

Queer hop

Notes on Ina Wudtke, the NEID Magazina, queer theory and HipHop

by Dieter Lesage

With three series of photographs, arranged and presented in many different ways, that constituted the Belief project, German artist Ina Wudtke continued her long-term research into visual anthropology, of which she commented in 1998: "The theme of my Foto Notes is some of the very static and common identity models German culture offers to the Germans. Right now there exist seven series. Each of them contains 60 portraits taken in classic portrait format. Compiled in various combinations, the series become studies of both variety and stereotypes of gestural expression and body image. There are series representing: German soldiers (1998), German boy group fans (1997), Women on German magazine covers (1996), Women in German TV (1996), Women in my Hood/Germany Hamburg, Karolinenviertel (1996), HipHop teenagers in N.Y. (1995), HipHop teenagers in Germany (1992-93). The rows of body images are specimens of characters in a complex script. Whether taken as live portraits, tube pictures or glossy covers, my photographs are descriptions of images. They describe how individuals and identities are modelled not only through language. The bodies are battlefields of urban culture, - gender clichés and logos proudly presented on clothes and skin."

Investigations into urban culture, gender and identity have always accompanied the artistic work of Ina Wudtke. There is no

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remix without research. One might wonder whether the artist/DJ comparison still holds true here, if Ina Wudtke's artistic form of remix is primarily research-based. Although the DJ can be considered a researcher in his/her own right, one has to admit they are not always as concerned about the context of the breaks that are mixed or the samples that are remixed, unlike Ina Wudtke in her artistic mixes and remixes. Indeed, in *More Brilliant Than The Sun*, Kodwo Eshun describes the DJ not only as an artist, but even more insistently as a scientist. At the same time, Eshun is quite polemical about the disregard of the DJ for context. Unlike visual artist Ina Wudtke, aka DJ T-INA, Eshun's 'DJ-as-scientist' seems to be more into biotechnology than cultural studies. According to Kodwo Eshun, DJ Grandmaster Flash is one of the founding fathers of 'breakbeat science': "For Flash in '81, going to the lab meant approaching the studio as a research centre for breaking down the beat. In the lab, the breakbeat is isolated and replicated, to become the DNA of rhythmic psychedelia". Eshun reminds us that it was breakbeat wizard Droppin' Science who, in 1993 when he was known as Sonz of a Loop da Loop Era, termed this 'scratchadelia'. What 'breakbeat science' aka scratchadelia eliminates, when it cuts the breaks from gospel and funk songs is the song itself. "Grand Wizard Theodore, DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash are human samplers who isolate the Breakbeat by cutting right into the funk engine, discarding The Song, ignoring intention and tradition to capture its motion: the charge and pull of the beat and the bass, the gait motorized by the deck's direct drive." Freed from its original lyrics, the breakbeat will soon enough

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become the sonic stratum on which the MC will rap. And for Kodwo Eshun, the MC is as much a scientist as the DJ: "For Kool Keith, words are machine parts, to be soldered together into Unknown Audio Objects. Roaming over the wreckage of songs, the scientist assembles phono-fictional engines from 'hypothetical basic mechanisms'". Of course, the 'science rhetoric' of Eshun's description of the DJ and MC at work resonates perfectly with the largely fictitious academic credentials of the multi-egos of a great number of DJs and MCs. Numerous indeed are the 'doctors' and 'professors' among DJs and MCs. One could interpret Eshun's polemical 'scientism' as a revolt against a depressing narrative, which relegates blacks to a fatal history of suffering and oppression, as if blacks can't be anything but victims. It is not difficult to recognize and appreciate this afro-futuristic revolt against 'history' as part of the history of black emancipation. However, for a white, German artist like Ina Wudtke aka DJ T-INA, this revolt against history is not an option if it means forgetting about the depressing character of history, which seems to suggest that Germans can't be anything but perpetrators. For Ina Wudtke, it would be unacceptable to get rid of history and finally accept the idea of Germany as a 'normal country', as if nothing ever happened. For Wudtke, if the artist as a DJ is also a scientist, then (s)he won't be a proponent of the cold science of biotechnology, but an investigator into the historical, social, cultural, political and economic context of artistic performances. This is one of the reasons why, in 1992, Ina Wudtke, together with Claudia Reinhardt, Heiko Wichmann and Hans-Christian Dany, founded a

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magazine, and became an editor. Eventually, NEID Magazina would become yet another of Ina Wudtke's alter egos: Ina Wudtke, aka DJ T-INA and NEID Magazina.

The title of the magazine, NEID (envy), is an obvious reference to Freud's concept of 'penis envy'. Interestingly enough, the title omits the 'penis', keeping just the envy. No wonder this magazine caused many castration complexes. During production of the very first issue of NEID, in 1992, students Ina Wudtke, Claudia Reinhardt, Heiko Wichmann and Hans-Christian Dany got messed up with some male professors at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg. Ina and her friends were only able to get their issue out because of the support of Adrienne Goehler, the newly appointed director of the Academy. Between 1992 and 2004, Ina Wudtke published ten issues of NEID, all of which contained a great variety of interviews, articles, cartoons, drawings, photographs, and poems. NEID had no 'format'. Each issue had a totally different layout and was based on collaborations with dozens of people: visual artists, photographers, designers, poets, musicians, philosophers, sociologists, cartoonists, graffiti artists, etc.

