

Radmila Iva Janković
Inside Out



Radmila Iva Janković **Inside Out**

Selection of Texts
1995–2012

Durieux | Hrvatska sekcija AICA
Zagreb



Contents

I am Myself only by Chance (ZVONKO MAKOVIĆ)	7
---	---

1. Me and You and Everyone We (do Not) Know

The Romantic Clone, the Mistress	13
At the Brunt of the Other	16
On Marta's Trilogy, the Defunct Albums and the Bogey Pictures	24
Search for a Place of Encounter	30
Usurpation by Gaze	34

2. Clandestines

An Artistic Saboteur	41
Anxious Objects	51
El Dorado and Other Stories	56

3. Works in Transition

Where Do We End and They Begin?	61
The Creative Energy of Female Community	68
<i>An Explosion of Eternity</i>	76
Works in Transition	80

4. Tactical, Sovereign and Other Media

Barging into the Collective Body of Images	87
Cosmic Techno-Snake	92
The Obstacle	95
Inside / Out	99
Electronic Palimpsest	103
The Archive as a Medium	107

5. The Transparency of Impermeability

Emptiness and Substitutes	115
The Transparency of Impermeability	120
In the Height of a Child's Eye	124
Ding!	127

6. Any Other Business

Phobias on Stage	133
Red Peristyle	137
Contacts and Influences – Joseph Beuys and Croatian Contemporary Art	142
Biography	145

I am Myself only by Chance

The collection of texts *Inside Out* by Radmila Iva Janković contains numerous catalogue forewords, critical writings about artists and exhibitions broadcast on radio and published in newspapers, and interviews with artists. It is a small selection from the author's prolific work as a critic and curator, and the texts date from 1995 to 2012. They are not arranged in the chronological order of publication, not even according to corresponding subject-matter or genre, but the general impression that the book leaves on the reader is nevertheless one of – exceptional consistency. What joins all the texts into one whole is a distinct point of view, a point of observation from which Radmila Iva Janković endeavours to enter the space of another so as to shape her own space inside it. All the time she is within the dialogue and within the artwork she selected, which can be an individual work or an entire oeuvre, or she is using the person of the artist to examine herself. This is an extremely personal book filled with empathy, with a deep emotional bond with the other whom the author is analysing. Her aim is not to describe an artwork, to discover a hidden truth in it, but to enter the consciousness of its creator, and by examining the consciousness of the Other she discovers and examines consciousness about herself. The boundaries between me and you have disappeared, I who am examining your work because I have discovered you within me. The book reflects absolute closeness with and yearning for the other, and in some places the examination grows into a “subtle communication of energy”. Thus merely observing a work falls short of achieving

the final aim because the eyes slide over the surface under which hide the complete contents that must be comprehended. How? This is the question that is the subject of this book.

The title *Inside Out* is indicative enough as a signpost to guide the reader into the complex story the author tells. It must be pointed out that the artists were by no means selected at random. Janković chose artists and works with which she feels exceptional closeness and affinity, with which she can establish a completely uninhibited dialogue. However, the title says nothing about whose “inside” is meant and even less about what moving “outward” entails. It seems to me that “inside” does not by any means belong only to the author herself but equally to the person with whom she is establishing a dialogue, to the artist whose work has given rise to the dialogue. What the author of the book and the artists and works she writes about have in common is sensibility, fragility, freedom from any strong gesture and rhetoric. The art discussed here shuns the assertive and domineering, unequivocal and final. It reveals love of the fragment, the random order of things, fluidity and extreme minimalism in expression. A barely noticeable trace is enough to change the order of things, and Janković takes the role of a guide who alerts us to these slight modifications because they can be important. The oldest text in the book was published in 1995 and is devoted to a cycle of paintings by Igor Rončević. This is the only text that deals with the painting as an object. However, it is not about paintings and painting but about what the paintings express and what can be discovered from the cycle’s title – *Fears*. Themes are revealed here that also characterise many other texts in the book, new points of vulnerability are sought in a subject that has again become fragile. It is of secondary importance that this vulnerability or weakness is expressed in a conventional manner, by painting. The painting is just a membrane that veils the story’s essence, and the author’s aim is by using words to lead it “outward” and bring it closer.

Writing about personal destinies, crumbling reality and a fragmentary world full of insecurity, the author at the same time also touches on and tackles current global political and

economic subjects, such as migration. It is these resources that hide potentials identical to the ones from which develops the art language that Janković deals with in her book *This* is by no means art from the margins, although it addresses the marginal. It examines and re-examines essential subjects, which makes it both vital and important for this time. Even so, it does not belong to the mainstream; what is more, it radically distances itself from that position.

Somewhere at the beginning of the book the author emphasises that one can discover one's own identity only through dialogue with another, that consciousness about oneself is built by examining the consciousness of another, that we must foster otherness so as to know ourselves. Indeed, when reading the book it is easy to recognise this as her *leitmotiv*. Understanding oneself through another even when that other has disappeared, become absence, emptiness. In other words, it is necessary always to keep moving, never to allow movement to stop, the subject to position itself. This is not a comfortable stance, nor does the art portrayed here serve to create comfort. The art upheld by the author implies an active consciousness ever ready to re-evaluate the other and the self. The public is thus looked on as a collocutor and partner and attempts are made to include it in the work's production. Of course, this means erasing the boundaries between the artist and the public addressed, but it also means an active critic who will not necessarily be an interpreter of the artist's intentions, of his or her missionary nature. On the contrary. The demand is for mutual trust, for a relationship that will not elevate one of the participants in the game into a dominant position.

Radmila Iva Janković built her personality as a critic on very complex foundations. Her references are numerous and delve equally into philosophy, art theory, visual culture, literature and film. What makes her texts specially convincing is lively research in which her foreknowledge is tested on artefacts, in dialogue with artists and in unremitting reappraisal of her own observations. Her precise and clear views as a critic grew out of life, just like the art she writes about here is exclusively understood as an

integral and pulsating part of life. A special value of the artist's writing is conspicuous subjectivity, individuality, her own view of the subject she is talking and writing about. However, Janković by no means sees herself in some privileged, omniscient position of possessing the only truth, a binding absolute. She has moulded herself into a space that Gianni Vattimo once called a weak or soft thought (*pensiero debole*). It is a space without a firm, or to be more precise a sure foothold, a space characterised by the fragmentary.

As she progresses through the material she describes in the book, the author makes investigative but also intuitive moves. These moves imply a process, complex and long, and there is no expectation that at its end a final answer will be found to many questions that were posed during the journey. In this text I said more than once that one of the author's important intentions was to examine the identity of the other so as to discover, through it, her own identity; that I exists only in correlation with the Other. This intense search for identity by exploring the expressive possibilities of the Other reminded me of an early play by Peter Handke, *Kaspar*. What is it about? The writer tells about a person without an identity who gets to know himself in a tortuous search for and examination of language. For an hour Kaspar tries to speak only one sentence, which he manages with great difficulty. When he finally utters it articulately, it is: "I want to be a person like somebody else was once." At the end of the play, when Kaspar seems to have mastered speech, the fragments of sentences he speaks include: "I did not want to be me / or anyone else," and when his sentences become more and more meaningful, more subjective, he starts to believe that through them he gained an identity. However, Kaspar Hauser's last sentence, spoken before the curtain falls ("with the greatest possible creaking") and the lights go out, before he disappears into silence and absence, is: "I am myself only be chance."

Zvonko MAKOVIĆ

Translation: Nikolina Jovanović

1. Me and You and Everyone We (do Not) Know*

* After the film by artist Miranda July



The Romantic Clone, the Mistress

The idea gradually dawned on me that all these people – men or women – were not in the least deranged; they were simply lacking in love.¹

The early activities of Ksenija Turčić from the end of the eighties are marked by the construction of spaces of energy with various perspective models that followed the Renaissance tradition of oculocentrism. At the end of the nineties, when she brought the digital image into her visual language, representation, with minimalistically rationalised object levels, shifted to new explorations of space. Now no longer of its abstract ambivalences, rather of the fluid, covert and intangible space of the emotions.

The metaphorical electronic presentations seem to be like cool laboratory observations of a traumatised subjectivity that defends itself with an endeavor at analytical comprehension of the causes and effects of contemporary symptoms: dislocation, perspective deformations and finally the fading out of the psychological space.

The time of most of the previous video works is circular. It evokes gyration in a vicious circle of unresolved internal conflicts, whether those in which through its spatial disposition it pulls the visitor into the seclusion of his own microcosm (*Sunt lacrimae rerum*, *Slow Motion*) or into the communication space of others (*True Stories*, 2000; *Phases*, 2001).

The interactive work *The Mistress* was created as the artist's intuitive response to observation of the replacement of authentic emotions, in which we dare share increasingly little, with instant emotions. In *The Culture of Narcissism*² Christopher Lasch draws attention to the fact of risk, the ginger walk upon the slippery

1 Michael Houellebecq, *Širenje područja borbe* [Extension of the Domain of the Struggle]. In: *Europski glasnik*, VI. No. 6, Zagreb, 2001, pp. 43–115.

2 Christopher Lasch, *Narcistička kultura* [The Culture of Narcissism], Naprijed, Zagreb, 1986

ground of personal relations, where both sexes in order to protect themselves from emotional hurt cultivate a protective shallowness and cynical indifference, which in fact they do not totally feel, but which after a certain time becomes a habit and starts to sour relations, quite frequently substituting mere display for feeling – turning affect into effect.

An idea about the figure of the ideal mistress in an advanced liberal world presents a mirror image to the contemporary puritan, who has perhaps best been described (to the point of cruel precision) in the novels of Houellebecq. The protagonist of the *Extension of the Domain of the Struggle*³ says “This is what is called the battle of the marketplace. In an economic system that forbids sackings, everyone more or less manages to find a job. In a sexual system that forbids adultery, everyone more or less manages to find a paramour.” The contemporary puritan, in the multiplication of identities, sometimes suffers from the symptoms of an angst-ridden feeling of emptiness, of the impossibility of empathy, while he most often experiences the Other as a means for enhancing his own self-image.

In the interactive process with the visitor, the virtual mistress is ready to encourage, to restore shattered confidence, to accept without reserve, to encourage, to admire. She actually works as an ideal Other, who fulfils the narcissistic confirmation and in subjective economics works as an extension of the “great”⁴ I.

A meeting with her is offered as an option for the filling in of emotional rifts. There is a covert irony in the fact that she who gives herself so uncompromisingly is actually an electronic clone, who, generated by software, after receiving the command, speaks samples of amorous discourse.

In a world in which sexuality is so frequently replaced by instant porn *The Mistress* can actually be interpreted as an artificial organ for the instant satisfaction of the illusionist depths of the

3 Europski glasnik, VI, no. 6, Zagreb 2001, p. 86

4 Slavoj Žižek, “Patološki narcis kao društveno nužni oblik subjektivnosti” [“Pathological Narcissus as a Socially Mandatory Form of Subjectivity”], *Narcistička kultura* [The Culture of Narcissism], Naprijed, Zagreb 1986



Ksenija Turčić, *The Mistress*, 2002, video still. Courtesy the artist.

emotional space, in which the subject actually does not communicate with anyone except his own double – with a shadow that is mediated by the third mechanical eye of the machine.⁵ The main actor in this work is the artist herself, who by the mechanisation of the emotional act of uncompromising giving keeps the dangerous emotional area of irresolvable contradictions at arm's length and thus defends herself from it with what is at base a harmless and witty interaction, since in the automated game with the electronic clone, no one can get hurt.

