

Hätte hätte Fahrradkette

Focus area "Science and Art":

*Première of a documentary about the "performance lab" of Helmi Vent,
Professor Emerita of Mozarteum University Salzburg
and winner of the Ars docendi State Prize*

THOMAS MANHART

During the 2015/2016 winter semester, students from various fields of study at Mozarteum University Salzburg and Paris Lodron University of Salzburg met ten times for a "performance lab" within the framework of the focus area "Science and Art". Ten times, cameras and microphones recorded what went on: voice and body sounds, improvisations, text-writing, walking, weaving, composing, questions and conversations, and performance processes in which the interplay of brought-along and evolved elements gave birth to unplanned results. The completed documentary "Hätte hätte Fahrradkette. Ein Performance Labor" is being premiered on October 20 (7 p.m.) at the film center "Das Kino" in Salzburg – to be followed by two more screenings, on October 21 and October 22 (both at 7.15 p.m.).

It is no mean feat for a (92-minute) filmed documentation of university study content to "make it" into a well-known cinema, and the fact that this actually happened is proof that more than a few exceptional features distinguish this project – which is unique in the German-speaking region – and its originator. Professor Emerita Helmi Vent established her arts laboratory "LIA – Lab Inter Arts" at Mozarteum University Salzburg in the 1980s and developed it steadily over the years. In 2013 she was honored for her innovative teaching concept when the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research awarded her the "Ars docendi State Prize for Excellence in Teaching at Austria's Public Universities". This was followed, in 2014, by an invitation to present her work at one of the discussions of experts during the Higher Education Symposium of the European Forum Alpbach.

"The impetus for the present documentary came from Alpbach," relates Helmi Vent. It originated as a request for a "model film" about the Lab Inter Arts concept, expressed by members of her audience: "You have presented so many results. Couldn't you also show the methods with which you develop them?" This is what Helmi Vent, together with the participating students and the camera team Stefan Aglassinger/Toldy Miller, has now done.

And now to the film itself: "In this type of course, the main thing is not the typical generation of knowledge that you need in order to prepare for an examination," says Helmi Vent within the first few minutes, and immediately receives positive feedback. A lab participant describes Helmi Vent's approach this way: "Always look at your own artistic projects with openness. Always allow for the possibility that something further could develop and give it a chance to do so". "What use is art if it doesn't make us think: Why are we here in this world?" another student adds.

Helmi Vent proposes, as a key parameter, “renewal and change, and the willingness to engage in them” and explains: “The important thing is not presentation; it’s the process of encounter – when what you bring with you enters into a dialogic field and is allowed to change. Through us, something happens to the person who has contributed something. In artistic expression that is a very important path to follow – a path that is not primarily intended to reach a destination.”

Towards the end of the documentary, the *Ars docendi* prizewinner does not even shy away from philosophic-sounding “explanations of the world”. “I believe that every attempt to redefine ourselves in the context of people around us not only has value, but is ultimately a sociocultural, political act – in the awareness that everything here and now can be changed tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, sometimes just by tiny impulses that we can generate ourselves. Therefore this project is worthwhile, because it contributes a little to the overall organism of society. There is no transformation that does not begin with oneself. For this reason, this kind of lab work is life-laboratory work. I see my life as a laboratory.”

Thus, the film’s title “Hätte hätte Fahrradkette”, borrowed from a German saying similar in meaning to “If wishes were horses, beggars would ride”, is simply a metaphor for unpredictability and letting things happen (how often would we have done something differently – and supposedly “better”?): life as a permanent performance lab.