Hardly Homemade: 
#Schlingensief’s Container

“Das theatralische Gefühl der Österreicher macht diese Stadt [Wien] einmalig.” [“Austrians’ theatrical sensibility makes this city [Vienna] unique.”]

— Peysmann (2018)

“Ausländer rein, Piefkes raus!” [“Foreigners in, krauts out!”]

— Poet (2002)

A clean-cut young man in jeans and a short-sleeved black shirt carrying a red megaphone struts around a large crowd gathered around a fenced-in shipping container that has been set up in the square in front of Vienna’s Staatsoper [State Opera House].

He shouts inflammatory statements into the megaphone, and incensed individuals in the crowd shout back, their remarks often laced with obscenities. One can see the scene, as well as “[t]he installation, its conception and construction, the progression of the six-day duration of the artwork, together with

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1 This chapter builds on material in Ingram (2012), which situates Schlingensief’s Container’s engagement with Austria in European identity-producing discourses.
interviews with Schlingensief and contemporaneous reactions from many different commentators (artists, philosophers and collaborators, as well as television news contributors)” (Fiddler 2018, 39) in Ausländer raus! Schlingensiefs Container [Foreigners Out! Schlingensief’s Container] (2002, dir. Paul Poet), the documentary controversial German film and theater director Christoph Schlingensief had made of the millennial media spectacle he was commissioned to perform as part of the same Wiener Festwochen that had twenty-four years previously hosted the Proletenpassion. As Allyson Fiddler has noted, “[t]he artwork or site-specific installation is internationally known and has generated a sizeable secondary literature” (Fiddler 2018, 39). However, as far as I have been able to ascertain, none have yet to analyze Schlingensief’s work locationally, as I do here. In outlining Schlingsief’s considerable dealings with Vienna and Austria and then contrasting his container action with Viennese documentarist Ruth Beckermann’s response to the controversial 2000 coalition government, namely, Homemad(e), the artistic rendering of her neighborhood — Vienna’s old textile quarter in the first district at the opposite end of Vienna’s inner city from the Staatsoper, this chapter demonstrates the considerable cultural distance between these two documentaries’ locations, one at the southern and the other at the northern edge of the Ringstrasse that encircles Vienna’s first district. My reading goes beyond identifying the works as merely site-specific to demonstrate the historical forces of these central Viennese locations that, whether unwittingly or cannily, were brought to bear in their respective artworks and generated the politicized responses they did. In doing so, Schlingensief’s final work in the city, a staging of Mea Culpa — eine ReadyMadeOper at the Burgtheater in 2009, a year before his death on August 21, 2010 after a lengthy battle with lung cancer, reads like a sign of the lessons

2 Schlingensief’s projects are notoriously boundary-breaking. As Alexander Kluge asked, “[i]s a work by Schlingensief an installation, an opera, a series of number, a total work of art, a working through of reality, a piece of theater, an intermission or backstage activity? They are all interventions, transcriptions, transliterations, continuations” (Kluge 2010, 2).
his work in the city and the country taught him about the power of its traditions of oppositional culture and the strength they lend its public sphere.

Encounters of the Increasingly Close Kind

_Bitte Liebt Österreich — erste österreichische Koalitionswoche_ [Please Love Austria — First Austrian Coalition Week] was by no means Schlingensief’s first project in Austria. That honor goes to the play _Hurra, Jesus! Ein Hochkampf_ [Hurray, Jesus! A Fight], which premiered on September 30, 1995, as a co-production of the United Stages of Graz and the Steirischer Herbst, an international festival for contemporary art held every fall in the Styrian capital. The Graz audience seems to have enjoyed Schlingensief’s humorous attack on the Church. They invited him to back to the Steirischer Herbst three years later to mount an Austrian follow-up to the highly controversial _Chance 2000_ action he had run in the lead-up to the German federal election of 1998.3 For _Chance 2000_, Schlingensief had “founded a political party with the aim of supporting disabled, unemployed, and other marginalized people to become independent electoral candidates” (Forrest and Scheer 2010, 10). The medial highpoint of this action was the invitation to go _Baden im Wolfgangsee_ [Bathing in Lake Wolfgang], a well-known summer holiday destination not far from Salzburg. Schlingensief invited all six-million German unemployed (and the number six million is not innocent in the German context as it is the number of Jews exterminated in the Holocaust) to join him on August 2 on the shores of the lake in Sankt Gilgen next to Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s cottage and to all jump in at the same time to raise the lake level and flood said cottage (“Chance 2000 – Partei der letzten Chance

