

Slavko Kacunko

The LIFE FLAG-Project. Art and molecular biology within the operational matrix of the biotechnological age

The Opening-Address within the Introduction-Event of the LIFE FLAG-Project

(Sabine Kacunko) on 8. Oktober 2010, 9 pm,

Robert-Koch-Forum, Dorotheenstr. 96, Berlin

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Well. Plainly, today, at this venue, artist Sabine Kačunko has pulled off a feat – in both realms, art and diplomacy, and a masterpiece in which, Your Excellencies, the leading roles are yours: as ambassadors from every culture of our common home, convening here at the Robert Koch Institute and thereby, by your presence, taking up and embodying visibly one Bo(o)tschaft: simultaneously a Botschaft – a diplomatic ‘mission’ as both ‘institution’ and ‘message’ – and in Ms Kacunko’s dual coinage, a ‘B o o t s c h a f t’, an ambassadorship’s hold-full, to which no one term can possibly do justice, and which we yet hold in common.

Paradoxically these are perhaps the most concise tidings, the most compact intelligence of all and probably the most important – because the LIFE FLAG embodies probably the smallest common denominator by which we are all connected.

The LIFE FLAG displays bio-molecular coloured micro-organisms. Their uniform colour and patterns are generated by the process of marking and so revealing the ribosomes (rRNA) which occur in bacteria, plants, animals, and humans too. So we have a factor in common and a point of departure generated out of the pitiless beauty of bacterial art – for: bacteria function as living solar cells doubling as living pigments (patina); and not least, they present us with a model in terms of their social behaviour.

The question arising about such processes, invisible to the naked eye, and so, about the LIFE FLAG project, is, what bearing might they have for us in real terms?

#1: In the operational matrix of our biotechnological age, molecular biology, especially the science of genetics, is fusing with computer technology to emerge as bio-information science – a new and powerful technological reality. Being able to isolate, identify and re-combine

genes, then, means that we have access to the genetic pool of our planet as a primary resource of raw material.

The LIFE FLAG-project draws on such re-combining techniques for its Bo(o)tshaft, a charge or message that places the instrumentalising of our ecological and human resources in the limelight.

Thence, art emerges as a source of collective forms of knowledge; and affinities with science emerge with it. The pull is reciprocal. Here and now, we as (cultural) ambassadors are celebrating an aesthetics of border-crossing, an aesthetics of artistic rationality and emotional intelligence in the process of networking while fending off the embraces of the art and culture industry as much as it rejects any retreat into 'splendid isolation'.¹

To that extent there is nothing utopian about the art we are celebrating here, rather it is profoundly realistic, based as it is on existing networks; not even metaphorically as in the virtual network of the Internet, but on a network analogous to nature and culture, one of embassies and ambassadors, representatives of humankind.

#2: Today, with the tension and at the same time the exchange between digital and biological existence becoming ever more evident, art finds itself in a new situation. Tension between techno-aesthetic and biological (perceptual) systems is central.

Beginning in just a week from now, from the 15th to the 18th of this month, the city of Aalborg in Denmark will be hosting a BIOTOPIA SYMPOSIUM which will examine how art 'handles' this situation; and right now in Berlin, Sabine Kačunko's LIFE FLAG project represents the 'flagship' of enquiry in the same context, charting new domains.

#3: The question as to the significance of such processes of reciprocal influence is integral to Sabine Kačunko's LIFE FLAG project, and here, in a moment, that question will receive an audible response.

But words from an art historian cannot capture the incomparable power and beauty of the Concept. However, perhaps the medium of music is a much more appropriate one. Ari Benjamin Meyers has composed the anthem *Hymnus Oceanobacillus pulvirenatus* specifically for this occasion. Under the direction of Professor Alex Constantin the Humboldt Choir, Berlin will performing it directly following this short introduction.

#4: The question as to the significance of invisible processes as implicit in the LIFE FLAG project, likewise elicits a visible response, and here and now, one will be offered.

The highly efficient, pigment-forming microorganisms visualised on the surface of the LIFE FLAG justify only too well our speaking of minutest biological causes of enormous aesthetic effect. Culture is rendered unto nature, and vice-versa.

By being here, Your Excellencies, you are already constituting a Social Sculpture in Joseph Beuys's sense, a sculpture that does not 'rest' in a static sculptural form but is animate in one of a living transformation – a communication in the making, a message, emission, mission, something ambassadorial: eine Botschaft.

In our understanding, the artistic process and the generating of culture in general are part of the same thing, an expression of the transformation of nature. The LIFE FLAG serves as a symbol and a metaphor for the transformation of that which is alive such that the transformation exhibits the determinant condition of that which is alive.

#5: Permit me, if you will, to conclude by responding to the question as to the significance of invisible processes as implicit in the LIFE FLAG project by Sabine Kačunko with the two closing sentences of Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialektik*:

“The smallest inner worldly markings would be relevant to the absolute, for the micrological glance demolishes the shells of that which is helplessly compartmentalized according to the measure of its subsuming master concept and explodes its identity, the deception, that it would be merely an exemplar. Such thinking is in solidarity with metaphysics at the moment of the latter's fall.”²

1 See: Christine Eichel, *Vom Ermatten der Avantgarde zur Vernetzung der Künste Perspektiven einer interdisziplinären Ästhetik im Spätwerk Theodor W. Adorno*. Frankfurt 1993.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, the last two sentences above taken from his *Negative Dialektik* from, quoted from: <http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html>.