(Preface to Ksenija Turčić's exhibition *Mistress*,
Gallery Dante – Marino Cettina, 2002)

Translation: Graham McMaster

5 Marina Gržinić, *U redu za virtualni kruh* [In the line for virtual bread], Meandar, Zagreb, 1998, p. 117

At the Brunt of the Other

If you believe in love at first sight, take a closer look!¹

The idea for the project developed along the lines of thinking about the position of the author (focalisation, i.e., the issue of who is seeing something from some point of view and then talking about it) in the context of contemporary art. At the exhibition *First Person Singular* the centre of attention consisted of the various forms of self-representation, while the international exhibition at the suggestion of Evelina Turković, a continuation of the topic as it were under the title 1:1 (*the interpersonal in contemporary art*), deals with the problem area of the Other, not that distant Other that is talked about but that is absent from the conversation, but the Other assumed to be here and immediately present in the talking. Like other social disciplines, particularly ethnology, art too is with ever greater vigour becoming a part of the anthropologising of the close, the intimate and the known, the purpose being to overcome the trauma of vicinity with the ethic of responsibility instead of mere empathy. Many pieces do genuinely get created as spontaneous examples of what Nicolas

1 Directed by Mike Nichols and screenplay by Patrick Marber, 2004

Watching, more or less at the same time the exhibition was being prepared, Mike Nichols' film *Closer*, we found expectations of a predictable love story with a happy end were frustrated. A quest for additional information provided a review with a tagline that remained long in the mind: "If you believe in love at first sight, take a closer look." The stars in the film are almost sickly dependent on each other. After the individual strong relations between them have frayed, at the end all of them insult each other in painful situations of crisscross relationships. And all in a desperate search for just a bit of attention and closeness.



Siniša Labrović & Rino Efendić, *Sermon*, 2005, performance and videoinstallation. Courtesy the artists.

Bourriaud² had brought together under the common denominator of relational aesthetics, the aim being to find a common premise for the generation of artists in search of a partner in a dialogue, an artistic not-counting on an audience as an unreal entity, but as someone to be inveigled into the process of the production of the work so that an attempt might be made with combined forces to set up some sense in the world we call reality. In the fragment of reality chosen for the exhibition nevertheless a distinction ought to be made from the general trend, for we are not concerned so much with the direct intention of cultivating good neighbourly relations as with the attempt to throw light on issues of relations, particularly those that are based on proximity.

If we accept the premise³ that there are no lines between awareness and world, then there are none between I and Thou also. Awareness of the self is attainable accordingly only with respect to an entity that is always-already-permeated-with-the-other. If we are concerned with the constitution of identity, it is sometimes manifested as an opening-up, as a hybrid overlapping, Thou who dwells in the I and becomes some third entity. Emmanuel Levinas suggestively describes closeness as something that “implies an obsessive infection, which makes my body passive, vulnerable, open to the suffering of the persons close to me, just as the mother’s body is for the child. Bodies cry aloud for disempowerment, but there is also a trap here, for the other turns me into a hostage or representative, deprives me of my own place and fills me with disquiet.”⁴ We are familiar with situations from everyday life in which because of being unable to be alone in our own shoes we readily pass over to some borderline situation and parasite on someone else’s identity, step into someone else’s shoes or allow the possession of our own, with all

2 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les presses du réel, 2002

3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologija percepcije* [Phenomenology of Perception], Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo, 1990

4 Vladimir Biti, “Tijelo” [Body], *Pojmovnik suvremene književne teorije* [Glossary of contemporary literary theory], Matica hrvatska 1997, p. 536

the consequences – beneficial permeation, corrosion and even spiritual moribundity. But all the same, in the flight from being alone, rather this way of laying out the body in the search for inter-corporal confirmation so that a common point of certainty can be set up via closeness, as a beneficial existential foothold.

See me, feel me, touch me, heal me

The emitting of longing for emotional, empathic co-relations relates above all to the issue of personality, in the sense in which we construct ourselves as persons that can set up contact with other people via the creation of communication. Immediately after such a claim we can ask: how much in fact do we live in our own body and in the space of direct interrelations, and how much inside a hierarchy of accepted symbolic relations that is forced upon us, or within various kinds of flights into imaginary and virtual spaces?

The advocates of anarchist positions warn us that in symbolically well ordered (civilised) worlds our senses become tamed. The theorists of the new media face us with the fact that in the virtual world our senses are put to sleep. But almost all are in agreement that sight, in the world we inhabit, has almost total domination. The story in which the individual is transformed into viewer, the world into spectacle and the body into object has long been known. In the long-term project of the Slovene/Czech couple **Alt-Vajd**, the contact that they make only via looking almost literally functions in this way, as apotheosis of the power of the look.⁵ The artists, both professional photographers, willingly heighten the “strangeness” to themselves and to each other and then to us, the observers. With a cunning maintenance of a beguiling distance they cultivate the Otherness in which they are an

⁵ Marina Gržinić, www.manwomenunfinished.com

object of the view to each other and in this enchanted game are capable of generating desire again and again.

Pieces in which communication is achieved by touch are not much featured in this exhibition. Touching means feeling (to be touched means to have to feel), although, in fact touch is more common here as a kind of shock therapy. In the piece of **Siniša Labrović** and **Rino Efendić**, for example, the reason for the *Sermon* remains secret, but what is indicative is the slap, a sudden, brutal touch, a gesture through which we force the person close to us to wake up and snap out of his or her own isolation. "Shock brings back the word, the punch can be the beginning of communication: the fist brings you back in touch when you are in want of words."⁶ Although there is no blow, rather, forced immobilisation, the same thing is at work in the uncommon performance, on the very verge of being unethical, of **Kai Kaljo**; the aggression and the shock to which she subjects her former husband has extorted the words that were clearly at one time fatally absent; in this place there was a gap of an overwhelming lack of understanding and communication. And then, on the other hand, it would seem that language, instead of communication, may become a barrier, concerning which the work *Unresolved* by **Žanić** and **Greiner** speaks with great eloquence.

If there is any genuine truth in the thesis that communication outside the framework of civilization once involved all the senses,⁷ the occasional quiet works seem to intuit a bit of this. **Tomislav Pavelić** establishes silent situations, stays in the intimate spaces of Others and puts in focus the energy of presence as a kind of exercise of the clash of his own identity in contact with others, overcoming mutual strangeness and the feeling of fragmentariness and awkwardness. This is also how **Božena Končić**

6 Catherine David – Paul Virilio, „The Dark Spot of Art“, *Documenta, Documents I*, Canz Verlag, Ostfildern — Ruit, 1997

7 John Zerzan, "Praznina kao pokretalo" [Running on Emptiness], *Anarhoprimitivizam protiv civilizacije* [Anarcho-primitivism against civilisation], Jesenski and Turk, Zagreb, 2004, pp. 75–91.

Badurina's *Coming Closer* works, in which the objective is to bring to awareness a subtle energetic communication, contact with the inner space of the invisible, non-material body that does not overlap with the visible surroundings, most often tacitly plied by people who do genuinely feel each other.

The Other as Wall, Erosion of the Psychological Space

In communicative processes, the other is sometimes perceived as wall, as something impenetrable, a foreigner the subject has to rebound from, often with an uncertain outcome. In some pieces communication is made permanently impossible, is forcibly frozen inside the symbolic order, is impossible, or completely uncertain in outcome. In the visual language of the barrier – the membrane – the wall becomes a palpable materialized metaphor – two men's shirts cast in wax (**Silvije Vujičić**), identity cards immersed each in its own plastic bag filled with water (**Pasko Burđelez**), the wall as mirror membrane in a work that symbolizes dividedness – the uncertainty of setting up contact of two physically separated bodies (**Vlasta Žanić**).

The chosen works represent but also create various patterns of communication of a recognizable everyday life in which either because of the demands for rapid exchange of information or because of the given social codes the erosion of the psychological space imperceptibly sets in. The desire for communication sometimes turns into a desperate appeal, in which technical aids meant for assuagement produce only the opposite effect. The pragmatic imperative of effectiveness that increasingly takes the upper hand over the need for dialogue creates cultural models of polite but insincere and superficial conduct. In spite of our being ascribed correct views in the **Tanja Dabo** piece *You are a beautiful person* – the attitude of sincerity and responsibility in encounters with the other – we are aware that the situation of uncritical flat-

tery creates a mood in which the wish is to make the person they are directed to weak and powerless, to dull his or her critical acuity, which most often is the main complaint of the social site of communication.⁸ An atmosphere of competitiveness creates a feeling of lack of trust, a fear of the Other. Instead of respecting and paying due attention to the integrity of the Other, contemporary Narcissus is prone to have unstable borderline relations, in which instead of the deepening of relations, their panicked multiplication occurs.

The incontestable diagnoses of the ills of everyday life that is inhabited by unstable and dispersed subjects, bitter analyses of the structure of the personality of the pathological narcissist as a typical conformist who ostensibly respects the rules of the game but in reality never takes them seriously, and observations about the anxious individual suffused with his “feeling of emptiness” to whom the Other is on the whole a proving ground for his own self-endorsement in the foreword of Slavoj Žižek to Lash’s *Narcissistic Culture*⁹ will long remain a point of reference when we are concerned with the contemporary individual in communication with the environment. In such a setting there are tendencies to occupy an active position in the views of the Other, in the sense of accepting some different initial premises.¹⁰ Above all, through a revived feeling of a binding but salutary ethicalness, setting out from the distinctive and reversible perception of the

8 R. I. Janković, foreword to the exhibition of Tanja Dabo, *You are a Beautiful Person*, Dante – Marino Cettina Gallery, Umag, 2006

9 Christopher Lash, *Narcistička kultura* [The Culture of Narcissism], Naprijed, Zagreb 1986

10 From email correspondence with Ivan Molek, June 26, 2007: “As for Levinas, the renewal of theological issues is not to be wondered at. In one way or another they were dealt with by A. Badiou, J. L. Nancy, J. Derrida, G. Vattimo, G. Agamben and W. Benjamin to mention just a few. It is about something really “human, too human”, and that is a human being’s power over the world and others – isn’t god or God just another name for’ power over this world, a power that is perhaps invisible and unfathomable, but still effective. Suppression of these issues, whether conscious or not, is useful most today to those who count that the operation of “my authorisation – your disempowerment” will be successfully carried out.”

Other who is asymmetrical¹¹ to me, and who is in flight, who has no common denominator with me, from whom my I does not stem, and yet who occurs nowhere else but only in me.

(Published in the exhibition catalogue *1:1, interpersonal in contemporary art*, realized in collaboration with Evelina Turković, Home of HDLU / Croatian Association of Artists, 2006)

Translation: Graham McMaster

11 "Asimetrični drugi" [Asymmetrical Others], in Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti* [Glossary of Contemporary Art], Zagreb, Horetzky, 2005

On Marta's Trilogy, the Defunct Albums and the Bogey Pictures

In a chapter of the catalogue to *First Person Singular* I refer to artists who in the process of self-representation have resort to the photographs of the family album. In *Camera Lucida*, which must be one of the finest books ever devoted to photography, Roland Barthes, considering the principle of arranging photographs in an album as a rudimentary form of autobiography, refers to the fact of the photograph that, as part of the culture of the age, has become an ersatz form of memory and, in line with this claim, we experience the disappearance of photos fatally, like memory loss. At first glance, Jerman's procedure would seem practically a blasphemy against this claim of Barthes. For Jerman wilfully destroys family photographs, not only in the *Marta Installations*,¹ where he burns them together with the whole of his mother's dilapidated estate, but equally radically in the cycle of *Pictures from Defunct Albums*.

From the film *Marta's Installations* we shall not find out much about Jerman's mother, Marta, which is very similar, if not quite identical, to the situation in which Barthes in *Camera Lucida* attempts to describe what he sees when he looks at the photograph of his mother. But this factual shortcoming that is created by the "pressure of the unuttered that strives for utterance" will explain the meaning of what Barthes calls the *punctum*, describing it as the moment when a completely subjective view of some photograph suddenly discovers in it a vulnerable place, an experience

1 In the chapter "Appropriating the Family Album" in the catalogue for the exhibition *First Person Singular* I wrote, not really believing or not being able to believe that he did this with the photographs of his closest family, that Jerman "burns everything except the photographs, for to destroy the photograph would be to destroy memory".



Željko Jerman, *Pictures from Defunct Albums*, 2003 – 2006, video still.
Courtesy Mladen Stilić.

that represents something only to someone who has had some special connection with the content of the photograph.