3 That he had in the intervening three years scored major hits with _Rocky Dutschke, ’68_ (1996), _Mein Filz, mein Fett, mein Hase!_ [My Felt, My Fat, My Hare!] (1997), _Passion Impossible: 7 Tage Notruf für Deutschland_ [Passion Impossible: 7 Day Emergency Call for Germany] (1997), and the television program _Talk 2000_, as well as a score of theater productions speaks to Schlingensief’s extraordinary productivity.
/ Wahlkampfzirkus ’98/Wahlkampftournee/ Wahldebakel ’98” n.d.). While they may not have succeeded in their stated goal, the wave of unflattering press generated by the event may well have had something to do with Kohl and his Christian Democrats [Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands, CDU] being roundly defeated in the election.

Schlingensief followed up his bathing action by switching his attention from the unemployed to the homeless. From October 4 to 10, 1998, less than two weeks after the German election on September 27, Chance 2000 für Graz took place, a much more major action than the play he had staged in the city three years previously. In the town’s main square, eight pillars were built around the existing Mariensäule [Column of the Holy Mary]. Homeless people were invited to sit on the pillars, and the one who managed to remain there the longest won 70,000 schillings, around 5,000 Euro. Additionally, every day at 5:30pm, Schlingensief appeared and threw 7,000 schillings in twenty-schilling bills (about 1.50 Euro each) at passersby, who scrambled for them in front of the homeless sitting on the pillars. The history of the site added to the piquancy of the performance in ways Schlingensief did not make mention or use of. Also called the Türkensäule [Turkish Column], the column at the Iron Gate is one of Graz’s most visible public monuments. Erected in 1670, it commemorates the victory of Habsburg troops in the Battle of Szentgotthárd/Mogersdorf/Monošter on August 1, 1664, which came to be celebrated as a great Christian victory against

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4 The full title of the action was 7 Tage Entsorgung für Graz — Künstler gegen Menschenrechte [7 Days of Waste Disposal for Graz — Artists Against Human Rights]. The following account is taken from (“Christoph Schlingensief, Chance 2000 für Graz” 1998).

5 As mentioned in the chapter on Planet Ottakring, the Schilling was Austria’s currency between 1925 and 1938 and from the end of World War II until the Euro was introduced in 1999. The fixed exchange rate when the Euro was introduced in Austria was €1 = 13.7603 schilling. Although the Euro became the official currency of Austria in 1999, Euro coins and notes were not introduced until 2002.
the Turks. 6 While the Mariensäule has been moved about a fair amount in its more than 300-year existence (it was previously on the Karmeliter and Jakomini squares), it has been at the Iron Gate since 1928, long enough to become a fixture on postcards. While it is difficult to ascertain what role the Holy Maria’s presence on top of the column overlooking Schlingensief’s shenanigans played in the far right taking offence to the performance, the FPÖ nevertheless took its lead from the column’s reputation as a bastion of Christendom and did its best to put a stop to the performance, collecting 10,000 signatures with that demand. Schlingensief counterattacked by threatening to occupy their party headquarters in the Griesplatz on the other side of the river, a less than fifteen-minute walk from the Mariensäule, something he was prevented from doing by the mobilization of twelve police officers. The resulting coverage in the German-language press demonstrated Schlingensief’s prowess in making his opponents look ridiculous (“Christoph Schlingensief, Chance 2000 für Graz” 1998). It also provided Schlingensief with a target and a template for his next major Austrian action.7

The Main (Container) Event

After the major loss suffered by Helmut Kohl’s CDU in the 1998 election, the Austrian election the following year on October 3, 1999 was hotly anticipated, and it did not disappoint. Since 1986 Austria had been governed by a coalition of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ) and its junior partner, the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP), and the share of the extreme-right populist FPÖ had grown from 5% to 27%, mainly due to its charismatic leader, Jörg Haider. During the 1999 election campaign, the leader of the ÖVP (since 1995), Wolfgang Schüssel, at-

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6 See the entry for “Graz, Marien- oder Türkensäule” on the Türkengedächtnis [Turkish commemoration] website for details (Türkengedächtnis).

