

Flirting with meaning

Contra-sexuality, performance and extending the realm of action

SV DAMENKRAFT are Katrina Daschner, Sabine Marte, Gini Müller and Christina Nemeč. They became a band in 2003 after collaborating on a range of projects. All of them are cultural producers in fields such as visual arts, performance, music, journalism, DJing, and dramaturgy. SV DAMENKRAFT sing(song) to pre-produced electronic beats and do wild and blatant live stage performances.

An email interview of Gini Müller, Katrina Daschner and Sabine Marte by Paula Pulver and Susi Schrott.

Paula Pulver/Susi Schrott: If we translate SV DAMENKRAFT into English, it would mean something like "Sports Club Ladies' Strength". What does the term "Lady" mean to you and where does the sporty attitude come in?

A: It was never meant to be translated, but it sounds good when you pronounce it with an English accent. "SV" stands for whatever you associate with the letters "SV".

B: Shortly after we changed the former band name "Svalka" to Damenkraft, I wanted to label a CD and wrote the first two letters of Svalka SV before I realised that it should be Damenkraft; this created "SV DAMENKRAFT" and we all liked the different associations combined with that.

C: We use "Damen" as a re-annexation of an old-fashioned word. We liked the elegance of the word - in combination with "Kraft" it gets an empowering meaning.

PP/SS: What is SV DAMENKRAFT for the four of you? Is it just

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a side project to fulfill the desire of having a band or is it more than that?

D: SV DAMENKRAFT has turned from a funny side project into a band project I seriously work on.

E: It is an experimental band project. The desire became reality; however there are still many options open to us.

F: For me it still feels like some kind of side project, although I do take it "seriously" when we perform.

P.P./S.S.: What themes are your performances built around?

G: Music, sexuality, gender roles and politics.

H: Feminism, radical politics, performative questions.

I: Contra-sexuality and questions around that.

P.P./S.S.: The choreographies of SV DAMENKRAFT seem to be a main ingredient of your performance. Do you develop them together and discuss their symbolic meanings?

J: The choreographies are simple and clear in their meaning. We discovered the power of the performative parts in our show; in some of the songs, the choreographies are the main element of the piece. It is quite an adventure because as a solo performer, I would never do things like that on stage; with the band it is quite daring and a lot of fun.

K: It is a process, of course we discuss it.

L: Because of my solo projects, it is thrilling to do group choreographies with SVD. Usually I have some ideas, show the others and then we adapt them all together.

P.P./S.S.: Do you develop your songs - the lyrics and the choreographies - from a theoretical feminist point of view or do they arise more playfully?

M: The creation of a song is a complex process of

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playfulness, political and feminist consideration, and the specific use of performance elements on stage.

N: Both things are quite important, sometimes more in this way, sometimes more that way.

O: The songs do arise playfully. All of us work with a feminist or queer background, so there is a collective understanding of doing things without the necessity to discuss each little detail over again.

P.P./S.S.: At one concert, two of you were styled as "gentlemen" (black suits, white shirts, moustache) dating the other two of SV DAMENKRAFT - the "ladies" (wearing a long, glittering ball gown) going to a banquet. Why did you decide to act as "gentlemen" and "ladies"?

P: The costumes are an integral part of the concert. We choose them from a range of different costumes depending on the location, the audience, and our mood for wearing them. This performance has a specific story. We were invited to play at the LEFÖ Gala; they were celebrating 20 years of activism for sex workers in the bourgeois club Moulin Rouge: the venue was a sex workers' working place years ago. We wanted to add a glamour touch to the Gala, so decided to wear suits and gowns. It turned out that all of a sudden, we played different gender roles and it shifted the meaning in some of our songs. For me it was the first time performing in drag and I loved it. Before we went on stage, I looked into the mirror, adoring my small moustache à la John Waters, and had to say, "Baby, you look fantastic tonight!"

Q: What we wear depends on the whole setting of a show, its context and so on. We are playing with figures.

R: It is more a performance of "femme as you can" for me, which I like to do anyways, not only on stage. I do not see

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those specific outfits as a repetition of the typical male-female binary system... more like genderfuck: to not define in a specific gender role, but take it playfully and with a shot of irony. Sometimes we play the coquette, the flirt, with meanings while we use them differently.