Jerman, whom we know as an artist whose works were created in the rebellious gesture, sneering at the bourgeois stereotypes of harmony and beauty, now, in collaboration with a friend from his youth Željko Janda, seems unexpectedly to have turned about-face, moving into the other extreme – to the aesthetics of heightened and melodramatic sentimentality. Jerman and his fellow seem practically to revel in this, inserting into documentary scenes shot hand-held, typical filmic effects such as slow dissolves, meditative music (Željko Janda) in order to emphasise the melancholic mood. Nevertheless, what is now really different is the medium, in which, in the post-avant-garde tendency to return to classic film resources, romantic pathos tends to be heightened. But is this not something that has actually always infused every segment of Jerman's work in art, and which, from the beginning

of the 70s, in spite of the tendency to objectiveness and analysis of elementary processes shared with his generation, actually equally distinguished him from it? ² In *Marta's Installations*, the punctum that is revealed in the photograph reveals something displaced and vulnerable, is the mainstay of Jerman's first-person story, which with its intensity manages to exceed the level of subjective experience and become something with which, immersing ourselves into Jerman's code, we can feel total empathy. In the film *Marta's Ship*, the origin of the story is the picture of an old sailing ship, the only artefact at his mother's request saved from destruction. In it we can recognise the same Jerman Informel handwriting, the same eye that enjoys extremes of ecstasy and entropy; in the image of the sea lashed by the stormy north wind or the rolling deeps with the sudden flashes...representations that like his own *Lightwritings* change unpredictably. In the last film of the trilogy, *Marta's Grave*, the cold motionlessness of the last resting place, animated with the story of family conflicts, is structured with the rhythm of the seasons, again with the same objective of wounding and puncturing, recalling the inexorability of the pain of transitoriness.

Pictures from Defunct Albums is the only cycle that is incomplete, like the film that Jerman wanted to shoot about it. The support is photographic paper, either clean or chemically treated (with household chemicals found in the flat of his deceased mother) that he processes with the same chemicals, pouring them copiously over the figures of the album. Weird changes take place at once, in the very process of the work, and hence there is nothing to be surprised at in Jerman having the need to record this process as it happens/vanishes, with all the changes that take place under his hand that directs the effect of the cleaning preparations with a simple toothbrush. Depending on the kind of the

2 "Even his method of elementary photography abounds in some manual copiousness that – more than a tautology – has at its beck an absoluteness just as breathing is absolute. Its existentialism breaks through the membrane of analytic pragmatism and the dry ascetism of the mental procedure." Zdenko Rus, catalogue for *Željko Jerman: Subjective and Elementary Photographs, Photos and Photogrammatic Images 1970-1995*, Modern Gallery Zagreb, 1996

chemicals (hydrochloric acid, bleach, detergents?) and the quality of the photograph – the vanishing unfolds in a range from minimal destruction to complete obliteration of the contents.

With the figures whose photographs he takes from two albums the artist feels no particular closeness, and cannot share in the pleasure of their anniversaries and the important moments of their lives (their weddings, baptisms and birthdays), particularly that part of the family that lives in America, whose lives, in the style of beatnik resistance to the stereotyped, to scenes from middle-class life, he compares with family soaps. And again, in this gesture we do not recognise any inappropriate harshness, rather the magic of transformation that once again recalls the idea of the Barthes *punctum*, something that provokes our vulnerability. The interventions are made in albums whose owners (German's mother and her sister), to whom these photographs meant something, are now dead, and so the meaning has forever vanished with them. German deliberately uses the words in Croatian that mean dead and extinct, since it is not just them who have died, rather, with his artistic gesture, in front of our eyes, their albums are dying out.

"They have become defunct through my destructive visual 'photographic intervention', and since in my work all destruction leads to new construction, the figures from the albums were actually destroyed so they could be transformed and channelled into *artefacture*, and with this only ostensible devaluation they have outgrown the insignificant emotion that existed only in the souls of close and no longer existent persons."

For German, the act of destruction was never just an artistic gesture. He often described the need for constant experimentation in the medium of the photograph as an act of self-maintenance, as his "great vital gesture", that, in some way, "saved [him]". At the moment when he reached a crisis point in which he felt life had no meaning, he wrote directly onto photographic paper the phrase: *Drop dead, photograph!* "I thought," he said once, referring to this work "after that, I had nothing else to do, and then bit by bit everything went in the direction

of elementary processes. The basis of it all was the desire to be present every day in the working process.” A few years after that he started his anthological cycle *My 1977*, in which he reduced photography, again quite literally, to the simplest possible form of document, the primary form of a log of events, supplemented some days with short notes, among which there is this, which once again confirms his statement: “One needs to summon up the strength for the statement: I am sufficient to myself, and work can and must be the only genuine preoccupation.”

The enduring obsession with death had at once, for Jerman, a destructive and a constructive meaning, in the sense of that tense dynamic duality by which Freud defined the concept of *Todestrieb*, the death-wish, attempting in it the first time to authenticate something that he recognised as the underpinning of the psychic life (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920) which in a greater or lesser intensity kept pace with everyone’s existence.

The *Grau Zone* cycle, which started with the exhibition in the Extended Media Gallery (*Gallery-studio-gallery*, 2000) went on from time to time later too, but took a step further: in the experimentation with an increasingly vigorous effect of chemicals on photographic paper, he explored possibilities of staging scenarios that were ever darker. Creating a presentation from something that provoked anxiety,³ Jerman built his ludic strategy as a shield, a shock-absorbing and protective membrane that in a paradoxical way he uses to defend himself from some sudden and perhaps much stronger clash with traumatic reality.

When chemicals are poured onto photographic paper, all kinds of phenomena appear: its structures break out onto the surface, like snow-flakes, metal compounds create points of light,

3 “To produce the image of what one fears, in order to protect oneself from what one fears – this is the strategic achievement of anxiety, which arms the subject, in advance, against the onslaught of trauma, the blow that takes one by surprise.” Rosalind E. Krauss, *Uncanny, Formless, A User’s Guide*, Zone Book, 19997., New York. “Anxiety refers to the certain state of expectation of danger and preparation for it, even if it is unknown; fear requires a known item of which one is afraid; terror means a state in which we fall when we encounter a danger we are not prepared for, it emphasises the surprise factor.” Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Radio Belgrade 3rd Programme, no. 63 -IV-1984

the blackness is intersected by gentle gossamer structures, the dark zones fiercely and aggressively spread out across the surface, or else accumulate in ominous clusters. Some of the photographs have been named in such a way as clearly to soften the angst-ridden contents with notes of black humour and self-irony (*Picture of Bogeys*, *Devil on a Trapeze*, *Anxious Picture*, *What do you Mean, no Ghosts? Brownish Bogeys with Ghosts*).

Many people who have written about the Jerman oeuvre, approaching it from various different angles, have arrived at the same conclusion – for him photography was not just a verification of being, but also a verification of vanishing, an invocation of death. These polarities are constantly intensified in a medium that in itself represents a paradigm of the same duality: the document that testifies to existence, and at the same time freezes it as a ruthless heralding of the death that will occur in the future.⁴ And this is something that creates fertile ground for the stab and the wound, which Jerman will always and again heighten, as an incessant attempt to map out something that is there behind the language and behind the representation, something that is hard to name, simply because it is the extra-linguistic that hits us. With the destructive gestures that will lead to new constructions, on the surface of the photographic paper Jerman reveals the presentiment of the traumatic encounter with the non-symbolic Real, or with what stands behind the structured world as the inexorable menace of the passingness of everything, including our own, concerning which we have nothing to say.⁵

(Published in the exhibition catalogue *Jerman. Introspective*, Croatian Association of Artist/HDLU, Zagreb, 2006)

Translation: Graham McMaster

- 4 “Offering me an absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me of death in the future.” Roland Barthes, *Svijetla komora, bilješka o fotografiji* [Camera Lucida, a note on photography], translated by Željka Čorak, published by antiBARBARUS, Zagreb, 2003.
- 5 Ibid. p. 116. “The only ‘thought’ that I might have is that my own death is entered at the end of this first death; between the two of them there is only waiting; I have no other help but irony; to talk about ‘having nothing to say’.”

Search for a Place of Encounter

The foreigner is a dreamer making love with absence [...]. There is some hidden wound that drives him to wandering.¹

Sometimes words, short sentences, which corresponded to the scenes from the videos or the photographs, would accompany the earlier works of Ana Bilankov too, conjuring up an incessant need, in spite of the settled habits of a life in the interstices between comings and goings, to make the positioning of the self feasible. It was possible to sense that there was, beneath these neutral and depersonalised representations and the indeterminate short sentences, some veiled reality that, as it were, resisted narration. These anonymous fragments of reality, fragile moments without any underpinning, stereotypes of passing non-places, became an allusive imaginary with which the author mediated a certain state of mind, feeling it the substance of her own migratory identity, the identity of a person adjusted to being alien.

In the darkened circular space of the gallery, we can see vast daytime and nighttime projections of a port town in Florida. While we are just looking at them, not knowing anything about how, why and when it was that just these scenes were chosen, listening to the sounds that blur into a raucous drone, we are also experiencing them from the position of traveller and foreigner, as archetypal scenes of non-places. The projection goes round in a loop. Again we meet the same scene: a vast passenger liner, rapidly coming closer and getting further away again in the

1 “Strangers to Ourselves” In: *The Portable Kristieva*, Kelly Oliver, Editor, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997, pp. 264–294.



Ana Bilankov, *Going Back & Forth*, 2006, video still. Courtesy the artist.

zoom setting, all to the disturbing sound of the siren, and then something like the sound of shattering glass.

In a part of the gallery, at a little table, we can read Ana's diary, in which we might light upon the sentence: "I decided to write down the first page of my book. Or the last page of a very old story. It will be some kind of real fiction. Or a thriller." In the text that follows, we find that the video clips were created in Miami, central port for the great cruisers, on one of these ships, on which her brother worked, at the same time discovering that the motivation for travelling to this jet-set mecca was none of the standard tourist curiosity that usually accompanies the need to eat up miles, rather that the journey had much deeper psychological reasons.

In the Diary, with the introduction of a third party, the artist intuitively grasps the essence of the novelistic structure, which thanks to this "he" and the occasional use of the aorist tense, enables the reader to take pleasure in a credible tale. "The novel freezes, makes fate out of life, a useful fact from memory, and of duration, a directed and cogent time" (Roland Barthes). But the third person occurs just for a moment, and once again the diary is

steeped in the first person. Drawing closer to the finish in the linear narrative structure slows down with digressions concerning the experiences from along the way, and the objective is revealed as an irrational desire for a moment of impossible encounter.

In spite of the experience of non-place increasingly becoming one of the global ingredients of all forms of social being, in the concrete reality of today's world the places and spaces or non-places and places are more and more interfused and intertwined. There is no place such as not to be able to contain the possibility of non-place, and also, this statement functions in an opposite sense, Marc Augé says by way of consolation,² writing of non-places as the flourishing metastases of the present day world. The place of the traveller will appear as a sudden oasis of meaning, in the unknown spaces, among unknown people who are for a brief moment linked by something in common. This actually happened in the Atlantic Center for the Arts, in an isolated artists' colony "somewhere in Florida" where Ana fetched up while setting out on a journey moved by an entirely personal story. The slides that change by a little table with the table lamp and her diary speak eloquently of the renewed feeling of strangeness of a place that she describes as "in the middle of nowhere". The scenes with which she locates her surrounds are shot from a distance; in the foreground there is usually blacktop, then a row of houses, and the occasional palm in the middle ground, describing more of the emptiness of the place than revealing the authenticity of some given abode. Then there are some uncommon scenes like the shot of a dead bear thrown onto the road, a lovely empty beach ("tourist paradise") and a self-portrait, in which she smiles, illustrating that she can't achieve the perfectly glittering smile of the tanned crew of a cruiser from a carefully preserved prospectus of 1994, a clue that enables her to remember her brother. As a one-time crewmember of the same

2 Marc Augé, *Nemjesta, Uvod u moguću antropologiju supermoderniteta* [Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity], pub. Biblioteka Psefizma, Zagreb, 2001

ship featured on the pages of the prospectus, on which people with seductive looks pose in a pledge of fun time and adventure, he shipped on board directly from an entirely different reality, miles away, of war and battlefields.

What in the past is invisible but that sometimes defines us so strongly and resists both language and representation, becomes, in palpable reality, just a space from which one once went away and to which one returned. Although this is something that is entirely irrational, we can feel the irresistible urge to repeat the trajectory, so as in the brief experience of being in the same space as a now always-absent loved one to be able to achieve a point of intersection that once was crucially lacking: the place of encounter. One of the ways of arresting this brittle moment is located in the act of writing, the creative process of the production of sense. The essence of what comes into being lies no longer in the casually announced genre (novel or crime story), but in the process in which language is not defined by what it says but by what enables it to move on, flow past and spatter out – by desire. What indeed becomes essential is process,³ not end, courage to move on with eyes wide open to the place of vulnerability, which although hidden and deeply suppressed does not cease to emanate the same unintelligible desire for meeting. The long journey she set out on in the search for the intensity of a lone and mute encounter with the absent Other is at the end revealed as a healing confrontation with the symptoms of the foreignness of her own shifting identity, which is achieved and subsists precisely when related to some Other.