7 His skewering the institution of psychoanalysis in Schnitzler’s Brain at the Schauspielhaus Graz in May 2000 was not as major as his outdoor events of this period (“Schnitzler’s Brain – Freiheit für Alles” 2000).
tempted to consolidate the right by announcing that his party would not form part of next government if it should fall below its second-place status. While his promise did mobilize his voters as he had planned, it did not have the desired effect. Schüssel’s ÖVP came in third behind Haider’s FPÖ by the slimmest of margins: both parties won 26.91% of the votes and 52 seats, with the FPÖ getting 415 more votes than the ÖVP in a country with a population at the time of over 8 million — 8,032,926 in the 2001 census, and the actual count was 1,244,087 votes to 1,243,672. After protracted negotiations among the three parties, the ÖVP and the FPÖ announced at the end of January 2000 that they would be forming the next government. This agreement saw the Freedomites share the government for the second time since being founded in 1956. The agreement was met with great consternation by the EU, which issued a statement urging the Austrians to rethink such a step. When the coalition nonetheless went ahead on February 4, the EU-14 — the other EU member-states besides Austria — unanimously decided to suspend diplomatic relations with the country. Only when Haider resigned as FPÖ leader and the coalition issued a declaration promising to abide by EU values, were the sanctions against Austria lifted in September 2000.

The decision on the part of the Wiener Festwochen to solicit Schlingensief’s spectacle Please Love Austria for its 2000 program is thus to be understood as “a political statement by festival director, Luc Bondy, in response to the election outcome” (Varney 2010, 109). Building on his experience with the unemployed and the homeless, Schlingensief this time turned to the refugees that were the bane of the far-right’s existence, and whose presence they continue to milk successfully to curry favor with supporters happy enough to blame the refugees for all the ills in the

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8 The first time was in 1983 when a particularly liberal version of the party led by Norbert Steger was in a coalition with the SPÖ, which lasted until Jörg Haider took over the FPÖ leadership in 1986.

Ingeniously Schlingensief positioned asylum seekers as the contestants in a twisted reality-TV show. A container was set up next to the Staatsoper with blue FPÖ flags hoisted above it as well as the logo of the Kronen Zeitung, Austria’s largest newspaper renowned for its populism, and, lest there was any doubt about these references, a large sign declaring “Ausländer raus” [“Foreigners Out”] was mounted on top. Then, just as in the Dutch television show Big Brother, which began airing in 1999 and was immensely popular in Germany and Austria, twelve people identified as asylum seekers were brought in to live in the container and were subject to round-the-clock coverage on an internet-TV channel set up expressly for the spectacle: www.auslaenderraus3.at. The public was invited to not just watch but to call in every day and vote for the two candidates they wanted to see deported from the country. At 8 o’clock every evening the two who had received the most votes that day were (un)ceremoniously removed from the container and shoved into a waiting vehicle. The prize for the last remaining non-deportee was 30,000 Austrian schillings, around 2,180 Euro or less than half the prize money offered in Graz, and marriage to an Austrian citizen through which they would attain the status of a legal resident.

