

reSource Chat with Francesco Warbear Macarone Palmieri / Gegen

Francesco Macarone Palmieri aka WARBEAR is a social anthropologist, performance artist, curator, festival promoter and DJ. His work is based on Cultural Studies with a focus on Sex Cultures, Independent Cinema and Sociology of Emotions.

r: Can you tell us about the general idea behind Gegen? What does the concept of “being against” (= Gegen) mean today?

W: [...] As I moved [to Berlin], I started to study the German language, and I stumbled upon a term that was very contradictory: ‘gegen’. In a way, ‘gegen’ represents both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective in the conceptualisation of reality. ‘Gegen’ means ‘against’ but also ‘towards’. So on one side it is completely closed: it is dialectic, because it means against something or somebody, and the other one is open. We can say, ‘Wir treffen uns gegen neun.’ which means, ‘We will meet around nine o’clock.’ So it is open. [...] It defines a space that produces an identity against something, and the other one is tendential. In the latter case it opens towards something or someone and that was impossible for me, because, generally speaking, German culture is so dialectical, so structurally functional, and so black and white – how is it possible that there is a concept that is so contradictory in the expression of reality? This was super queer for me. And it was queer not just because it was criticising identity, but it was criticising the logic that produces identity. That was the flame that lit me up towards the concept of an event, which is much more than a party but it has the intrinsic desire of being a project of transformation. Gegen as a concept came out like this and its basic engine is the open contradiction, so not to resolve the contradiction, but to keep it open as a space of crisis and removal.

r: When did you start this project?

W: The project started almost two years ago. I moved here three years ago, and for one year I just focused on myself – on my writings, my music, etc., and then my closest friend and brother Fabio Boxikus came to me; he was representing the previous wave of queer cultural production and party-making through a very famous party called Sabotage. They were mixing a queer perspective with techno music; this party was fading away [...]. After six months he came to me, told me about it and asked what I would think about conceptualising a new party together with him. [...] I really wanted to start it, including the whole scene. But how would it work? What kind of production mechanisms would work inside the scene of Berlin? What were the relations between the institutionalised clubs, what was the language within the queer-scene? I needed a more focused picture. So we waited a little bit and then, as we already had booked three dates in the same club where he had been organising Sabotage before and that was called the Mikz, we just decided to use these three dates as a test. We wanted to try and apply this concept to that space by rescuing the previous crowd and pushing it forward to a new dimension of queer entertainment. [...]

r: Can you explain more in detail what this means?

W: [...] It was much more focused on performances and live-sets and video installation [...] than [with] the party itself. It was a much more experimental interzone. [...] We also included the guy I was living with in the organisation, Tomas Hemstad – he is a queer writer and culture promoter from Sweden, he moved to Berlin one year before

me. When conceptualising this new party I proposed him to join in and bring in his perspective. [W]e were having a bigger dance floor, which was basically a techno dance floor, as a pattern to inject a lot of different styles of music, influences, and performers. At the same time it had also its own dialectic. There was a darkness that was like pure performance. Conceptually, we were always hosting two artists. One was exactly the opposite of the other. It was like some kind of algebra. It itself was a kind of ironic dialectic concept – keeping the contradiction open. That was the scenery of the first gay gigs. In relation to this open contradiction, the methodology of production was based on a critical infiltration. We were criticising the dialectics of the concept of community by applying the concept of scene as a network – that meant, applying the queer concept of an interzone onto a territory by mixing different sources. To do that we were applying the idea of queerness as penetration, and we would create ourselves and our space as an open scene towards the queer scene – the Schöneberg LGBT area, the clubbing and techno scene, the art scene, the academia, a lot of drop outs in between, and even intergenerational relationships by calling older people to come in. This for us was the open contradiction – not the production of a dialectic vision against the LGBT community that would have been represented as the queer community. This method was inclusive and exclusive at the same time. It was even producing the language of becoming, because it was not identified as a market niche – like techno parties, deep house parties, or whatever parties, which are identified as ‘niches’

with specific boundaries. We were marketing the impossibility to have a boundary, and therefore we were the only ones producing the possible, which is conceptualised in a market-frame in the economy of cultural production.

r: How did you deal with the problem of the queer scene in Berlin, which is pretty identity-related?