Whatever its name may suggest, NEID was never meant to be an exclusively female project, and Ina Wudtke would always distance herself from old school feminism. Instead, she would cite the post-feminist philosophy of Judith Butler – who in 1994 published a text in NEID's second issue – as an important reference. NEID was meant as an empowering, liberating and resolutely queer project, not only for (straight) women, but also for gays and lesbians, for ethnic minorities, for

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transsexuals, transvestites, sadomasochists, fetishists and precarious workers, as well as for all possible hybrids of those impossible categories. One of the most striking visual strategies of NEID was to produce covers of covers, in which men were replaced by women, and vice versa. Thus the 1994 NEID #3 cover was a cover of the cover of the 1992 album Daily Operation by rap duo Gang Starr, with Ina Wudtke and Claudia Reinhardt taking the places of DJ Premier and Guru, while another photograph by Birgit Wudtke, published in the 1997 NEID #5 issue shows Ina Wudtke posing as Serge Gainsbourg with a cigarette, and a naked male model, Manuel Zonouzi, standing in for Jane Birkin.

From 1994 on, Ina Wudtke aka 'data DJ T-INA' – as she called herself in her editorials – became the sole responsible editor of NEID. Neid is also a pun. The German word 'Neid' is homophonic with the English word 'night'. In that sense 'Neid' also refers to the temporality of the DJ, the queen of the night. If the editor is a DJ, then it's a small step from 'night life' to 'NEID Live'. Indeed, almost every new NEID publication was the occasion for one or more NEID events, which often produced materials – texts, photographs, recordings – which were remixed in new NEID publications and other NEID releases. The NEID label also released a single, a mini-CD, and two videos. Over the years, Ina Wudtke created something of a NEID posse – or NEID crew, as Wudtke often called it – with people coming and going. Indeed, NEID was always a controversial project, with inevitable tensions and conflicts. With NEID, Ina Wudtke strived for an almost impossible mix of queer theory and HipHop. Wudtke

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shared with queer theory an interest in issues of sex and gender, while she learned the collaborative drive from HipHop. This sense of cooperation was, as Nicolas Bourriaud indicated in his 1998 book *Esthétique relationnelle*, a very important aspect of the arts of the nineties. It may well be that this sense of cooperation was already starting to get lost precisely at the moment when Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, in their 2000 anti-globalisation cult book *Empire*, praised the merits of the multitude. *Empire* probably reflected the spirit of a decade at the moment of its disappearance. When Nicolas Bourriaud in his 2002 book *Postproduction* compares the artist with a DJ, one could also interpret this rhetorical turn as a change in his appreciation of the importance of cooperation in the arts. The artist becomes more and more an individual again. In Nicolas Bourriaud's 1998 first book *Esthétique relationnelle*, the DJ was not mentioned even once. The closest one gets to DJ culture in Bourriaud's first book *Esthétique relationnelle* is a very general, rather odd but telling remark on "collectivist practices going on in the techno music scene". If there is any music scene where 'collectivist practices' were and are still going on, it was the HipHop scene, with its posses of DJs, MCs, breakdancers and graffiti artists. Ina Wudtke's first contribution to HipHop was expanding the traditional posse and its four groups by including photographers, video artists, cartoonists, poets, writers and professors. While in HipHop, MCs were already calling themselves 'professors', thanks to Ina Wudtke, professors became MCs. NEID became a place where street wisdom and academic knowledge met and interacted. And of course,

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the posse definitely included women and gays. That was Ina Wudtke's second contribution to HipHop: opening up the bastion of heterosexual male self-confidence.

Although prominent HipHop artists today take care not to indulge in homophobia – think of Eminem collaborating with Elton John – in the 1980s and 1990s, not a few HipHop artists still thought they had to have a 'problem' with gays. Back at the beginning of the 1990s, a project like NEID that aimed to be both HipHop and queer was not as easy as it may seem today. Even if NEID itself never referred to the political philosophy of Antonio Gramsci, one could argue that Ina Wudtke wanted to contribute to the establishment of a leftist progressive hegemony, which in the Gramscian sense of the term supposes that many different groups agree on a common ground. In order to break down the conservative consensus, women, gays, ethnic minorities, immigrants, illegals and precarious workers will all have to discover a common ground. As Gramsci always argued, culture is absolutely crucial to the formation of such a consensus, which eventually could be constitutive of an alternative hegemony. Ina Wudtke belongs to a generation of German artists and intellectuals who chose to move to the new German capital in the first years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Over the past fifteen years, capitalism dramatically changed the urban face of the city. But the city has also changed a lot sociologically, of course. Because of its function as the capital, it has attracted a new national and transnational elite. But it also saw the growth of a new exploited class, the so-called 'precarariat', 'digitariat', 'digital bohemia', or whatever one might call it.

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Whatever the extravagant commercial success stories of the Jonathan Meeses and Daniel Richters may suggest, most artists face precarious conditions, hopping from one project to the next. Looking back over fifteen years of artistic work, Ina Wudtke's work also seems representative of this struggle with precariousness. She was able to survive as an artist by also working as a DJ. As if she were spinning on two decks, Ina Wudtke has constantly shifted between artistic projects and DJ gigs. Her work reflects an acute awareness of the condition of the artist in times of global capitalism.

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