P.P./S.S.: In an interview, Beatriz Preciado said, "I define myself as a dyke of "soft" technology - textual and Dildonics - [which] I use to transgender." How would you describe your identity and your technologies?

S: Shifting, changing temporary figures, using and abusing all sorts of technologies, images and languages, rough and tough stuff, sometimes glamorous, sometimes strange.

T: I would say that it is different for each of us; for me "to transgender" is important.

U: I also like to fuck with dildos sometimes, but would never call myself a "dyke of soft technologies"; it sounds too sophisticated. For me, a dyke is a person who is interested in an active sex life and/or sexuality mostly with women. I identify with this.

P.P./S.S.: You use dildos and crochet dicks in your shows. Would you call this a cross-gender performance? What is your intention behind such accessories?

V: During the show, we gradually undress. Under the dildos, we wear brown big underwear like our grandmothers. Something always does not fit - including the image of cross-gender.

W: Dildos are a toy and a tool, a prop to visualize, and gender accessories for cross gender-plays.

X: I think they look gorgeous and sexy in a weird way; wearing them makes me happy. I am into "radical crafting", anyways.

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P.P./S.S.: In the performance of the song As Foucault Says, the lady debauches the man and fucks "him" from behind while s/he is singing. It seems as if you rape your standardised, obeying bodies in order to give them a polemic character in habit and speech. What is your aim in performing the song that way?

Y: If it creates an image like that, I am glad about it.

Z: It is a performance lecture about teachable bodies physically confronted with "performing a sex scene", so it is about the theory and practice of relationships.

A: I do not like the word "rape" here - rape means sexual abuse! If you mean "break", then this is what we want. To be honest, the principal "intention" to perform this way was because of Gini and me having a crush on each other - it was a good excuse to come closer!

P.P./S.S.: A posting on the website for the Austrian venue OHO, where you played in October 2005, says, "It was funny to watch the embarrassed grinning of the audience". Is it your intention to embarrass your audience?

B: Not at all - [our intention] is to create images that are very different from what you might expect from a band on stage.

C: That is an effect sometimes, depending on the audience; to embarrass ourselves is definitely part of the performance tactics.

P.P./S.S.: You use poems from Barbara Schurz and Alexander Brener as lyrics in at least one song. These figures reject being part of what we may call the art scene or art market. SV DAMENKRAFT have performed in cultural institutions like

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Kunsthalle or the MUMOK in the Museumsquartier (all institutions located in Vienna, Austria). How do you deal with the meanings of places? Do you discuss pros and cons of such appearances?

D: We like the books, lyrics and drawings of Brener/Schurz; they are inspiring and strong. Their activism has a serious goal: to attack the art scene which celebrates itself performing and reproducing deflated gestures. They are radical in their way of attacking the institutions. Seeing us there, they would also attack us. We would not be surprised. The scandal of their actions and their exclusion from the Vienna art scene shows how fleshless and narrow-minded this local scene is.

E: We discuss this and expect that they could attack us. The question is of dealing with art, how far to go in selling ourselves.

P.P./S.S.: The first time we saw a concert of SV DAMENKRAFT was at the opening of an exhibition at the Generali Foundation (Vienna, Austria). There was an arty crowd of curators, critics, artists and an ordinary art audience. We were astonished that you decided to play there, as we would have rejected doing anything for an institution like Generali Foundation at that time.

F: We discuss the meanings of places and adapt our shows to where we play and who is going to be in the audience. I like to experience different contexts, where we are taken differently. Of course, the "shock" factor is bigger in OHO than at a Ladyfest. I do like the stiff atmosphere in art institutions sometimes; you can have a kind of concentration you would never get in clubs where it is more a party between band and audience. Actually... we did shock a young

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punk with our dildo masturbation performance at our last concert in EKH; he told me after the show.

P.P./S.S.: How does performing for a crowd in such a place compare to playing for the audience of a no-racism solidarity party at the EKH, a former squatted house in Vienna?

G: It is interesting to perform in different spaces! Imagine yourself always performing for the same audience in the same places, no contradictions ever possible and people getting what they expected. We do not want to reproduce the same accepted, standardised political gestures. We want to extend the realm of action.

www.myspace.com/svdamenkraft