(Published in the exhibition catalogue *Ana Bilankov: Going back and forth*, Extended Media Gallery, Croatian Association of Artists /HDLU, 2006)

Translation: Graham McMaster

3 Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Edip* [Anti-Oedipus], Sremski Karlovci, 1990, p. 106

Usurpation by Gaze

Connected: a performance by Božena Končić
Badurina at Bačva Gallery, Home of HDLU (Croatian
Association of Artists) Zagreb, on June 6, 2007

So far, Božena Končić Badurina has presented a series of performances in which she was alone on stage, separated and isolated from the rest of the world by means of fragile, transparent architecture and sometimes even completely hidden, wrapped in bandages or aluminium foil and immobile like a non-living body, or simply fully exposed, natural and relaxed on the podium of a night club, as in her performance *Silent Guest*. She has described this communication, taking place beyond speech and the body, and provoked by her passive and silent appearance, as a situation that triggers specific physical and mental effects and experiences in the audience. Sometimes it is an enhanced awareness of oneself, or a change in one's role as an observer, which makes the spectators question their customary role, as in some sort of experiment where they had become participants instead, often even the most active agents in the event. That was manifest in *Coming Closer*, a performance Končić Badurina staged last year at the group exhibition *1:1*, at the same venue where she is having her latest performance. One by one, the visitors approached the artist, who was standing in the centre of a huge empty circle of the gallery and meeting them with her eyes closed.

Her performance *Connected* repeats this intense moment of encounter in circumstances where communication by the usual means is missing, having been abolished and transposed into the subtler and invisible sphere of communication by means of energy. She chose the participants for *Connected* over a website created to select extras for TV shows, films, advertisements, or



Božena Končić Badurina, *Connected*, 2007, performance, Croatian Association of Artists, Zagreb. Photo: Boris Cvjetanović. Courtesy the artist.

theatre performances. In her performance, the chosen participants literally become extras: statically exposed persons who at the same time cease to be such, since their presence not only fills the stage, but also turns them into the main and only actors (even if passive) in their encounter with the audience. In one of her first solo exhibitions, which took place at PM Gallery some ten years ago and outlined the elements that the artist would continue to use and elaborate, small canvas cabins were placed into a circle. By entering one of them alone, the spectator was faced, in solitude, with various contemplative models: a view of a landscape photograph, sound of an empty TV channel, an encounter with oneself in the mirror... By entering one of the tents, the spectator would unexpectedly meet the real gaze of a stranger peeping through a narrow slit in the canvas. A similar situation was repeated at the SC Gallery, where the audience had nothing to see but other people's gazes, their identities hidden by white canvas partitions.

Encounter with the Serenity of Strangers' Faces

We understand the gaze to be one of the most powerful instruments in our encounter with other people. We use it to defend ourselves from strangers or to constitute them in relation to ourselves. The work of German artist and activist Barbara Kruger explicitly communicates this idea by using a poster image of a frozen portrait – sculpture of a woman's face, titled *Your gaze hits side of my face* – implying visual violence or a mechanism of subjugation. The gaze is directly active in establishing contact and sometimes we try to neutralize it in order to conceal something or to keep it secret, the same as we do with our voices when we try to hide our emotions. In *Coming Closer*, where Končić Badurina exposes herself to the gaze of strangers, as well as in *Connected*, where she literally exhibits other people as artworks by creating a situation of encounter with individuals from the crowd in an enclosed space, the gallery becomes something of a laboratory in which such everyday situations, which we normally do not take notice of, condense and gain in intensity. Now we can no longer pass by a crowd without becoming aware of it, as we are forced to face it by entering the space. "Facing" implies eye contact, meeting the face and eyes of the other person, but here we are deprived of it and, among so many serene and relaxed faces, we remain alone with our gaze. Staying in a space that is intersected by various energies, created by the presence of strangers, triggers different experiences in the audience – from irrational bliss to embarrassment and anxiety, or even strong emotional turmoil. The level of energy established in mute 1:1 encounter in *Coming Closer* has now been augmented, creating a multiple interconnecting force that may seem unreal for a moment, like passing through a utopia, as our fragmentary everyday experiences are briefly merged/united and immersed into the feeling of mute togetherness.

Relationist aesthetics is defined as the participative work of artists and their collocutors in the processes of mutual opening

up, in which they learn from each other to understand how to inhabit this world in a different and better way. Even though there is no trace of real action, the performance of Božena Končić Badurina works in a similar way, as a sort of prototype. Faces with eyes closed, left to silence and deprived of the gaze that would allow them to defend their bodies from the usurpation of foreign gazes, all seem tender and vulnerable in their unprotectedness. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has written of the human face as perhaps the only place where silence really exists: “Character marks the human face with all the words not said, all the intentions never acted upon; the face of an animal always seems on the verge of speaking; but human beauty opens the face to silence. The silence that prevails is not the simple suspension of discourse, but the silence of the word itself: the idea of language. For this reason, in the silence of the face, and there alone, is mankind truly at home.”

The feeling of embarrassment caused by a sudden encounter with the serenity of strangers’ faces probably results from an uneven situation, in which our gaze acquires an inopportune, almost impertinent domination.

“The Trauma of Neighbourhood”

However, in some visitors the performance also causes enthusiasm or a feeling of strong emotional turmoil, which is interpreted as a sort of rare moment when the crowd is not associated with a combat arena, but with an intense encounter with the tender atmosphere of humanity. In front of such faces one need not adopt a pose. Individuals from websites who have for some inscrutable reason placed their beings in service of the world of spectacle represent themselves with dignity with their temporary mute presence, exposing their faces to the observer without cramped expressions, with all the traces of their personal histories inscribed therein.

Advocating art that helps us surpass the “trauma of neighbourhood” with the ethics of responsibility, Nicolas Bourriaud has relied on Levinas, who has elaborated in detail the first step towards such ethics by analysing the perception of Other in the very face-to-face encounter, whereby the *One* wants to set the rules and the *Other* has the ability to resist them by resorting to the unforeseen resources of his or her own freedom. Instead of measuring oneself against that Other, Levinas speaks of disclosure, of the face being exteriorized and thus resisting our attempts at occupying or captivating it, depriving it of its power. Extremely simple and probably therefore so directly effective, the performance *Connected* does something similar: it spontaneously indicates the possibility of ethical resistance through sublime contact, communication without language, which is transformed in the alchemy of encounter into a powerful universal language with no words.

(Broadcasted in the *Triptych* programme of the Third Channel of Croatian Radio June 21, 2007 and published in *Zarez* IX / 210-211, 2007)

Translation: Marina Miladinov

* All the texts published in the periodical *Zarez* were prepared by the editorial staff.

2. Clandestines



An Artistic Saboteur

Interview with Sislej Xhafa on the occasion of his light installation *Zagreb Boogie Woogie* on the façade of the Home of HDLU (Croatian Association of Artists)

Yuppie at Manifesta, persona non grata at the Biennale

Xhafa's interest in the issue of illegal immigrants started with his own story, when he left Kosovo owing to the political unrests and decided to continue his artistic education abroad.

Having spent a few years in Italy, which was at that time a promised land for Albanian immigrants, he moved to London. Dissatisfied with the sterile atmosphere at the Chelsea College of Arts, he started working as a chef at a restaurant that employed illegal workers coming from the Third World countries. His career began at the time when the curatorial establishment developed an interest in countries that had previously been absent from all relevant artistic events. He may have himself contributed to this evolution, at least regarding the young Albanian scene, by illegally appearing at the Venice Biennale in 1997 (*Clandestine Albanian Pavilion*). With his body painted red, a ball in his hands, and a soccer game blaring on the radio in his backpack, he was looking for teammates among the artists from the neighbouring pavilions, thus embodying not only Albanian, but also all other non-existing national pavilions in Venice's Giardini.

Clandestines have been the preferred topic of his early works – with which he played, armed with irony, by imitating the familiar stereotypes without a hint of the usual rhetoric. In his performance *Stock Exchange*, presented at Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana, he was dressed in a fancy suit such as worn by the Wall Street brokers, shouting out the train departures and arrivals, which

metaphorically spoke of the mass emigration of people from the transitional countries to the European Union, where they were bound to become cheap labour. Instead of the stereotypes of delinquents and criminals, the *clandestines* in his work become the “power of the future”, as he has often emphasized. At the Milan stadium, inspired by an exhibition on sports, three young Albanians promoted a new athletic discipline: running with a tree trunk. Ali Hamadou, the invented five-meter tall black businessman from Senegal wearing an Armani suit, stood in the hangar of Fondazione Teseco per l’Arte in Pisa in complete darkness, where “we all turn black” as our eyes become accustomed to the fact that a nearer or more distant future consists of people who have until recently avoided police while selling forged brand bags in the streets of Italy. Xhafa also managed to shock and disillusion the public when he covered a church that was being renovated with a 12-meter banner announcing the construction of the Cal-al-Sheikh mosque, complete with precise information on the investors and contractors. The humorous and utopian dimension of his work has come most explicitly to the fore when he transformed a police station into a luxurious lounge, or in his project at the Michelangelo Pistoletto Foundation in Biella, where a round table with the inevitable snacks and a pile of malfunctioning microphones was attended by the aged members of the Italian antifascist movement, who were organizing a protest against the state electricity company because of its high prices. Indirect criticism of the current situation in Italy is also manifest in his recent video project, where the famous scene from Fellini’s *La dolce vita* is paraphrased by a couple of skinheads diving into the Fontana di Trevi in romantic rapture. Although his artworks are sometimes complex metaphors, they are also direct intuitive responses to the surrounding reality and therefore function without a complicated art-historical apparatus of interpretation.



Sislej Xhafa, *Padiglione Clandestino*, 1997. Unauthorized performance during the Venice Biennale 1997, Collection My Private, Milan. Courtesy the artist and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana

Boogie Woogie for Zagreb

Recently, this artist-traveller, whose nomadism has turned from an existential necessity into a lifestyle (largely dictated by his being in increasing demand in prominent exhibition venues), has been reacting to the stagnant cultural environment. At the W139 Gallery in Amsterdam, within the *Nivea* project, he set up a complex *tableau vivant* (the protagonists being figures from Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* and Vermeer's *Milkmaid*), which was gradually transformed into a hilarious happening. The light installation *Zagreb Boogie Woogie*, although focusing on the issue of cultural heritage, is far more meditative in nature. Alluding to the Croatian modernist legacy, Xhafa has lighted up Meštrović's pavilion with a regular grid of warm and cold colours from Mondrian's palette, its sharp edges blurred with the expanding neon light and turned into a delicate aura, which at night "warms up" and enriches the rather gloomy district full of apartment buildings with neglected facades and second-rate restaurants.

How did you come to the idea for the Zagreb project?

— While participating in *Zadar Live*, I slipped over to Zagreb to see and experience the space. I did that by driving around the building in a car. What I sensed was the austerity and purity of triumphant architecture. I felt I should do something like Mondrian, whom I admire very much, such as the Boogie Woogie. When we pronounce the words *Boogie Woogie*, it makes us think of movement. What I wanted to achieve is an artwork that is viewed from a car or tram. When you stand close to it, you cannot see what it's all about. Besides, I always try to do something that is typical of the cultural tradition of the place I'm working in, and I knew that the characteristic features of Croatian modern art were luminokinetics and abstract geometry. However, the most important aspect was the physical quality of this artwork, rather than its mere aestheticism.

Zagreb Boogie Woogie is not your first light project?

— No, it is the second. But it is the first that I have realized, as the one in Japan is still in the concept phase. I was invited there by architect Kazuyo Sejima, who had won the contest for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa near Tokyo. I did not really want to intervene in architecture, I preferred doing something unimportant. So I decided to build a wall around the museum, which would remain there as a permanent installation. I proposed a physical wall, but one that would be visible only at night, since it consisted of white light. Light will be placed on the ground and emitted to the height of three meters. Today it is unnecessary and stupid to build walls. I simply wanted to construct a different sort of wall, a mental one that one can pass through. It will be very expensive: the price is incomparable to that of the Zagreb project. What links them together is that they are bound to the cultural heritage of the country. In Japan, my intent hasn't been to attract attention, I am not looking for movement: it is simply a white wall. The Zagreb project is something that depends on the activity around the venue. Reactions to it have been positive, as far as I have heard, and that is why I've decided to donate it to Zagreb, since I love this city very much.