The show was intended to push all kinds of political buttons, and of course it did. Not only was the website unable to manage the amount of traffic it got and kept crashing, people turned out in droves to take in the spectacle, and there was a week-long public debate. The event ran from June 11–17, and one of the more interesting moments came on Thursday, June 15, when “about 600 protestors attacked the container and tried to demolish the ‘Ausländer raus!’ sign” (Weiss 2001, 61). It was initially unclear whether the action was supposed to be part of the spectacle or not, and when it in fact turned out not to be, but was rather Viennese protesters looking to show up Schlingensief, he and his team derided them, leveling critique “at the failure of ‘well-meaning leftie activists’ to mount an effective
opposition to Haider and the far right” (Varney 2010, 113). In contrast the protestors were very pleased by the action:

Mathias Lilienthal recalls the way that the situation was defused by selecting a delegation of six protestors to bring their message to the “asylum seekers”: “We want to liberate you! We want to bring you freedom! We are from the anti-fascistic front!” they shout. The situation is defused as Schlingensief’s team accede to releasing the “asylum seekers” — though this is shown to amount to little more than bundling them into the same black Mercedes as was used to take previous “losers” to be “deported” — and one of the protestors is shown happy and smiling, declaring that “Now they will all be freed.” (T. Schmidt 2011, 6–7)

In the online *Neue Lager Zeitung* that documented the events of the action, a boastful headline read “The Fortress was Stormed; the Asylum Seekers Almost Freed,” with the action of the “Widerstandsdsemonstration” [“resistance demonstration”] likened to “Indians” attacking a fort in a wild-west film. The text goes on to assure readers that “the asylum seekers are in safety — they are well” (“Die Burg ist gestürmt: Asylanten fast befreit” 2000), as though the demonstrators were a greater danger to the asylum seekers than the conservative crowds that gathered daily around the container.10 One sees a similar pro-

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10 The original text describing the incident reads: “Widerstandsdsemonstra-
tion griff an! Wie im Wildwestfilm: Das Fort von Indianern überwältigt.
Die allwöchentliche Demonstration zog zum Container und beinahe
mit ein. Die Asylanten sind in Sicherheit — es geht ihnen gut. Donner-
stag abend, kurz nach 20 Uhr. Lagerleiter Schlingensief verliest gerade
die Namen derer, die abgeschoben werden sollen. Eine Menschenmenge
bewegt sich auf die Container zu: Trotz verstärkter Security war es nicht
möglich, die einzelnen Stürmer zurückzuhalten. Sie kletterten über den
Zaun, drangen durch die Türen, stiegen über das Vordach des Containers
in den Innenhof. Ihr gemeinsames Ziel: Die Asylanten zu befreien und das
Transparent mit dem Text ‘Ausländer raus’ herunterzureißen. Beides gel-
ang nur fast. Die Containerinsassen wurden vom Team der Lagerleitung
und der Security mit einem Wagen in Sicherheit gebracht. Heute sind sie
German spirit in the reference to “the failed attempt by activists on day four of the performance to ‘free the refugees’ and shut down the container compound” (Varney 2010, 120n32). This account emphasizes “Schlingensief’s continued provocation to the coalition to tear down the sign, ‘Foreigners Out,’ and its failure to do so, pointed to the path not taken by the authorities” (Varney 2010, 116), rather than drawing attention to the protestors’ success in reaching and desecrating the sign with graffiti.¹¹

The action taken to free the refugees from Schlingensief showed his team what real Viennese actionism was about.¹² It was also an offshoot of locally organized protests against the national coalition government—the so-called “Donnerstag Demos,” demonstrations that took place every Thursday.¹³ Moreover, the site of the Container was bound up in a local tradition of demonstration, namely the “Opernball Demos,” the first of which was held in 1987 to protest a planned Bavarian nuclear facility. It happened that the arch-conservative Bavarian head-of-state, Franz-Josef Strauß, attended the Opernball that year, and the Green Party organized a demonstration that turned ugly, resulting in street-battles between the police and protesters. The following years saw a continued escalation of

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¹¹ The pro-German slant of the Art without Borders volume can be seen in their not including Chance 2000 Graz in their List of Titles (v).

¹² Vienna Actionism refers to the performance actions of a number of radical Viennese artists in the 1960s who, in order to express their rejection of the increasing commodification of art and society, staged transgressive actions such as “Kunst und Revolution” [Art and Revolution] in June 1968. See Widrich and Export.