W: [...] In a way, I use a specific language as a call to confrontation. I put myself on the frontier by relating myself [to] people that are having a different perspective on what cultural queer manufacture can be and by telling them that for me, in a philosophical perspective, queerness has to do with the deconstruction of identity. To deconstruct identity you have to put yourself within, inside and outside – you have to be molecular. You have to be ready to abandon your position and at the same time lift it. This consistence will produce a crisis that is the tool of transformation in a libertarian perspective.

r: How did you relate to the queer club scene in Berlin, and do you believe in the existence of a queer scene in Berlin?

W: I believe in the existence of different meanings in the production of reality. My personal inclusion in this range of meanings is, as I said before, criticising the relationship between an easy conceptualisation of queer culture as community towards a step beyond, a step forward. This means the subjectivisation of queer community in terms of networking. Networking means to penetrate and being penetrated, too. It does not

mean having to flag a dogmatic route towards or better 'gegen', so against another reality. It means having your life vision cleared, and producing a bridge with other realities. This is a concept of resources for me, because it is taking a source and socialising in multiple critical perspectives. So, that is my concept. My concept is going much more towards a scene which is related to a historic Italian counter culture concept, the "posse" concept. The "posse" concept was an open space. In the beginning of the nineties, you were having this huge squatter movement, called the social centre movement and a lot of different languages were produced, for example political hip hop language that was organised on vocal points, it means that they were open. So you would have like three participations in a posse that would produce a language not as dogmatic, but for an open space which you could relate yourself to, that would help you to come out, in terms of a sexual orientation but also in terms of the process of being and becoming.

r: In the Italian tradition the concept of queer could also involve hetero people, it is more about experimenting a fluid approach and attitude crossing various practices. How do you relate this to the Berlin queer scene?

W: There is a long tradition of conceptualising the concept of queer – starting with Judith Butler, I am just the last one in a long line. Speaking in general terms, you have to produce a space for people to come out, to produce a multiplicity. And there [are lots] of people who come out thinking about themselves not in an identitarian way, even though they are part of the queer community – and here I am using this term in its ideological sense. It is easy to be dialectic. What is complex is to be individual, and what is even more complex is to be 'dividual'. [...] In the dialectic vision [...] of the queer community there is [...] huge heterophobia – but queerness is about identity construction, about the mechanisms of power that produce identity and why these power mechanisms codify a specific territory in terms of markets, politics, society and culture. [...] For me a very interesting background is the deconstruction of the simple ideology that [...] heterosexuality

is hetero-normative. To me these two spheres are very different. One is a sexual orientation, and the other one is an ideological construction of power. And by approaching Kitkat club we worked on this thing too, because Kitkat was perceived as a heterosexual Sadomaso club [...] with that kind of [typical East Berlin] imaginary. I think that queerness is [challenging you], [it] means perceiving yourself in different contexts. So to me the choice to go to Kitkat [...] as a codified place was super interesting [...] because [...] you are exposed, you expose yourself. [...] [H]ow do you position yourself in a new frame as a queer subject?

r: How did this challenge go?

W: It went very well; [...] it is a place where you have an incredible mixture of people. So people went there and [...] they were confronted with a pleasure of displeasure: the pleasure of having the displeasure of a crisis of the old models. People started thinking that maybe heterosexual people are not hetero-normative, because some really don't care and others are very curious and in love with being 'others' – so maybe they are more queer than [we]. It was very fluid. I think that a queer event becomes political when a crisis is produced; when such an event codifies its own language, it just becomes marketing.

r: How do you perceive the current situation in Berlin related to the development of queer networks? What sense does networking make for queer events or communities?