An Artistic Criminal

Sometimes you don't call yourself an artist. You've described yourself as a "sensitive agitator".

— My way of working has nothing to do with "being an artist" and I don't even know what the title "artist" is supposed to mean today. What I do know is the power of creativity, which can indicate various sorts of reality in a society. It needn't necessarily be an artwork engaging with the society; it can also be purely aesthetical in nature, yet it always marks something. I feel like a rebel and sometimes I experience myself as a criminal, but in a positive sense. I am not sure how to describe my poeticism, since

I am never entirely aware of what I am doing. I think that we can never change anything, since all change is violence. What we can do is try and cooperate, bringing order into things by making an indirect impact on the society. It means questioning economy, politics, tourism, many small things that we disagree with, but without trying to change them, since the so-called role of the artist is not to change things forcibly, but to anticipate. What I am doing with my photographs, drawings, actions, and performances is my personal way of trying to question things.

Mentioning tourism, you've reminded me of Elegant Sick Bus, your contribution to the Istanbul Biennial.

— Yes, there I referred to the sick state of tourism in Turkey. I covered an entire tourist bus with mirrors. It was standing on a slope and, as it wasn't functioning properly and as its brakes were broken, it was sliding down the hill. The passers-by realized that it was an incident and readily joined forces to stop the sick bus from sliding to its ruin. The bus was something like an impersonation of tourism. Tourists come to Turkey looking for "exotic" pleasures. The picture was touching. Local people, paupers from the street, everyone tried their best to save the elegant tourist bus. What they could see while doing it was their own reflection – the mirror reflection of poverty.

I would like to talk about another artwork, which seems rather monumental in photographs. It is the happening called Again and Again, in which the Belgian symphonic orchestra perform classical music masked as terrorists...

— I didn't pack any ideology into that project. It was simply about three things: complexity, unity, and diversity in our modern society.

Can you explain it a bit?

— When I think of complexity in our modern society, I mean the minorities, who have their own demands and we must deal

with that. It is thanks to the minorities that we are rich. Imagine our life without the minorities... Diversity is not something that America has invented. Diversity is a part of development in each and every society.

Unity – it is there because we are human beings, and the value of human beings resides in community, without an exception. These are the three things that, I believe, belong to this project in a very universal way, avoiding all stereotypes. The immigrants, for example: there are so many prejudices about them, and many among them are no criminals at all. Some of them can play Beethoven and Mozart. I am not talking about geographical relations here. I am an Albanian from Kosovo, but I don't like to be assigned any names as to where I come from, since I belong to the universe. I don't like the smell of nationalism, because nationalism is a product of emptiness and insecurity in people who have isolated themselves within the society. People are mobile; I am focusing on the issue of illegality as the future of the world, and this is the reality that some find hard to accept.

It may seem strange, but I believe that in some 50 years, perhaps even sooner, the prime minister of Italy will be a second-generation Albanian and the prime minister of Germany Heinz with a moustache coming from Turkey.

The Magical Action of Movement

Whom does the project Pleasure our Flowers address, which you have set up in a Ghent police station?

— It addresses the authorities. My way of approaching the authorities is with respect. I simply respect them and I never use the rhetoric of violence. I think that one should cooperate rather than confront. When speaking of cooperation, I think that there is no use whatsoever of attacking a McDonald's. One should see the different realities that exist today. When speaking of the authorities, I want to say that they should be treated with respect,

since their job is far from easy. The police belong to us, to all of us, and we must accept them whether we like it or not. In the Ghent project, to which I was invited by Jan Hoet, I explained that I wanted to transform the unpleasant waiting room of the police station and turn it into a luxurious lounge, comfy and warm, with sparkling wine, atmosphere lights, scented fruits, and books on philosophy. My intention was not to disturb the police work, but the policemen loved the project from the beginning. People who were coming in couldn't believe that it was a police station. The policemen were standing at the door and invited people: come, come in and have a look – it is a police station. Of course, this project was a pure utopia. And irony.

You've mentioned that you don't have your own atelier, since you travel a lot. Nomadism is not rare among the artists of today. It seems that they are forced to travel in order to survive. However, as I see it, your travels, as well as your wish to live in Bombay, are not really related to that.

— Nowadays, many artists speak of nomadism as their strategy. Nomadism must be felt, you must simply venture into the magical action of movement. It has become a term that is on everyone's lips; it is thrown onto the table and conceptualized. As for me, what truly matters is the physical aspect of nomadism. I keep moving because I need that movement like I need food. There is not a hint of wishing to conquer territories or colonize. I can't go to India reading Charles Dickens; I don't care about Charles Dickens, I am going there in order to live, to find my own perspective. My atelier is mobile. A Japanese curator from Tokyo, for example, asked me to wait for her in Milan in order to go to Florence together. We travelled by train and spent four hours discussing the project. My atelier was in movement then and many times afterwards. Modern nomadism, the way I understand it, has nothing romantic in itself; it is simple physical movement where there is no place for hiding away into a safe corner. In the morning, you wake up and you're ready, as soon as you open your eyes, to face the reality.



Sisley Khafa, *Zagreb Boogie Woogie*, 2003, light installation, Home of HDLU (Croatian Association of Artists) Zagreb. Photo: Ivana Vučić. Courtesy: Galerija proširenih medija (Extended Media Gallery), HDLU, Zagreb.

Nomadism is something that you also practice in your approach to work. You make drawings, performances, sculptures, videos, urban installations, some even with light...

— I will use any kind of medium that I find appropriate for what I am trying to say.

Balkan Folklore at the Biennale

Among the many Balkan exhibitions that have taken place recently, you have participated in one: Szeemann's Blood and Honey. Why did you go for that one?

— That is a good question, since it is my first and last so-called Balkan exhibition. Szeemann visited me and we talked about his project for a few hours. He explained to me that he still believed in some of the stereotypes related to nationalism. I asked him

whether he wanted to do with us something similar to what he had done with the Chinese three years before at the Biennale. Yes, he said, he wanted to do the same thing. I liked the direct way in which he admitted the truth. He chose Vienna for the exhibition site. I liked that as well, since it seemed like a parody of the Turkish invasion. Since he had explained his reasons without any hesitation, I decided to understand him and agreed to cooperate. But as I've just said, it is the last exhibition of the sort that I have accepted. I do not like at all this recent tendency of Western curators who are trying to create uniform art on people from the Balkans. As if it mattered at all where people come from. What's far more important is their individual value. And that is equal, sometimes even superior with regard to the English or the Americans... It all depends on the way things are presented. It is a way of thinking that is typical of the colonizers and that's why I don't like it at all. He confirmed this way of thinking when he said the truth and didn't even try to pretend it was something else, as it is usually done. In Croatia, for example, there are so many excellent artists and they are not of a rare kind, they have their own value. Western culture should think of the value of other people... We have already seen this type of nationalism in young British artists and the Venice Biennale has always been a typical nationalist manifestation, where some curator may have folklore dances from the Balkans this year. It is perverse. And my position on this issue is very clear.

(Published in *Zarez*, V/104, 2003)

Translation: Marina Miladinov

Anxious Objects

Mona Hatoum's exhibition *Interior Landscape*,
Fondazione/Palazzo Querini Stampalia, Venice, 2009

Mona Hatoum is a Palestinian artist born in 1952 in Beirut. In 1975, while on a short visit to London, the war broke out in Lebanon and forced her to live in exile. In 1981, she graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art and in 1995 she was nominated for the prestigious Turner Prize for an exhibition she had the previous year at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and one at White Cube, a private London gallery. While searching for the most intriguing London-based artists of the younger generation, London's gallerist Charles Saatchi noticed her work in the 1990s. Thus, Mona Hatoum became one of the famous Young British Artists (YBA) and presented her work at Saatchi's exhibition *Sensation*, which brought new names to the art world with great pomp: Damien Hirst, Gillian Wearing, Chris Ofili, Sam Taylor Wood, and others.

However, similar to the Iranian artist Shirin Neshat, despite the fact that Hatoum had left her home country, the feeling of displacement, threat and violence, corporeal vulnerability, and death would remain part of her permanent, obsessive vocabulary.

Staged spaces of intuition

Fondazione Querini Stampalia is a historical home of one of the most distinguished Venetian families. In the luxuriously equipped rooms of this Renaissance palace, with its stuccoed

ceilings, Murano chandeliers, woven covers with antique illustrations, oriental carpets, fine porcelain, sculptures, and globes, the Foundation not only offers an insight into the family art collection, but also displays a high living standard. With her discreet installations, Mona Hatoum has managed to introduce a feeling of discomfort and restlessness in this opulent and safe oasis of the privileged Venetian class. On the massive table of the living room, she left paper plates in which grease has created stains resembling a geographic map. Her minimalist interventions in the interior saturated with the Serenissima's glorious past created a gap through which a different, incongruous reality would seep through, and the history interspersed with warfare would not create a luxurious stage set, but rather introduce a troubled memory of homes lost forever, of struggle to survive and to reinvent one's identity in the newly created contexts of displacement. Her installations are never political stories directly told, but rather skilfully staged spaces of intuition. Her ability to transform ordinary things into estranged, anxious objects may remind us of Robert Gober or Felix Gonzales Torres, but Hatoum's method reveals a latent, inexplicit, yet permanently present feminine standpoint. In one of the palace rooms, there are decorative figurines, among them *The Triumph of Beauty*: a composition of intertwined mythological characters and an original example of 18th-century porcelain art from Sevres. By transforming the symbolic into the decorative in the work *Witness* 2009, Hatoum used the same technique of miniature porcelain sculpture in order to reinterpret the public monument of Martyr's Square dedicated to the victims of war placed in a central Beirut square, a key site of the historical conflict that had divided the city.

Associations to animal cages and prisons

A public monument has likewise been composed of symbolic figures, but unlike the gracious *Triumph of Beauty*, it was made in



Mona Hatoum, *Hot Spot III*, 2009, and *Worry Beads*, 2009, exhibition view.
Photo: Agostino Osio. Courtesy: Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice

a realistic manner and transposed into the context of a home, now featuring as a decorative object on the living room table. In the next room, two cabinets in which colourful Murano glass ornaments are displayed, yet their shapes closely resemble those of hand grenades (*Natura Morta* 2009). Transformed into decorative objects that are associated with a privileged and idyllic environment, these objects with military associations have been discreetly displayed inside ornate cabinets. In a rotating lantern that is supposed to create a pleasant ambience by emitting a soft circle of light, Hatoum has incised silhouettes of soldiers holding machine guns and marching around the space. At the very entrance to the Querini Stampalia Foundation, there are the maps of three cities – Beirut, Kabul, and Baghdad – are mounted on table tops linked by wooden trestles. Delicate concentric circles have been cut out into the surface of the maps to create convex and concave areas suggesting dangerous zones of explosion. One of the rooms contains a large cube made entirely of rods of barbed

wire (*Impenetrable* 2009). With this and similar structures, such as the impressive *Light Sentence* from 1992, which are reminiscent of animal cages and prisons, Hatoum spoke of an encounter with the repressive apparatus of institutions that have a paralyzing effect on the individual, imprisoned in a system of surveillance and control. But at the same time, these installations using a play of moving lights and shadows on the walls, so that the visitors become enmeshed in the shadows and wonder whether they are in fact, inside or outside the cage made of wire mesh – leave a powerful impression with their aestheticized order and the peculiar harmony of their structures. The central room of the palace contains an installation entitled *Hot Spot* which is a large steel globe made of woven metal rods with the continents outlined in red neon on its surface. The mapping of the globe with glowing red neon tubes again creates an ambiguous image by leaving an impression of warmth and emotions in accordance with the primary, archetypal symbolism of the red colour, yet subconsciously creating an uneasy feeling of danger and potential disaster with the red glow in a darkened room.