¹³ Fiddler deals with these demonstrations at length. They started up again on October 4, 2018 after another ÖVP–FPÖ coalition took power and began dismantling the post-World War II achievements of the social partnership, such as introducing a sixty-hour workweek, and quickly spread to other Austrian cities, and even Berlin. See “3.000 Demonstranten legen Wiener Ring lahm” (2018).
these demonstrations, which began to be organized against the bourgeois attendees of the Opernball with titles such as “eat the rich” and the “Anti-Obern-Ball” — against those above, a play on ‘ober’ [above] and ‘Oper’ [opera]. By the time of the 2000 event, there were over 10,000 protesters clashing with the police and being brutalized and arrested. Had Schlingensief’s *Container* taken place in the square in front of Vienna’s City Hall or in front of St. Stephen’s Cathedral in the center of the city, it would not have been as over-determined to be demonstrated against as it was on the square in front of the State Opera House.

After the attack by the local resistance demonstrators, Schlingensief insisted on playing out the rest of the farce and having it made into a documentary as they had planned.14 He was similarly recalcitrant in refusing to address the amount of protest his pro-populist position generated:

A man shouts at Schlingensief, “You are an enemy to Austria and you have to be deported!” Someone who hates the xenophobic messages breaks in at night and tries to set the containers alight. Another attacks the structures with acid. A protestors is shown being taken away in a police car after defending the rights of foreigners. “Where are the dirty pigs who authorised this?,” he shouts as he is dragged away. Another woman first attempts to persuade the gathered crowd that “those who already stay here shall remain here, and they shall have equal rights to the Austrians.” But then, [...] she

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14 Director Paul Poet’s 2002 *Ausländer raus!* *Schlingensiefs Container* won several awards at international film festivals and enjoyed a rerelease six years after its premiere, on account of another political crisis in Austrian politics brought on by difficulties between the two coalition partners. In the snap election held on September 28, 2008, just two years after the previous election, both the SPÖ and the ÖVP did terribly, with the worst election results in their history; however, despite the strong gains made by now two anti-immigrant, anti-EU parties, who together won an unprecededent 28% of the vote and more seats than the ÖVP, and despite Jörg Haider’s death in a car accident less than two weeks after the election, a traditional SPÖ–ÖVP coalition assumed power, and the threat of once again having an extreme right party in the Austrian government abated.
shouts, “[t]hose Piefkes [an offensive term comparable to ‘Krauts’] always start these things!” She demands that the container be taken down, “otherwise there is going to be a war between us! We want to have our peace,” she shrieks, again without any apparent awareness of irony, as she smashes her hand violently against the fence surrounding the container. Soon she is marching through the crowd, chanting “Kick out the Piefkes! Foreigners in!” (Schmidt 2011, 5–6)

The presence of Germans and their condescending attitude towards Austria continues to be cause for some consternation in Austria, a problematic noted in Chapter 2 in the reading of Planet Ottakring.

Schlingensief’s practice reveals the contempt in which he held traditional activism, and the need he saw to operate “on the level of appearance, of spectacle, of the representational regime of images.” In his view, “[t]he whole container-thing was a machinery to disrupt images!” (ibid., 7). He also confessed at another point that one of the central concerns was “to put public spaces to the test” (Gade 2010, 91). The public space in front of Vienna’s State Opera turned out to be highly charged and allowed for much conflictual contestation. As Claire Bishop notes, “[a]lthough in retrospect — and particularly in Poet’s film — it is evident that the work is a critique of xenophobia and its institutions, in Vienna the event (and Schlingensief’s charismatic role as circus-master) was ambiguous enough to receive approval and condemnation from all sides of the political spectrum” (Bishop 2012, 282). If Schlingensief designed the event, as was his wont, to interrogate the exclusionary mechanisms inherent in a particular public space, then from the fact that the square in front of the State Opera made space for all to enter, it would seem that it passed Schlingensief’s test with flying colors. The “disturbing lesson” that we have to take away from the test, however, is, as Claire Bishop underscores, “that an artistic representation of detention has more power to attract dissensus than an actual institution of detention” (ibid., 283; italics in original).
A Homemad(e) Take on Intercultural Relations

