

## The writer's block

I went into the print shop. It was called REMA print, which I knew was an abbreviation for Revolutionäre Marxisten, which then, years ago—I was still a teenager—made me confident enough to try. I had always liked printing. I liked the colours—oil colour—and the machines, and I liked the miracle of multiplication. I felt like a living example of Walter Benjamin's claim of, given the available technical possibilities, everyone should be admitted the right to reproduce oneself. One of my dreams used to be to have a small offset printing machine at home. A wish I linked to Virginia Woolf who actually had one in her Bloomsbury home, in a back room. In Leonhard Woolfs memoirs he writes, that they also had it for a sort of therapeutical reason. Setting typo and printing, choosing and changing paper and colour seems to have had a comforting effect on a troubled mind, and it made them think they were independent. And yes, Virginia Woolfs books were only published using that small printing machine in their house. It was a mechanical manual printer. The sounds are different from the rhythmical stomping of an electrified machine. The big Heidelberger machines, we used to have at home, and their appearance, that seemed to come straight from a long gone luddite age. I liked to have machines, even when I didn't reflect on it, but being surrounded by heavy machines, that worked for you was encouraging always, and even now I sometimes use the sound of the washing machine for the same effect. But I had a printing machine once. It was more a book-binding machine, but it could be used for printing, or for, what Dieter Rot, who seemingly had something similar, called squeezing (quetschen). It stood in the basement of a house I once lived in, and it was so heavy and unmoveable, that it seemed as if the house had been built around it.

The REMA people were surprised that I knew the origins of their name, as by then it had already turned into Vienna's most prominent printer for art-catalogues, a high end printer. But they had started as a small left-wing print-shop for leaflets. Years later I would sit at a panel discussion with someone from REMA. The topic of the panel discussion was whether artists should have a second profession. Or at least we talked about that. Actually it was about self-organisation. REMA was one of the small number of collective businesses, that existed in Vienna. Having started from a collective endeavour to get some economy into their lives. Printing used to be a model process for a desired different sort of economy. It was linked to production, and promised some sort of concrete aspect in lives built mainly on immaterial production. And it was local. It could not be shifted to cheap-labour countries, since time counted, things had to be publicised in time, mailings, menus, leaflets, newspaper, announcements, posters, whatever. And it was male work, and you always needed literate people in the printing process. So the money in it was historically ok, and it seemed you just had to start with a machine. There is a scene in Rio Reisers memoir, including all the people from his commune regularly sitting around the eating table and collecting the pages into the heaps that were made into books. You would buy this pirated books in the evening in bars. I still have an Adorno printed like this. There is a small statistic printed in the back cover, showing the profit distribution in publishing, and claiming revolutionary potential in pirate publishing.

This is why there were (and to a lesser extent still are) so many printing shops in Kreuzberg. Even in the 2000' when I moved here, there used to be five to six printers in direct reach. It now seems as if this type of left-wing printers has staid with me for a long time. We also used to print with agit Druck in Berlin. A prominent left-wing printing shop, which used to print RAF publications. They even have a Wikipedia entry. On 17th of October 1977 four of the printers were arrested for printing. Not the owners. Their imprisonment on remand lasted for incredible nine months. Printers are by law responsible for what they print, easy to think of the reason behind this. Police legislation, 1848 Vormärz, images of scenes with hammering of fists on the doors, hectic removal of papers, someone trying to hide the printing press. Not enough time, people escaping through the basement window, or not. Somehow printing seems related to basements. And it is. These machines shake houses. But not the small printing press, that is related to the clandestine. The press with

which these pictures were printed is from Leipzig. When I borrowed it from Suse Weber, she told me that the last time it was used, it was used to print the leaflets for what then turned into the German revolution.