A biography permeated with the trauma of exile

In a smaller room at the side, a special ambience has been created by placing a metal bed frame made of rusty iron, the paint peeling, without linen and with a base made of a grid of barbed wire. On the wall, there is a wire hanger that has been distorted into the outline of the historical map of Palestine and a handbag made of a cut up map of Palestine, suggesting the country's dissected form. There is a single pillow on the bed, embroidered with long female hair. Opposite the bed, there is a scarf laid over the back of a chair – at the first glance, it seems like an ordinary Palestinian *keffiyeh*, but on close inspection, it becomes evident that the wavy lines of the pattern on the white surface of the scarf are, in fact, woven out of black locks of a woman's hair. The

artist's repeated use of cartography is manifest throughout the *Interior Landscape* exhibition: in the pillow, the globe, the hanger, and the handbag, in the oriental carpet in which a view to a geographic landscape has been carved out by cutting through the carpet pile, which is readily associated with the artist's biography, permeated with the trauma of exile. In Hatoum's vocabulary, the Palestinian scarf, which has meanwhile become popular in the West as a utilitarian object symbolically associated with the revolution, has retained its authentic connotations as a female head-gear – which in Islamic countries also has explicit sexual connotations. Hand grenades made of Murano glass have become a sort of seductive, colourful fruit... a rosary is scaled-up and cast in metal so that its beads resemble cannon balls; it becomes a sign of threat instead of prayer and meditation... the bed, once a place of rest, has become a site of suffering... Mona Hatoum has been intuitively playing with the symbolism and function of things.

A ceaseless transformation develops in the multiplied field of meaning in which everyday objects emanate anxiety and unease.

(Broadcasted in the *Triptych* programme of the Third Channel of the Croatian Radio, July 7, 2009, and published in *Zarez* 11, 263–264, 2009)

El Dorado and Other Stories

Collaboration between artists and immigrants

Summary

In the mid-1990s, the political and economic crisis brought the new issues about displaced identities into the focus of artistic attention, including the question whether identity is something predefined or rather subject not only to external circumstances, but also to individual choices. The text begins with a review of the artists' activity as they have taken their own experience of leaving home (Shirin Neshat, Mona Hatoum, Sükran Moral, Ghazel, Tanja Ostojić) as the starting point in their art practices, and closes with an analysis of the procedures adopted by artists who have collaborated with the immigrant groups in various participatory projects.

The reflection on the collaboration between artists and immigrants has been inspired by the *Retrospective* of Danica Dakić, an artist from Sarajevo, held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb in 2010. Her earliest work on the subject of displaced identities has been a reaction on her leaving the homeland, caught in war during the 1990s, but later on, her first-person speech transformed into listening to the voice of the Other through the phenomenology of roles, introducing some props as a proposal for cooperation. In the beginning of her collaborations, she usually creates a theatrical situation, after which she changes the place that her protagonists are used to and opens up room for becoming aware of herself as the Other – a position from which it is far easier to speak of oneself. Even though



Danica Dakić, *Guided Tour*, 2007, Performance, Deutsches Tapetenmuseum, Kassel, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

she refuses to be defined as a socially involved artist, the people she collaborates with are always representatives of marginalized groups. In her video installation *El Dorado*, created for *Documenta 12* in Kassel in 2007, she first dealt with immigrants, more precisely with minors who had left their homelands without their parents and were cared for by the social workers of Kassel's Hepata Centre.

Participatory practices of various artists have been inspiring collaboration projects with marginalized groups since the mid-1990s, the immigrants being one of the most prominent. By collaborating with them, the artists could deal with the neuralgic points of Western politics, starting from the premise that – even though the refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, or “clandestines”, as they are sometimes called, make up for 1% of the world population – the official maps of states and cities do not show their reality, even though their changeable and uncertain paths, defined by their fear of violence and deportation, reveal alterations

in what is formally labelled as “public space”. An overview of the simple and often similar methods that the artists deploy in their participatory practices has been presented in the projects of the artistic duo Big Hope (*Re: route*), Andreja Kulundžić (*sight.seeing, Austrians only, Bosnians out*), and the reference to the *Missing Monuments* project, a result of collaboration between Kristina Leko and David Smithson. The success of such projects is usually measured by the invisible criteria of how well they establish an intersubjective space in which the greatest sin is to exploit the other, intentionally or not. However, in relation to the highly set benchmarks regarding work with threatened groups, one may observe some intentional deviations, as in the project of the Spanish artist Santiago Sierra in his collaboration with the immigrants.

(Broadcasted in the *Reviews and Debates* programme of the Third Channel of the Croatian Radio, December 21, 2010)

3.

Works in Transition



Where Do We End and They Begin?

Interview with Dominic Hislop and Miklós Erhardt on
the occasion of their exhibition *Points of Departures*
at the Gallery of Extended Media, 2002

Owing to its intriguing history, its situation and form, Meštrović's pavilion at Fascist Victims Square has recently become the target of various artistic interventions. The latest was performed late in January by the Scottish artist Dominic Hislop and Miklós Erhardt from Budapest, who placed an inscription consisting of the logos of various Croatian companies and entrepreneurs on the building's facade. The two artists started their collaboration in Croatia, in the artists' colony of Labin in 1997, and gained international popularity within a year with their joined project *Inside Out*. Having completed his traditional academic training in Edinburgh and a postgraduate programme in Glasgow, Dominic Hislop spent six months in Budapest in 1996, where he started working on a series of activist projects, intervening directly into street signs and advertising billboards. It was at that time that he met Miklós Erhardt, who studied painting at the Art Academy and philology at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in Budapest, where he also graduated from the New Media Department. His dissatisfaction with the art system and his own part in it found expression in a text titled *Structures of Emptiness*, published in the webzine *Subsol*, which he wrote in collaboration with philosopher Joanne Richardson.

Miklós, in your text written with Joanne Richardson, you mention monumental exhibitions of contemporary art that you compare with an inventory book – pure redundancy without real goal and purpose. What inspired you to write this text?

Miklós Erhardt: It often happens that my ideas come from watching television, and once I saw an advertisement for Sony on TV. Sony had recently introduced the slogan *Go Create!* In the advertisement we see a lonely observer somewhere in the Antarctic who had to make his report to the Center about what is happening, and obviously nothing is happening, because there is blinding snow everywhere, and so every day he says the same meaningless things. I remember it is the 830th day when he creates a penguin (digitally) and from then on, this penguin reports the same way as he did before. In the closing image he again stands in the big flat plane of snow and laughs, in the way, arguably, God did when he saw how his creation had worked out. It made me think that today the System – the global capitalist economic–social–political world order – became indeed very creative and therefore tore down the last fortress of art, that is, the modernist myth of creativity, which, after all the other sensitivities, knowledge and skills that had been needed for the representation of the world, was declared superfluous, and this is what had distinguished modern artists from the rest of the world. In the great époque of modern art, in the beginning of the last century, the avant-gardes, the Bauhaus and all, had great insights, built great utopias and proclaimed radical equality, but what happened later is that much of this radicality and utopianism got appropriated by the system, which used it, and in many cases used it much better, in propaganda, mass communication or the advertising industry, in the production and design of the new world. So the thesis of this text is that today art is not like the historic avant-garde anymore, which ran forward into the future to be in control of the situation, but rather it can only run behind. It is more than happy if it gets some crumbs from the system that it can appropriate and fuel its self-consciousness with. So the relationship kind of turned upside-down. I found the



Miklós Erhardt and Dominic Hislop, *Points of Departures*, 2002,
Photo: Boris Cvjetanović. Courtesy: Galerija proširenih medija
(Extended Media Gallery), HDLU, Zagreb.

advertisement funny at first, but later quite hopeless, so I wrote this text in search of a way out from my disappointment, and I, a bit ironically, found that it would be better to leave behind the great époque of art which is still inscribed in the subconscious of artists, and that it would be better for art to be on guard against this change of current. And I feel that somehow we are working towards the advent of this small and suitably modest époque.

Dominic Hislop: But I also think we agree with Douglas Huebler's famous quote, which I can only paraphrase, about there being too many objects in the world already and we don't want to add any more. Our process is appropriating visual information from the already oversaturated environment and somehow using it in a way that displays it and creates a question about its function or social background. It goes along with what Miklós has been saying – it's not just that we're following the system, it's also a conscious choice that we don't want to create: we're appropriators and workers with found objects.

You attracted the attention of contemporary art critics and theorists with your Inside Out project, where you turned the traditional model of artistic representation 'inside out'. You gave disposable photo cameras to homeless people in the streets and shelters of Budapest and asked them to document what they found relevant about their life, and then you organized an exhibition of the photos and the authors' comments in an art gallery. The project in Budapest at first got an ambiguous reception in art circles, but after you had put the material on-line, you started receiving invitations for important international exhibitions.

Erhardt: In Hungary itself, it was quite slow to be appreciated and that was probably because the artistic culture was still much more focused on medium specific work and technology, and not so much interested in questions of social context. When the project was first exhibited, the local artistic culture found it hard to accept something so directly engaged with a social context as art. Also problematic was that the producers of the visual work were non-artists – with our role somewhere in the background and quite anonymous. I think this was a little bit difficult to deal with. That was one of the reasons why we wanted to exhibit in an art gallery. Because of those reasons in that particular context I think it was quite provocative and it wouldn't have had that effect in another location. As for the reception outside Hungary – it gained a wider recognition through the website and through foreign curators coming to Budapest then selecting it for various exhibitions in Berlin, Denmark, Stockholm – as part of the “After the Wall” exhibition – and also in Ulm, Germany. Since then it's been much more accepted in Budapest, too.

For the exhibition in the Gallery of Extended Media you wrote on the facade of Meštrović's pavilion and on the circular wall of the gallery the question “Where do we end and they begin?” in Croatian and English, using different logos you found in Zagreb. This idea emerged during the time when you were on the art residency Lamparna '97 in Labin. Why were you interested in these local logos?

Hislop: In Labin we visited a local football pitch for the Labin team. Around the stadium there was a concrete wall which had

a white band painted on it. On this band there were various logos of companies from the Istrian area painted on it. We were very interested in the quality of these logos and how they were hand painted, which was really interesting – in comparison to the technical quality of displays on bigger football grounds. The logos were often symbolic representations of the service or product that these companies offered and involved the initial letter from the company name as a graphic symbol. Already in Labin we had used the question: “Where do we end and they begin?” on an LCD display in the town center. There we had the framework for the idea and the elements of it, but it didn’t quite come together as well as it has here. Now we’ve found the perfect space for it. At that time we were just interested in a very broad question about points of separation, of borders, and it was interesting for us to be in a relatively newly created country and be able to reflect on the phenomenon of how it came about. When we came to Zagreb in September we saw many more of the kind of logos that we’d seen in Labin. Again, we couldn’t recognize them since they were local to Croatia, but they had a somehow nostalgic or naive graphic quality that visually linked them to the product or service the companies were dealing with. The contemporary multinational logo serves as a symbol for itself, not for any particular product or service, as there can be many unrelated products behind the logos for Adidas, Nike, Virgin, Camel etc.

Erhardt: This is one of the inspirations. The other is the structure of the building where the exhibition is being held. It is located in a quite central point in Zagreb. Many avenues come together in this round square and this beautiful round building in the middle of it is like a crystal mirroring the surroundings; it’s a beautiful, pure structure and the Gallery PM is nested in the middle of it. It is such a powerful structure and we wanted to use it in some way because we felt that if you don’t enter into a dialogue with a context like this, it could overpower the work. This is not so important in every gallery because in a normal white

cube, such 'collaboration' between the space and your work is not always necessary. So, we were intrigued by the idea of adding some text to it like on a display or banner. This is also maybe morally questionable, to use another artwork as a display for your own, but it's also part of the provocation somehow.

Hislop: Putting logos on the building is an interesting displacement and de-familiarisation of the everyday, so on that level I enjoyed it. It's kind of playfully provocative in a way, causing passers-by to ask the question: Why? If you can achieve the result of causing the passer-by who normally wouldn't walk into a gallery to pose this question, then you've gone one step further than most galleries and exhibitions are able to go. If someone can figure out these are words and walk around the building and read them, then you've gone another step, reached another layer of the work. Other people we've spoken to, who have been working with us on this, told us, 'We can't see the city the same way after putting these logos on this building. We're constantly walking around the city and noticing more and more logos.'

The title Points of Departures as well as the question create an associative and open interpretative space that relates to the social context. Could we say that in the époque of liberal capitalism this work addresses the process of globalisation?