In stark contrast to Schlingensief’s deliberately outrageous, highly visible orchestration of one of the most prominent central tourist locations in the city, Ruth Beckermann’s Homemad(e) (2001) quietly introduces viewers to the locals in the street in which she lives at the opposite end of the first district from the Staatsoper, namely, the Marc Aurel Strasse, which runs parallel to the Judengasse and is quite close to the city’s central synagogue. After making her film debut with Arena besetzt [Arena Occupied] (1977), discussed in chapter one, and then establishing her countercultural credentials with Auf amoi a Streik [All of a Sudden a Strike], (1978) and Der Hammer steht auf der Wiese da draußen [The Hammer is in the Meadow Out There], (1981), and co-founding the Filmladen, one of Austria’s largest film distributors, Beckermann turned her attention to her Jewish heritage in the trilogy Wien retour [Vienna There and Back] (1983), Die papierene Brücke [The Paper Bridge] (1987), and Nach Jerusalem [Toward Jerusalem] (1990), establishing herself as a prominent member of the second generation of Jews in Austria, who “embraced their Jewish identity in protest against Waldheim and his supporters […] in a public way that put them at odds with the survivor generation” (A. Reiter 2013, 1–2). As in Die papierene Brücke, so too is Beckermann’s point of departure in Homemad(e) “the house in Vienna where she lives”; here too is her interest “her father’s Ashkenazic culture of origin in Eastern Europe” (D. Lorenz 2014, 72). Yet this time, with a blatantly anti-Semitic party ensconced in the federal government attracting the wrath of the EU and European avant-garde media circus directors such as Schlingensief, her travelogue remains firmly grounded in her local surroundings and documents the comings and goings around the Café Salzgries, which is now a hip hangout called the Billiardcafe Küü, of mostly creative types, retirees, and a few older housewives. As her opening voiceover explains, she has arrived back in Vienna after making Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient [A Fleeting Train to the Orient] (1999) and wants now to turn her attention to her
neighbors: “Von einer großen Reise mit einer großen Kamera zurückgekehrt, nehme ich meine kleine Kamera mit auf kleine Reisen, nicht weiter als vor meiner Haustür mitten in Wien” [“Having arrived back from a large trip with a large camera, I take my small camera on a small trip, no further than in front of my door in the middle of Vienna”]. As the opening conversation among the three elderly Jewish gentlemen makes clear, her goal is not, as one of them immediately supposes, to depict how “deppert” [“stupid”] they are, a subtle or maybe not-so-subtle dig at Schlingensief, but rather how well they get along, even with Iranian hotel-owner Djavad Alam, the “Araber” who runs the Café Bar Butterfly across the street. Unlike Schlingensief, whose resolute focus on the Austrian political situation blames them all equally for allowing something so terrible to happen, Beckermann does not ask residents for their political views until the last twenty minutes of the almost ninety-minute documentary, preferring to establish their characters and lifestyles first. She leaves us with what Christina Guenther calls “a final gesture of friendship, however flawed or uneasy” (Guenther 2004, 42), namely the question of whether being good neighbors is enough in a Vienna, where “das ganze Leben ist ein Theater [all of life is theater]” and “alles ist vergänglich [everything is fleeting]” as the main character, Adolf “Adi” Doft, muses in the final conversation with his Iranian neighbor. The final scene shows Doft shutting up his tailor shop and going home for the evening. Young people pass by; a young mother pushes a carriage and a young man rides a bicycle. Doft encounters Alam, who reveals his vanity by removing his glasses for the camera and commenting a bit derisively on Doft’s attractiveness to the camera women, namely Beckermann and her assistant.\footnote{Christina Kaindl-Hönig is credited as the “Regie-Assistenz,” which fits which Doft addressing them as “Mädls” [“girls”].} The conversation that ensues illustrates the challenges of intercultural relations. Alam’s attitude towards Doft is condescending, while Doft responds good-naturedly but with some reserve. Alam seems to have been asked to make small talk for the camera.
He asks where Doft is going, how he will spend the evening, what he will have for dinner. Soup, hamburger, mashed potatoes and stewed fruit comes the reply. Homemade stewed fruit? Oh yes, always, Doft responds, and also a small Ottakringer beer for 4 Schilling 90, at which Alam remarks, smirking and looking at the cameraperson: “Oh, Preis muss man unbedingt wissen” [“oh, one must absolutely know the price”]. When his “joke” flops with those present, he goes to assure everyone that they are “gute Nachbarn, das ist wichtig, sehr gute Nachbarn” [“good neighbors, that is important, very good neighbors”]. Doft responds, “[j]a, ja, ich glaube, ich bin ein guter Nachbar” [“yes, yes, I think I’m a good neighbor”], implying that he’s not so sure about Alam. He grabs Alam’s hand and wishes him good health and praises Alam’s responding wish of “alles Gute” [“all the best”] with “[i]n Ordnung” [“ok”], something Alam doesn’t quite get. He turns to the camera people and asks them, “[w]as soll das bedeuten?” [“what does that mean?"], as the camera follows Doft walking away down the street and the credits roll. While in Jenseits des Kriegs [The Other Side of War] (1995), Beckermann set out to “examine why veterans and other Austrians of the war generation visit an exhibition of material that indicts them in the strongest terms” (D. Lorenz 1999, 323), here she depicts an everyday encounter of a Holocaust survivor and a more recent anti-Semitic immigrant businessman to show how Jews manage to live with everyday racism that wears a friendly face. In doing so she reveals both how much the FPÖ’s blanket condemnation of “foreigners” misses the mark and the terrible irony that some of those foreigners are likely their supporters.

