Thomas and Katrin:** Every work demands its proper attention and it is not the work’s origin—cultural, historical, social—that automatically determines its appearance. In fact each work demands its own self-contained aesthetics, which provokes and enables to think of its rules in relation to the potential of (intended) references and connections. Decisions that derive from a work’s invented position, allow the work—the process of work contains the artist as her/his life doesn’t stop during the creation of the work—to set values and variables of form, content, structure, method in (invented) relations to the frame of the work’s immediate appearances. In this sense work takes moral, political, social, ethical, logical, esthetical, etc. positions by its self-contained potential and, therefore, the necessary reflection is not restricted to the discourse and history of aesthetics, but rather offers a field of philosophy, which is not solely restricted to the academic field. If we classify a work “conceptual art” we position it within a

timeframe of art history (as the “Historical *Avant-garde*”). In our opinion, a work’s potential is not determined by its origin and thus needs no reference to communities of recognizable common rules, i.e. in the connoisseur’s eye of art history. It rather demands a curious eye in the larger frame of culture.

**R:** Your position is very clear about the denial of being “teachers” and also about the refusal of hierarchal positions. In a certain moment during the workshop at Casa Hoffmann you said that outside Europe you feel this hierarchal cliché. Any idea about why it happens?

**Thomas and Katrin:** It is so difficult to speak of Europe as a linguistic force of dissection. But we can’t escape from our myths. We are unable to forget them. Even flying to another continent they already turned into the shapes they chose to catch our first look just before we dare to look back. A glimpse to what we don’t see because it passed away. People are leaving their past all over. Fictitious frontiers try to strangle our myths to death to fill their timeless presence with some need for speech. Thus the invisible horizon is expelled to give the measured space prospective.

**R:** What about hierarchy inside the European universities and institutions?

**Thomas and Katrin:** Academic hierarchy performed and based on publications and their visibility.

**R:** One of your work motivations is the problematic of gender, in an artistic and not activist way. “Sexual identification” was a current term during the workshop. It seems that this term is much more related to language processes and cultural questions than to sexual choices: “When did you first realize that you were called a girl?”, for instance. Can you talk about the importance of the sexual identification concept in the work developed at frankfurter küche?

**Thomas and Katrin:** All our work that has been developed and shown so far deals with sexual identification because we think of our times and from the cultural political positioning we are situated, of artists being called male or female ones having to confront their private personal political point of view towards that. We have worked for almost three years as a man/woman-couple. In the beginning we called our work one coming out of a homosexual relationship. This caused us big aggression from some of our “activist” friends because they felt betrayed in their com-

munity. Then we tried to research the meaning of “b” or queerness as a constant alternative to the heterosexual “a” matrix. Then we considered ourselves having a brother and sister relationship. This brought the works we did too close to a tragic appearance of drama at a time where we have to live the fact of having left dramatic forms behind us for a moment of history. Now we work on a fictitious creation of us being a twin couple which makes the incest possible in all political, ethnical, sexual, and identical means because we claim to not share the biological DNA as identical, but both of our protocols. But this could only be started after our intercourse, which we did in winter 2002.

**R:** What could be said about *self-containment*? Does this term come from a specific theory? What is the relation between *self-containment* and sexual identification?

**Thomas and Kattrin:** Regarding St. John “in the beginning there was the word”, which means that before God could utter this first word there was nothing but himself. In this sense God needed to inhale in order to speak the word and start creation, but the only thing he could inhale was himself. This moment of pneumatic cannibalism was his initial movement of his invention of the world with language and it is repeated with each breath before any “calling”. As God created mankind as a self-portrait, we can transpose this idea to the human domain. In this sense our first and autoerotic (self-portrait) repetition of this pneumatic penetration is not dependent to the sexual organs and their rules of behaviour. It is what comes before the word and therefore a constant reminder that makes one’s “sexual identification” dependent to the act of “self containment”. The beginning of the invention of the world is also the invention of one’s body–world relation. So to speak, one’s “sexual identification” is not linked to the “sanctioned” performance of gender hierarchy within communities, but what was the pneumatic initiation, the inhalation of oneself, the autoerotic first cannibalistic self-penetration. It is the experience of erection because it contains the danger of death (suicide, if one does not inhale oneself), before each invention of the wor(l)d, always already a calling, naming the idea of “fear”.

**R:** Is there any relation between sexual identification and elasticity/flexibility?

**Thomas and Kattrin:** The advantage of any container is that it cannot contain itself.

**R:** The method presented in the Solo (Re)Working work-

shop—which consisted in “observation, formulation, process, (re)formulation, and (re)process”—guided us to a continuous elaboration of our own creative and theoretical working methods. In this process the responsibility and individuality of each creator were explicit, and everyone became a critic and theorist of his/her own practice. In many cases, the dancer/performer self-critical position is a complex matter because of the intimacy of the artist with his/her own work. It seems that the method, which the two of you developed in the workshop, helps to establish a practice closer to each artist’s thought (and vice-versa) through the actions of re-formulating and re-processing the working methods. How have the two of you perceived this issue?

**Thomas and Kattrin:** This is how our work is, so we guess it is what we are invited for.

**R:** In 2002 you did *I like Erika and Erika likes me*, a 96-hour performance with a clear reference to Joseph Beuys’ performance *I love America and America loves me* (in which Beuys spends five days with a coyote inside a New York art gallery). Can you talk about this work?