I would always try to talk my co-editors into staying with agit, pointing out the RAF story. It seemed like a sort of gloriole for Starship. The printers were not the easiest characters, and neither were we. M. hated to go there. Making me the one who spent hours proofreading in their office. And it may be argued that it were not the same people anymore. Though I think they were. But not the printers. Last time we called agit, they told us that it was actually their last day, the day the machines were removed. We also printed with Dressler, who printed Merve, or still does so? A lithograph used to work there still, and the films were set by hand. But unfortunately they only print black and white. So we don't print with them anymore. But I miss the factory being so close by. The new one is somewhere. We used to be able to just pass over the street to look at the proofs, or sign the dummy.

There was also a day when all the machines were moved from my family's factory. The street was blocked and the heavy lorries came to pick them up. Some of them went to England, some to Spain. That Dressler was printing Merve I know from the book of Merve Lovien, who was Peter Gente's first wife, before he met Heidi Paris (what a nice name— n'est-ce pas). Merve's book is called— I have to look that up—Weibliche Produktivkraft—Female labour force?, force of productivity?— The title goes on: Is there another economy? A book we were reading in the 90ies. It was written much earlier, and depicts the first days, weeks and months of Peter Gente fighting the printing machine, before he surrendered, and had the books printed at Dressler. The actual Dressler is a very melancholic son of another Dressler, who had been a printer. I met him standing in the entrance of his print shop, where the machines were rattling. He looked across the factory, like a farmer would look over his land, hit by drought for the third year. I could have been him. I could have inherited all this machines. In fact more of them. And I remember the noise, which was part of my childhood. Which makes me think I am connected to printing. And is why I went to REMA print, to ask them if I could learn with them to become a printer. It was also one of my daily survival ideas, a thought that hit me every morning: how to earn money. I went into a shoemaker, and I went into all the bars, and I went into Wiener Zeitung, and asked them if I could write for them. I would write a letter, that I would come at such and such hour, and then I would just go there. Saying I had an appointment. The only place where they kicked me out was a theatre, otherwise it was quite successful. On the first day at Wiener Zeitung I learned how to fold a letter sheet properly. Time, time, time has taken away the value of that lesson. Seldomly we do write letters. It was my accreditation letter for the Atonal festival in Berlin. I wanted them to send me there. So he let me type this letter on his typewriter, which I remember was not standing on his main table but on a table somehow set aside a bit. The editor in chief's typewriter. An entirely mechanical machine. He signed it and I flapped it first half down, whereas he took it out of my hands to fold it along the long axis. So that you open it like a book. And I went to Atonal. And I handed all of the doormen of all of the clubs this accreditation letter.

I used the printing machine in the basement to squeeze things on paper, and later even for proper etchings. Until we lost the house, which belonged to a prominent catholic publisher, and writer. Who was dead by then. The house belonged to the family. He was one of the publishers of Magnum magazine, a magazine I had always held in high regards, for their way of dealing with images. Funnily also Springer then pointed to this magazine as one of their style models. The publisher had a daughter who had tried to live in New York as a camera woman, also working for Gabor Body, and didn't manage, so she wanted to come back to Vienna, and she wanted the whole house to live in. She decided, she had to get rid of us, and the only thing she imagined was to form a sort of neighbours committee, including the school director of a nearby school, who would testify that we were not worth living, therefore we would not need a house. I remember the scene in court where this school director—how had she arranged that I now wonder, Viennese bourgeoisie and their charms—argued that I had different man-friends visiting. At some point we gave up and left, not that we lost, but she also installed a man with an air-hammer in front of the house, everyday from 7 to 8 a.m. I liked the house. It had a beautiful rose garden. There was a harp player living on the second, the top floor, and waking up while

she was practicing gave a strange heavenly feeling. It never tries your nerves like piano would. It just never seems repetitious. She had left earlier. And where did air-hammers vanish to, I wonder. They were omnipresent ages ago.

**Ariane Müller:** afterwards by patience, perseverance, practice, I came to be one of the best in jumping off moving vehicles.

**PAGE**

**PAGE 1**

Time, time, time has taken away the value of that lesson.