

Third Spaces: The Bridge to the Other is Imagination

Since her studies in the master's programme in *Cultural Production* in Salzburg (2010-12) the sculptor Helga Palasser has started to put a special emphasis on cross-cultural exchange in her work. *Stone Diary I* in Zimbabwe was followed by *Stone Diary II* in Nepal and numerous journeys to symposia in European countries (among them France, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Cyprus; documented on the webpage <http://www.palassart.com/>). In the work that is presented here, the trails of these diverse experiences made as a travelling sculptor are converging. Inspired by the concept of Third Space by Homi K. Bhabha, the artist tries to give expression to the unlimited possibilities of cross-cultural exchange. The following questions motivated her: What happens between two or more people with different cultural background when they get involved in an exchange? How can they meet each other in an open way? Which possibilities arise, and which difficulties emerge? And, what does it mean to belong to different cultures at all?

For Homi K. Bhabha, the possibility to enunciate cultural difference arises from the shared incompleteness of every production of cultural meaning. Cultures are not closed entities, they are in a permanent process of evolvement with uncountable ties to other cultures. Culture cannot be fixed but evolves in the interaction *between* people anew at every moment. This in-between is represented by the Third Space, a space of ongoing negotiation, articulation of difference, a space where something new and different can come into existence. Bhabha's concept of Third Space challenges hierarchical and representative concepts of the production of cultural meaning. Thus, culture cannot be reduced to an easily manageable means for the purposes of political representation and rule anymore but becomes a process of infinite transformation and translation where there is no first original that could claim higher authority any longer.

To make Third Spaces possible basic openness is required as well as confidence in the other, but also self-confidence and the pursuit of one's own way. On the one hand, imagination is a very personal thing being always tied to one specific human being; on the other hand, it is the human capacity to transcend one's own self and approach the Other. Therefore, Christoph Wulf is writing: "The bridge to the other is imagination." What imagination represents here is a positive openness towards the other, confidence in oneself and in the other, a positive unifying power that is capable of changing and crafting reality. Everyone has got the capacity of imagination, it only has to be fostered. Art in its various forms is nutrition for the evolvement of imagination, a capacity that liberates people from their fears of others and encourages them to get involved in something new.

Curved lines, arches, paths, bridges, ties, interruptions, characters, converging, diverging, intersections, distances, a complex network of links, possibilities appearing and disappearing, spaces to rest, paths to follow, flowing time like water beneath the bridges used by travellers to walk across, translations, transformations, dynamics within statics, stability that enables mobility, oppositions in tension to each other and in harmony, giving space for something new, something different.

(Text by Michael Gferrer after a conversation with the artist Helga Palasser)