Erhardt: One more thing about this sentence 'Where do we end and they begin?' We're living in a very strange time, a period of new separations within the global political culture with very powerful and very stupid slogans, talking about good and evil, us and them, terrorists and non-terrorists etc. Mr. George W. Bush said, 'If you're not with us, you're against us', so I'm talking about those kinds of slogans. I think we were also attracted by the opportunity of putting in a really powerful position a slogan which is very subtle and modest, it is just a question. In such a setting you might expect something more politically direct – just because of the location of the building in Zagreb...

Hislop: And not forgetting the recent contestation over and changing of the name of the square and the political demonstrations that have been held here.

The use of the logos itself directs the meaning of the question towards the separations within society, economically, between the locally familiar logos and their function, and the function of internationally familiar corporate logos that have much more capital behind them, and power, and are constantly expanding while the local is contracting. It's happening worldwide, it's not particular to Eastern Europe, it's happening in Western countries too. There's this struggle for the survival of the local at the expense of the growth, expansion and centralization of the global. There's more money going to a shrinking minority of people and less money coming to a growing majority of people. This is an international phenomenon. Here we did this project in Zagreb where the conditions were suitable for using these logos with the single letters of local companies, but an added layer is given to the text of the work by Croatia's emergence as a nation and more specifically the recent contestation over the naming of the square where the building is located. Using this particular building allows for this nice circular arrangement on both the inside and outside, making the question inconclusive – it starts again as soon as it's finished and has no prescribed answer. If we had some particular, definite answer or comment, maybe we'd write an article in a magazine and not make this artwork. This way it's much more open, slipping from one definition to another. That's part of the strength of the work, it's talking about definitions and separations, but at the same time it is defying definition itself.

(An abbreviated version of the interview broadcasted in the *Triptych* programme of the Third Channel of Croatian Radio, February 2, 2002)

The Creative Energy of Female Community

Since the time that artists took on the roles of ethnographers and anthropologists and since the art that presupposes a committed involvement of artists in social spheres obtained an important place in museum and gallery programmes, we have increasingly often been faced with artworks that appropriate the form of such an occupation, but lose that initial connection with the fundamental premises, and the essential reasons for such a vocation. Artists not infrequently content themselves with fragments from life with the cultural or ethnic Other, the reception of which does not reach outside the walls of art institutions. In his celebrated essay “The Artist as Ethnographer”¹ Hal Foster draws attention to the theoretical trends towards endless confessional testimonies that appeal to the emotions of the observer, as well as the plethora of pseudo-ethnographic reportages as a new and superficial form of artistic *flânerie*. These unwelcome by-products tend what is more to be matched by institutional unreadiness to take an active part in a project, and present it properly, the reasons for which are most often financial constraints. Nevertheless, making the transition from the symbolic to the expanded field of action, nimbly hurdling the walls of institutions, the boldest and most persistent ones still manage to achieve their objectives, which is to say, to accomplish real results, to turn the wheel that is going to change the given social condition at micro or macro levels.

1 Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer”, *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996, pp. 302-303.



Kristina Leko, *Cheese and Cream*, 2002/2003, exhibition view.
 Photo: Boris Cvjetanović. Courtesy the artist and Galerija
 proširenih medija (Extended Media Gallery), HDLU, Zagreb.

From its beginning, Kristina Leko's work has enjoined the artist to adopt an active position as creator of engaged processes of communication and collaboration, with which, in line with her ethical principles, she lends her voice to those whose voices are usually disavowed or neglected. Back in 1994, when the concept of anti-globalism was not particularly entrenched, the work *Speaker System* was created; it consisted of a number of actions and installations in public spaces. Replicas produced of Sony Corporation packaging differed from the original boxes by their discreet, well nigh mimic, incorporation of a text, a quote from Wim Wenders, speaking of the threat to the European identity by the expansion of the American film industry. While she was then, as a youthful artist, wielding her critical scalpel in the defence of European cultural values, the project *Cheese and Cream*, which was

put on in 2003 in the same place – in and around the Croatian Fine Artists' Association centre in Zagreb – was, in contrast to the previous work, a critique of the conception of the new Europe. In the run-up period to Croatian membership Brussels was insisting on a rapid change in certain economic standards and practices. The collateral damage incurred in this case would be the extinction of some traditional occupations. One of the main generators of Leko's work is the endeavour to protect the weak "so that the whole world should not look the same, which is the essence of democracy, and democracy is not capitalism, is not market competition..."²

Consistently, indeed practically dogmatically, abandoning the modernist tradition of art, which rose and fell on a hermetically enclosed idea of itself, from the 1990s, starting from the *Speaker System* installations, the artist devoted herself vigorously to art in social context, to engaged art, and community art. The first wave of art in public space with indications of activism, in the spirit of revolutionary 1968, appeared in Croatia under the aegis of what was called the New Art Practice. Robust new inroads of activism came in the wartime and the post-war nineties, appearing in a time marked by a material and moral crisis – casualties of the war, the collapse of formerly powerful industrial plants, the abrupt process of privatisation, unemployment, impoverishment and corruption. While the engaged works of artists created at that time (like, for example, the wartime performances of Slaven Tolj or the post-war action of Igor Grubić called *Black Peristyle*) focused on the situation as it was, with quite often radical gestures, Kristina Leko founded her work on an attempt to change the status quo, focusing on the responsibility of artists for the picture of the world.³ In her work process, from the outset she considered in parallel the manner of representation, of how

2 "Odgovornost za sliku svijeta" [Responsibility for the image of the world], interview with Kristina Leko, R. I. Jankovic, *Život umjetnosti* 74/75, 2005, pp. 24-43.

3 Ibid.

to make a given problem visible, as well as the ethical side of her own activity.

In her earliest participatory projects among which is the video work *Exchanging Biographies* (1999-2000), created in Gdańsk, Poland, working with children from a socially neglected neighbourhood, she most often left the decision-making about what was to be made visible to the principals with whom she was working. She tested out this relationship again in works that followed, such as *Sarajevo International* (2001) or the project produced slightly later – *On Milk and People* (2001-2003), which was made in close cooperation with Hungarian and Croatian rural families earning their living from milk production. At this time the focus of the work was on the documentation of a life style that was being lost. The theme to which she was most completely and intensely to devote her energy in the *Cheese and Cream* project relates to the transitional and legislative changes connected with the EU. She created some short films and a whole exhibition while working closely with members of rural families; the money obtained for the project from the Ministry of Culture was spent on their journey to Hungary, there to mount, in collaboration with the local rural people, an exhibition. The romantic aim of the project was to foster encounter and exchange among the Croatian and the Hungarian country people.

This incessant consideration of the Other resulted, a little later, in the piece *An Ethics for Artists in Twelve Simple Rules*. In order to help herself and her fellow artists in the process of becoming fully aware of their own responsibility, so as to avoid the trap of using commitment as a mere pose, she reduced her previous experiences to a set of instructions. As the criterion of success that regulates the points of the *Ethics*, she mentions, among other things, the intensity of personal involvement, the establishment of mutual trust, and the possibility given to the people with whom she works not only to take part but also to have a direct creative share in the process of devising the representation. The last and most important rule the artist addresses is the achievement of

real results, consequences that lead to permanent changes in the surroundings/location, while positing a thoroughgoing research of the problem as the basic premise for success.

Working on the *Cheese and Cream* project, the artist assigns her professional abilities to work for the cause of milkmaids. "The declaration, the video installation, installations of use objects, photographs, the Web site, all that is subordinate to the same goal, and exists for it," says the artist. "It does not exist for itself, but is subservient to the idea and the objective, and from this point of view, we can talk about social realism. Formally, my video installation is Realism in the 19th century painting sense. But it is not just about social realism; it is a left-oriented effort that generates cultural democracy. I believe that, for example, the farmers should come into galleries and that there are no cultural barriers that could not and should not be overcome in a just society. None of this is a new invention; it is the inheritance and a replica of the historical avant-gardes of the early 20th century."⁴

Looking back at the *Cheese and Cream* project, in the production of which I had a mediating role as curator of the Expanded Media Gallery in which it took place, it seems that its success was furthered precisely by the profound involvement in the very process of a long-lasting and detailed analytical examination. It was initiated by the artist and put into effect in collaboration with the members of the BLOK Association. The questionnaire was not restricted to a formal completion of the form; rather, it was a gradual process in which the dairywomen became more aware of the importance of their profession which is not to be taken for granted, and which has gradually been incorporated into the identity of the city through its many years of existence. It is important to remark that the questionnaire was not carried out on the basis of a sample of the dairywomen, the problem, rather, being comprehended in its entirety – most of the women who sell dairy products on the six main Zagreb produce markets

4 Ibid.

(448 of them) were interviewed. A constant concern for the milkmaids not being reduced to an object of study and analysis, allowing conclusions about their familial and financial statuses to be drawn, was an evident element of devising the project. Important was the process of working with the milkmaids, in the sense of initiating their gradual active involvement in the project. A curatorial essay prefacing the exhibition was replaced by the *Declaration*, which, in an agitational tone, calling for protection of the occupation of milkmaid as cultural heritage of the city, was composed by the artist for a catalogue-cum-flier. On its cover it showed the faces of a multitude of Zagreb dairywomen. The visitors of the gallery were addressed with a demand to participate as well, while the exhibition was devised as the open office to the project. For the problem to reach the general public, journalists were contacted, with timing and content of the press release being heedfully coordinated. When the exhibition opened, along with the action of handing out cheese-and-cream, the news was reported in the main TV broadcasts and daily papers. The artist engaged experts – veterinarians, sociologists and politicians – who at a roundtable conducted a well-informed debate, with divided views, about the position of the dairywomen. The aim was achieved. A public debate about the threatened Zagreb trademark got underway. The arts institution – the premises of the PM Gallery – for a short time became an ideal example of vital collaboration between and the intertwining of art and the everyday life of the dairywomen. The visitors were not just passive observers needing to be sensitised to a problem. Instead, they became actors, signing the petition and getting the opportunity to record their own testimonies on the web site, in which there was no want of emotional input and no lack of tips about how to cook with cheese and cream. The artist's wish for democratisation, for the elision of cultural habits, also dictated the form of display in the gallery, where the status of artistic artefacts, placed in the museum showcase, with their specific aura, was conferred on everyday use objects – the hemispherical plastic bowls, the measures

and the dishtowels, a great collage being made of them, invoking at the symbolic level the strength of female community. At the opening itself, the central event (the action in which cheese and cream were distributed free of charge to the public in the setting of Meštrović's monumental circular building) took on a practically ceremonial character. The process of democratising art in the gallery venue was fostered by one more large collage with photographs of almost all the dairymen, encouraging them to come into a space that otherwise they might never have visited, so as to take down from the wall and take home with them a memento of the action – their own portrait.

The project triggered an avalanche of reactions. When the action was over, cheese and cream were much talked of in the public and the media. Indeed, the idea of the project, to protect cheese and cream, was even hijacked for rightist-oriented political campaigns. In the course of time, the market places brought refrigerated cases in so as to comply with European standards. This threatened to increase the price of points of sale and drastically to reduce the already endangered number of vendors of cheese and cream. But thanks to this project, it did not happen. The city authorities, understanding the message of this artistic action, gave financial support to defray some of the costs of the introduction of the new measures. In the meantime, among the milkmaids, again thanks to the project, their endangered self-confidence and sense of togetherness was on the rise. They had begun to organise themselves, and fight for their rights.

Notwithstanding all this, their numbers have been declining from year to year. The omnipresent processes of globalisation, attended by changes in the habits of consumers who increasingly get their supplies in shopping centres and not in produce markets, cannot be halted. Ten years on from the *Cheese and Cream* project, confides the artist, the number of 500 milkmaids behind the counters of the main six Zagreb markets has dropped to 350.

In a key text, “Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art”⁵ Grant Kester explains that art offers a privileged position of opposition to the world precisely because of the creative energy of participatory practices that are capable of rehumanising, or of retrieving from alienation, at least for a short period of time, a society that the repressive utilitarianism of capitalism has made monotonous and fragmented. In accordance with Kester’s conclusion, the success of the project can be identified primarily in the creative energy and persistence invested in launching the idea of the strength of community, in this case, the community of women whose very existences, and those of their families, are seriously brought into doubt by social and political changes. From this point of view the *Cheese and Cream* project in the context of contemporary activist practice in Croatian art represents what must be one of the pioneering and watershed endeavours. It would be worth looking at it closer in the framework of women’s movements, and of feminism, which in general deal with the question of women in an urban context, while the need for rural women to acquire their own dignity and self-confidence is regularly marginalised in social negotiations.