W: The concept of community belongs to the history of sociology. [...] I think that Berlin, in this moment, is having a strange dialogue between stasis and ecstasy – a stasis of all the old models of production, which by consequence produces a crystallisation of dialectics [...]. With this I mean parties that stand in a strong dialectic relation [to] the institutions where they take place, such as Berghain, or SchwuZ. But then you have always sprawls, new frontiers that are pushed by Berlin as a social network market, but that at the same time are challenging the structure of the social network market itself. This actualises itself in [...] areas of urban sprawl, too, on a double level

between experimentation and gentrification. You can see this in areas like Neukölln, Ostkreuz, or Lichtenberg, for example. [...] That reminds me [of] the time when I was organising raves in Italy; for that we were spotting factories, and these areas then became so famous that people were going there even when there was nothing happening. This for me is a queer sensibilisation of an urban sprawl [...].

r: So could you say that in this way you are both criticising the process of gentrification and disrupting it?

W: Yes. There are always multiple layers [...] the gentrification process wants to use. The political action here is that of being conscious and relating to all this in a critical way – being an active user instead of being used. [...]

r: In a so called queer network, if something like that exists, what do you think is the need of networking? Going beyond having fun at a party, do you see something that is also creating a change in the structure of the city? We always use the word 'network', but never talk about what we are actually networking for. Why are people coming together?

W: Having fun at a party is transforming the city – first of all. I think, philosophically speaking your actions in life have to be motivated by the desire of becoming. That is very Deleuzian or very Situationistic, but that is my approach to life. So putting the desire in the centre of your activity, at the moment in that gentrification development in Berlin as a social network market, you cannot be somewhere else than in between. If you use yourself as a space in between, you are producing a transformation, applying a critical vision on what is happening around and through you. For example, thinking about networking in terms of digital culture as reducing other networks as antagonistic, it is falling back into a concept of community for me. At the same time, I am not Foucauldian in this perspective. I am not just saying in the sense of approaching the territory as a process to be libertarian. I want people to think about themselves and what they are doing, applying specific models,

being conscious about what they are doing. To me this is the engine of producing a critical network. And a critical network is an intra network. It means, producing different networks at the same time and thinking on how they can connect. I am missing the production of codes towards a completely new independent network. That was for example done in the beginning of the nineties, because the concept of the enemy – in terms of 'gegen' as counter of an object – was very clear. As the digital technology rose, there was an application of this technology with the idea of an enemy by being a market of the major politics, at least in Southern Europe. But then the market reorganised itself and it took you from the back. So you are not having the enemy in front of you anymore; it is not clear improved in trying to create this transgender context? I think the more conscious you are about your projects in terms of becoming, the more impact you will have on Berlin, that is, through being an active user of this social network. Speaking [about] the concept of the last transmediale festival, BWPWAP: In the discussion of whether he can be accepted back in the Solar System, Pluto has to problematise [...] a system. If he is accepted by the Solar System, aphoristically, it means that he accepted the game of the solar system itself. [...] I don't want to be accepted, I want to produce my space and you have to recognise me as I am.

r: Great interpretation of the transmediale theme! I would also like to ask a feedback from you regarding the events we had, especially the one last August, and in which you participated. In what way could we contribute to form a more critical and collaborative approach in the future? [...]

W: I think a network has to be a method; the times of Deleuze and Foucault are over. [...] It is about methodology, more than about the contents themselves. You always have to have this double perspective: one is the development of the network, and the second one is the meta-narrative on how the network develops. [...] As I said before: there are a lot of people begging for resources, but they are not active users. We have to promote the activity of the being. [...] To produce a resource, I have to produce a

dialogue. [...] I prefer to promote the concept of a networking inhabitancy – so of having an active position in a space –, not that of a network citizenship.

r: What did you think about the second day of the August event? What were your impressions of the panels that we moderated?

W: There were a lot of different approaches that were very interesting. First of all, I liked the fact that there was an approach regarding different media, so for example also paper was included. [...] So I really liked the fact that the concept of presentation and media was not completely imprisoned in a digital perspective, because this is what I stand for: the multiplicity of languages. [...] If a technology is an aggregation of different media, it is very interesting to see how you contextualise your body in a fluxus of information. If the queerisation of technology is only being seen from a digital point of view, then, from a critical point of view, it risks to be again (more) dialectical than communitarian.