A New Stage

While there is no evidence to suggest that Schlingensief took on board the lessons of Beckermann’s documentary, or that he could even understand its difficult, local dialect had he watched it, when he next returned to perform in Austria, with the world premiere of the anti-Iraq-War play Bambiland at the Burgtheater on December 12, 2003, it marked a decisive development in his
performative practice. It was the first time he staged a theater text by another author (Koerner 2010, 153), and not just any author but the soon-to-be Nobel Prize winner, Elfriede Jelinek, who won the prize the following year. Having participated in Chance 2000 and Please Love Austria, Jelinek considered herself a Schlingensief fan, and as Morgan Koerner relates, she had discovered from Frank Castorf’s radical 1994 staging of her Raststätte oder Sie machens alle [Services or They All Do It] “a process of creative collaboration with directors in which she encourages (if not forces) them to respond to her associative texts with further associations” (ibid., 156). Her choice of Schlingensief to direct Bambiland at the country’s most prestigious stage and her enthusiastic response to the production confirmed the compatibility of their dissonant styles and approaches. She gushed, “I am thrilled. It was one of the most overwhelming reactions that my texts have ever received. Even though not much of the text appears, it corresponds to my method of writing. This text is an amalgam of media reports about Iraq, and Schlingensief amalgamised it once more with this overwhelming visual level” (ibid., 154). He in turn “was moved to tears” when she was announced the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2004:

Ich war zu Tränen gerührt, als ich die Nachricht über die Zuerkennung des Nobelpreises an Elfriede Jelinek erhalten habe. Das ist eine der besten Entscheidungen des Nobelpreiskomitees. Jeder irrt sich, wenn er meint, das war die Frauenquote. Da ist eine wirkliche Dissidentin zum Mainstream gewählt worden. Ich würde sie als die Cassandra der zeitgenössischen Literatur und des deutschsprachigen Theaters bezeichnen, jene Cassandra, die das Schreckliche kommen sieht, das Unheil, den Abgrund, den Tod, und niemand glaubt ihr.