**Thomas and Kattrin:** With this action happening in a small gallery space in Frankfurt we tried to reenact, via a certain reference on Action Art, the loss of experimental spaces in Frankfurt, using as well gender as performance issues to work with the visibility of immediate appearance. We locked ourselves for 96 hours in the space that had open windows to a busy shopping street in the city center. But we painted the windows with white color except for small stripes at about 1.80m [5.9 feet] above the ground level. The visitors had to step on small chairs in order to watch us working in the space. Inside we followed a fixed time schedule of mostly everyday actions (writing, training, eating, sleeping, talking, etc.). During the night we projected video and photo works so that the gallery space was expanded to the streets.

Surprisingly, this simple action got quite a big publicity (through e.g. RTL-television and *Bild-Zeitung*) because we were compared with “Big Brother” and people expected to see us fucking or fighting or maybe doing nothing. For us this was amazing because we could experience that Action Art is not yet buried in the museums of the so-called *neo-avant-garde*.

**R:** The unison in dance and in opera is one of the most stupid and poor characteristics for Thomas Plischke. You



Workshop with Thomas Plischke + Katrin Deufert  
Photography: Fundação Cultural de Curitiba

told us about a work in which all the performers had the same body, the same height, the same hair, and they all looked like the choreographer. For you and Katrin, are diversity and multiplicity in a work ways of refuting the “spectacular” and the “representational”?

**Thomas and Katrin:** A unison structure in choreography is always also a structure of uniformity (unlike music), which in our reading functions as a reminder that what we see is composed. It assures a citizen that he/she visualizes the amount of work prior to what became the performance looked at (like virtuosity as an insurant of repetition). I think we don't necessarily, at least on a structural level, need this insurant anymore, as according to Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, we encounter the horror that the citizen has no successor. So we can take the challenge of this broken genealogy and meet up with the complexity proposed in what we have invented so far as our world.

P.S. We leave it up to the proper inventor how “spectacular” or “representational” this is.

**R:** In your workshop, we were asked not to project the ideal anatomy on the other. Besides that, you strongly work with the use of images in order to make us think about very specific points in the body. What are your perceptions about the “anatomically correct” and from what sources each dancer/performer can work his/her anatomical specificity?

**Thomas and Katrin:** We as humans have only one communicable way of perception. Difference. This means either there are only differences or none at all if this could be more than a pure “either-or” distinction. But obviously it isn't. Art is the only field where the principle of *diffrance* can become political only through an esthetical statement.

**R:** In a certain moment, you said that automatisms of observation, thought, and movement are as complex as the sexual identification and nationality issues. Do you consider that when we get closer to our personal movement we are also approaching our own automatisms?

**Thomas and Katrin:** Automatisms are necessary for an economic handling of our body. But, mostly, we decide for a life within the arts because we like the challenge to actively meet the complexity proposed by our invented world. As John Cage said, it's quite some effort to become

critical on one's own encrusted behaviors, conditions, likes, and dislikes. In other words, if we follow our intuition it might, after some time, get quite uninteresting for ourselves. To get conscious of it is another topic. The dog in Pavlov's laboratory might be happy for the bell even if he doesn't get food because, by sanctions and repetition, he learned how to respond. The problem might be anyway that the dog can't speak and say that he's bored and the bell hurts its sensitive ears.

**R:** Talking about the crisis of representation... Does keeping away from representation mean getting closer to biographical interests/narratives?

**Thomas and Katrin:** In what is supposed to be our Western culture, the crisis of representation created theater or the performing arts and, since then, the Historical Avant-garde experimental art in general. Maybe mythological figures like Orpheus, Eurydice, Syssiphus or... Europe were invented to keep our myths alive in the past. They will always have been illegally lived experiences. Somehow we still are expelled from paradise. So all we can do is going on living what in the future will have been our fictitious biography.

**R:** You choreographed (*não se pode falar*) with teenagers from a Rio de Janeiro community, in collaboration with *Cia. Étnica de Dança do Andaraí*. What was the development of this work like? Was the working method the same as the one used at the Casa Hoffmann workshop?

**Thomas and Katrin:** No, the working method was different, although the development also underwent a process of formulation and (re)formulation, in another scenario of danger, in another context, at another place, another culture... so this might be another interview.

**R:** What projects is (FK) currently developing?

**Thomas and Katrin:** We try to continue our work. ♦

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Thomas Plischke + Kattrin Deufert led a workshop at Casa Hoffmann – Centro de Estudos do Movimento in Curitiba, Brazil, August 4–16, 2003.

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The frankfurter küche (FK) / deufert + plischke was founded jointly by Kattrin Deufert, Pirkko Husemann, and Thomas Plischke in 2001. Kattrin Deufert works as a director, author, and video artist. She was also a founding member of Breakthrough, the *Diskursiven Poliklinik* (DPK), in Berlin, and the frankfurter küche (FK). She wrote her doctoral dissertation on “John Cage’s Theater of Presence” in 2000. Thomas Plischke is a director, choreographer, and video artist while being a founding member of B.D.C. and the frankfurter küche (FK). Thomas Plischke was awarded the Phillip Morris Scholarship as the “Most Outstanding Performer” in 1998, and the *Tanzförderpreis* of the city of Munich in 2000.





Thomas Plischke.  
Workshop com Thomas Plischke + Katrin Deufert  
Fotografia: Fundação Cultural de Curitiba

# Relâche

Relâche – Casa Hoffmann e-Magazine  
Curitiba/Brazil, 2004.

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Relâche e-magazine was made possible with funds by Fundação Cultural de Curitiba – FCC and Prefeitura Municipal de Curitiba.