

## **Art & The Political Seminar: Part 1**

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The idea Ross [Birrell] had is that I present one project which I skipped during the presentation [at GFT 'An Ideal Society Creates Itself']. This is a project about the so-called counter-globalisation movement, in which I participated to some extent. It is one demonstration within this whole cycle of demonstrations, which took place in Gothenburg, in Prague, Genoa, and Seattle. It took place on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2001 in Salzburg, just some weeks after the summit in Gothenburg and two weeks before the summit in Genoa. The summit in Gothenburg was the first time that, within the context of these demonstrations, the police shot demonstrators and I think three or four people got hurt, and in the daily press, in the newspapers and on TV in Austria, there was then this discourse of violence, and the strange thing about it was that the discourse of violence was not to make the violence of the police an issue but they always talk about the violence of the demonstrators. I had some problems to understand it... It seems to be related with the power relationships, which, of course, also exist within TV stations and newspapers. Anyway, this discourse of violence was used in order to have the demonstration in Salzburg banned, so there were big debates but finally the police said that they could not guarantee the order in Salzburg. If they cannot guarantee the order and if the demonstration is considered to be the causes of why there could not be an order, then law in Austria provides the possibility to ban a demonstration.

An interesting aspect is that the demonstration took place on the occasion of a meeting of the World Economic Forum. The World Economic Forum is a private lobby organisation of transnational corporations, where they invite politicians and different influential people in order to get economic globalisation in the path they wish it to be. So the right to demonstrate, which is democratically defined within representational democracies, was suspended because of a meeting of a corporate lobby organisation. Anyway, there were still some thousand people who did not accept a demonstration ban, and so the demonstration took place without permission. The only thing which was accepted by the police was a meeting of the demonstrators and some speeches in front of the train station, but it was not allowed to leave this place – but as I mentioned, several thousand people then decided to leave this place and we marched through the city of Salzburg. I was there with a camcorder and recorded certain things, did some interviews and went with the crowd. We walked around in the city in this demonstration for maybe two hours, and then the police decided to encircle a certain part of the demonstration, and this encirclement lasted for seven hours. The police counted 919 people in this encircled area and I was one of them.

I thought that the material I recorded there could be the basis for a video I was planning to produce, and collected material from other activists who were with me in

this demonstration in the following days. I was only interested from viewpoints from within the demonstration and decided to carry out six interviews with participants in the demonstration. These interviews I carried out a couple of weeks after this event, so that there is a more intense level of reflection of the events, about police tactics. Let's watch the video a few minutes.

[VIDEO: *This is what democracy looks like* (Video installation, 2002)]

In comparison to these other demonstrations, which took place on an international level, the one in Austria, I would say, was very peaceful from the side of the demonstrators, so there was really almost nothing happening so that the police could say these are violent demonstrators – so they had to get these cobble stones as evidence. And a second thing was that they claimed that one of the policemen was hurt very seriously – and this was in the newspapers for days – that the violent demonstrators hurt the policemen. During the research I found some activists who recorded the incident and showed me the video piece, which shows pretty clear that these policemen had not been hurt, but just collapsed. It was on July 1<sup>st</sup>, and it was very hot and the policemen had all their heavy and warm protection wear and so I think he simply collapsed, without any attack. But all the daily newspapers and all of the TV, they had their own truth, what happened there. But I needed half a year to finish the video, which is pretty fast for me as an artist but maybe not fast enough for TV. Of course I tried to bring this video to a larger audience, which I think is very important if you do such a work, and did several presentations in art cinemas in Vienna, Salzburg, or other cities in Austria. I got in touch with the state TV, and tried to sell the video to them and I thought at the beginning that it was actually pretty successful because it was scheduled – not prime time of course, but at least shortly after midnight, which is better than nothing. During the negotiation with the TV, they told me, that in Austria, if you want to present something on the state TV, it has to be well balanced. Both positions have to be presented, and of course the position of the police was missing in this film, and also the mayor was not asked for his comments, etc. (Laughing.)

So the TV station asked me if it would be fine for me that they invited the head of the police in Salzburg and I thought it was a good idea to have a discussion with this person, and also this police officer accepted the invitation, but then, I think two or three days before it should be broadcast, the head of the TV station, who is responsible for all the cultural agenda, said it's not possible to broadcast a political debate on a channel which is for culture, and that the police cannot be invited. (Laughing) She didn't talk to me personally, of course. But the story of this piece continues, it has a positive end, at least. So there were some discussions about not presenting the piece, and I had some support from people and there was an international media art award of the ZKM in the summer 2002, and there was a curator in the jury of the award who really liked the video and put a lot of energy and effort to convince the rest of the jury that this video should win the first prize – what it finally did and which led to the film's presentation on TV. Not in Austrian TV, but on five TV stations of neighbouring countries, but at least through satellite or cable TV it was then possible to see the video also on TV in Austria.