[I was moved to tears when I received the news about the awarding of the Nobel prize to Elfriede Jelinek. This is one of the Nobel Prize Committee’s best decisions. Everyone who thinks it was because of the female quota is mistaken. A real
dissident of the mainstream was chosen. I would describe her as the Cassandra of contemporary literature and the German-language stage, that Cassandra who sees what’s terrible coming, calamity, the abyss, death, and no one believes her.] (Schlingensief 2010)

In the “Jelinek and Schlingensief” section of Pia Janke and Theresa Kovacs’s *Der Gesamtkünstler Christoph Schlingensief [The Total Artist Christoph Schlingensief]*, which is devoted to a consideration of their relationship, Jelinek in turn calls him “mein Assistent der [sic] Verschwindens” [“my assistant of disappearance”].

The depth of Schlingensief and Jelinek’s mutual admiration paved the way for two further experimental installation-performances at the Burg: *Area7 Matthäusexpedition [St. Matthew’s Expedition]*, which opened on January 20, 2006, and *Mea Culpa*, which played from March 20–25, 2009. Unlike his earlier incendiary outdoor actions, which awakened the histories of the sites on which they took place and were very much in the tradition of what Claire Bishop has called the “expanded field of post-studio practices” (Bishop 2012, 1), these final works modulate that understanding of “expanded” to bring it into line with Joseph Beuys’s expanded art (Vogel 2006) by returning indoors, into renowned theatrical spaces such as the Burg in Vienna, and pushing at the limits of what they will allow as though he were seeking to explode them from within. Sabine Vogel conveys the post-theatricality of *Area7* very well:

As in all Schlingensief’s works, whether TV talk shows, theater pieces, or films, *Area7* evinces a deep antipathy to narrative, going so far as to destroy the normal course of a theater visit. Once arriving on a set evening, visitors must structure their own time, without seating, intermission, or most other conventions of the theater. The stage and a portion of the auditorium and the orchestra level are changed into a giant installation guests may walk through, albeit only in small groups. Cobbled together in a self-consciously slop-
The presence of a Namibian boar is evidence of Schlingensief’s desire, as he approached the end of his life, to embed parts of the colonizers’ and the colonizeds’ cultures physically into each other. In addition to initiating a project to build an opera house in Burkina Faso and collaborating with performers from Burkina Faso on his last production *Via Intolleranza II*, he also put on an exhibition of film and photos from his trip to Kathmandu and Bhaktapur in Nepal at the Kunstraum Innsbruck from February 16 to March 29, 2008 entitled *Der König wohnt in mir* [*The King Lives in Me*]. Given his earlier projects, this staging of encounters with art from “foreign” places would seem intended to provoke confrontation and critical thought about the cultural processes involved in (de)colonization.

Yet his final performance in Vienna was entitled *Mea Culpa*. Of course, given that it is Schlingensief, the phrase requires some interrogation. While he in his usual inimitable style half-jokingly blamed himself and his decision to stage Wagner’s poisonous *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 2004 for his terminal illness, calling it “Todesmusik” [“death music”], he also used the occasion to draw attention to the shaming that the ill, and especially the terminally ill, too often undergo. In his own words,
he turned his illness into a social sculpture: “[i]ch gieße eine soziale Plastik aus meiner Krankheit” [“I pour a social mold from my sickness”] (Dössel 2010). In mock-confessing in the manner of the Christian guilt that isolates and individualizes, Schlingensief stealthily sought its condemnation. After staging Area7 in a way that forced audiences to navigate the space of a deconstructed stage in small groups, in Mea Culpa he tried to give those groups a language to revisit and reconstruct those navigations. Over the course of his life Schlingensief reiterated how damaged he felt by his petit-bourgeois upbringing, a point on which he bonded with many in the artistic world, such as Elfriede Jelinek. Yet how exactly can one locate the great harm done by organized religion, including its participation in colonization, in specific cultural performances? As this chapter has explored, Schlingensief’s answers can be located in the significant slice of his oeuvre that was carried out in Vienna and Austria.

16 Susan Sontag’s Illness as Metaphor (1978) is an obvious point of connection.
17 Exploring the question of whether all kinds of guilt, religious and otherwise, do so would take us far afield. My point here is to highlight the connection between Christianity’s sustaining ideology and capitalism.