(Essay for Kristina Leko’s *Book about Milkmaids /in preparation/,*
Otvoreni likovni pogon, Zagreb)

Translation: Graham McMaster

5 Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, University of California Press, 2004

An Explosion of Eternity

Slaven Tolj's exhibition *Out of Season*,
Art Gallery Dubrovnik, 2007

The fate of Dubrovnik has almost been a paradigm of modern tourism, for what renders better Boris Groys' metaphor of the tourist's romantic gaze that, like Medusa's, makes everything it touches magnificent and precious? "It is only tourism that creates these monuments... it is only in passing through the city that the ever-flowing, constantly changing urban environment is turned into a monumental image of eternity." The evolution of tourism means a faster creation of monuments. We are experiencing an explosion of eternity, or rather the creation of eternity in the cities. And while the relentless transformation of the living city into a petrified scene of eternity is taking place, the locals flee Medusa's gaze and the city is gradually turning into an empty stage set.

What we encounter in front of the glass entrance of Art Gallery Dubrovnik perplexes us at first. The gallery seems like a place where nothing whatsoever is going on, like a scene of some noisy social happening that has ended. By means of a few simple interventions, the gallery's ground floor has become almost unrecognizable: the densely arranged, empty tables have been brought from restaurants, while the marble staircase has vanished under a wooden scaffold.

On the wall next to the staircase, there is one of those maps that can be seen in several points in Dubrovnik, showing the sites of war devastation. However, when looking more closely, one realizes that only the syntax has been preserved, while the meaning has changed. The circles and triangles no longer mark the



Slaven Tolj, *Out of Season*, 2007, exhibition view. Photo: Antun Maračić.
 Courtesy: the artist and Museum of Modern Art Dubrovnik

places where the shelling has caused damage; instead, they show the main points of tourist offer in the city, places overcrowded with tables and chairs. On the mezzanine level, there is a series of bar chairs, ordinary and real, which resemble Duchamp's snow shovel in that they, transferred as they are to the gallery context, invite the visitor to come closer and look at them more carefully. Like a pair of old shoes, which still bear the traces of their owner, these chairs bear the same kind of marks in the same places, caused by the sloping street where they have been standing for years. Whereas the empty tables are associated with what is left after the summer season and the tourist stampede, the chairs exhibited in the mezzanine discreetly invoke the image of the old, culturally rich city, which is still there despite its slow agony. These chairs are, namely, a part of the inventory of the legendary café-bar *Libertina*, owned by Luči Capurs, one of the famous

pop band “Dubrovnik Troubadours” and a place where the locals still like to meet: the stubborn minority who defies the terrors of overall commercialization with their relaxed conversations.

In the back area of the empty hall on the first floor, there are eight television sets placed on pedestals. The height of each individual pedestal with its TV-set corresponds to the height of a singer from Dubrovnik’s acapella group bearing the symptomatic name Ragusaveccha (Old Dubrovnik). Filmed separately, each one singing his own score, the singers harmoniously perform the number titled “If you were a song”, whose author remembers his city while living far away from home, comparing it to a woman and nostalgically remembering it as it once was. Shot against a neutral background and standing each one on his own pedestal, the singers have preserved not only their musical scores, but also their character of the city’s autochthon inhabitants, which is additionally emphasized by inscriptions giving their name, profession, and height.

Slaven’s subtle treatment of light, with its various dimensions of meaning, is known from one of his 1998 installations, where he transferred two lamps from the baroque church of St Ignatius to the main railway station in Kassel (*Documenta X*), as well as from many other works in which it has appeared as a bare sign of presence or absence.

In the video projection *Prolonged Stay*, two ordinary white, globe-shaped lamps are seen in a room intended for the prolonged stay of schoolchildren in a primary school in the city centre, in which the number of pupils has been decreasing from year to year with an alarming speed. Pale light illuminates the wall with the painted bulwark of Dubrovnik. The light goes out, one lamp after another, and the painted bulwark is immersed in darkness.

Above the mantelpiece in the festive central hall, there is a photograph shot in the same room, with its Gothic window arches and its magical view to the island of Lokrum, in which the lustrous chandeliers are nostalgically reflected. The actual

chandeliers have now been lowered down to the gallery floor. In the back of the hall, there is a wooden door with a peephole, leading into another room. Behind the door, one can hear the Croatian anthem and a look through the peephole reveals the end of broadcast of the Second Channel of Croatian Radio and Television. A black-and-white Croatian flag flutters on a black-and-white screen. The weak lamplight and the black-and-white flag remind of Tolj's earlier work, but now, carrying an echo of these earlier connotations, they have acquired a fresh intensity, equally charged with meaning.

Despite the international esteem that Tolj enjoys since the 1990s and the negativity that he has encountered in Dubrovnik, the artist has not only remained in the city, but has also become an active organizer of cultural programmes at the Art Workshop Lazareti, resisting both mainstream populism and Dubrovnik's out-of-season lethargy.

Even though Tolj's conceptual expression is often minimalist and austere, his artworks rarely need an additional interpretative framework. Objects from the real world are transferred into the gallery, favourably supported by an intimate or social context and thus acquiring a new aura, which appears as a happily achieved unity of place, time, and action. With his *Out of Season* exhibition, this has occurred to the full, with an intensity that once again shows Tolj as a master of ready-made, an artist who reacts immediately to the social moment with a visual language, without superfluous details or additional narration, creating with his spatial installations what Boris Groys has identified as their active substance: establishing a fixed, stable, closed context and a topologically clearly defined here and now.

(Published in *Kontura Art Magazin* 92, 2007)

Translation: Marina Miladinov

Works in Transition

“...pedestrian movements create one of those real systems, whose existence truly constitutes a city; they do not localize, but spread in space,” says Michael de Certeau in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In it, measuring urban space in pedestrian steps is compared to trees that are mobile, that move around and transform the stage, so that their movement can hardly be captured in a photo, equally as its meaning can hardly be formulated as a text. “Their rhetorical migration takes away and dislocates the analytical and encompassing real meanings of urban planning; we witness a ‘wandering semantics’, generated by masses that remove some parts of the city, glorify other, unhinge them, fragment and disassemble their still fixed arrangement.”¹

The content of the black and white photograph that Luiza Margan adopts from the archives of the Students’ Centre Gallery and blends into her work is the action of walking. This is a documentation of the resistance performance by the Zagreb-based group TOK during the seventies in Graz, as part of the KunstMark event; its aim was a protest against the commercialization of the artwork. The documentary photograph is a frozen fragment of a trajectory of a walker with a statement. Under the motto “Art for Everyone”, artists carry their abstract paintings around the town in order to express their disagreement with institutions and the market that stand in the way leading to the autonomy of art,

1 Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984 (translated by Steven Rendall).



Luiza Margan, *Concert for a Sewing Machine and a Tree*, four channel sound installation, 2012. Photo: Ovidiu Anton. Courtesy the artist.

determining the value of artworks and turning them into objects of elitist culture. On the opposite side to this scene, workers are accidentally included into it. Luiza Margan separated these two groups in the street into two independent units, opening a Pandora's Box by this simple gesture. Many questions and doubts will emerge from it, like: Where are the boundaries of the autonomy of art? If they are not generated by the market, what kind of logic sets up the evaluation criteria for an artwork? Do artists receive adequate remuneration for their work? Associations will also trigger questions like: What happens when the artist skips the symbolic part, just lands a scene, and juxtaposes it to reality? Do the people accidentally captured in a frame actually wish to be a subject of representation? Questions will not stop cropping up even if we face Margan's next work in which workers are again in the foreground and in the focus of representation. In the video-installation *Rehearsal (Action!)* a common theatre situ-

ation of dismantling the stage setting has been borrowed from reality. This scene is represented in the form of a fictitious play i.e. a staged authoritarian dialogue of the artist and the workers; she energetically directs their activities and demonstrates the way how they should perform monotonous manual movements, even to some extent creating the entire atmosphere.

The grades of reality, ranging from the adopted actual situation to fiction, actions and reflections on them are continuously altered and intertwined. The instructions by the artist, followed by workers who move wooden boards from one part of the stage to the other, interchange with self-referential off statements and reflections on the phenomenology of the voice. It asks itself: how can we achieve that people without the right of speech speak, and how do we reinstate the sound into its role in the struggle against power? Assuming the position of power in this fictitious play, the author links the question of ethics with the voice, intuitively addressing the connection that in many languages already exists in the very etymology of the word, where the expression denoting obedience is based on the verb “listen”. The text by Mladen Dolar states that the voice is a two-edged sword, at the same time an authority over the Other and exposure to the Other – an appeal, a plea, and attempt to conquer the Other.² However, the authoritative, additional voice used by the author to flippantly direct the movements, dynamics, and mood of the workers on the stage are fragments of a “wandering semantics” where reality again transcends artistic boundaries, interferes with the symbolic system of representation, and introduces confusion that will result in a series of associative reactions to particular notions. One of them is, for example, “workforce”, which is here not only an adopted segment of reality that becomes part of an artwork, but also its actual content, because at one point the question aris-

2 Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2006

es, how much does the representation of this on-stage work cost. The answer to this is cleverly evaded by giving further directions.

The recent four-channel audio-installation *Concert for a Sewing-Machine and a Tree*, recently displayed within the framework of the Zagreb *Urbanfestival* and now transferred from the public space of a square (from the trees) into a gallery venue, has also been created by intertwining and adoption of situations that actually took place in reality. Edited in the manner of a musical score, this interchange of irregular rhythms and sounds from real time and space, located into the public space of a city park, in four tree-crowns, introducing a spatial illusion of by no means harmless connotations, has for a short time animated a static idyll of the urban green oasis of the square. The produced sounds remind of the upsetting events that had shortly before happened in the immediate vicinity of the park. They are a result of long-term mismanagement by ruling structures, i.e. systematic economic destruction of one of the last textile factories in Croatia. The work of machines and women's hands, of protesting voices, tearing, cutting, and sewing together are provoking, testifies Luiza Margan, while new questions crop up about who, how and to what end re-distributes the space and structures. The allusion to re-tailoring, suggested by the dominant sound of sewing machines and tearing of the cloth eludes any attempt at non-ambiguous interpretation. This re-tailoring evokes the memories of actual events (like renaming French Republic Square into Dr Franjo Tudman Square), as well as contemporary gentrification processes, which are frequently conducted in collaboration with art, in order to enliven a devastated structure after its economic collapse. In this particular structure, associations keep forming a chain: indicated by sound, the listener faces a new cognitive space that outlines the concept of power of individual resistance and even his/her possibilities to re-tailor the already set routes and to design trajectories to which the resistance to the inherent language of power is feasible and maybe even possible. "The lan-

guage of power is being 'urbanised', but the city is still subjected to juxtaposed processes that complement each other and enter different combinations outside of the panoptic power," says Michael de Certeau.

In Luiza Margan's "wandering semantics", in which art intertwines with reality, this sound installation, initially intended for direct and unplanned reception by passers-by in a place that had really experienced re-tailoring in the recent past, has now been transferred into a new situation – gallery venue – as part of the artist's research practice. Although in her work she takes documentary methods of immanent practices of contemporary artistic activism as her point of departure, on the other hand Margan does not deny the existence of an autonomous field of art. Migrations and dislocation of signs from one venue to the other, from one level of reality into the other by applying artificial editing procedures will equally efficiently result in reflections on critical spots not only in the society as such, but also in the position of art and artists in that society. The problem of the image/picture is how to depict a voice, writes Mladen Dolar; it brilliantly solves this problem in the editing process linked to Lacan's description of urges as something devised and not founded on the natural order of things or instincts; this editing process is not final, and like a surrealist collage it has no beginning and end.

These sound installations, collages, and video-plays, which in some segments remind us of *zaum*-like artistic gestures of avant-garde provenance, although they do not come about as a result of immediate intrusion into the field of reality – by directly influencing the awareness (and thus also the conscience) of the individual – will finally, as it seems to me, have an equally mobilizing effect.

(Preface to Luiza Margan's exhibition *Compositions in Walking*, Akatrax Gallery, Ljubljana, 2012)

Translation: Andy Jelčić

4. Tactical, Sovereign and Other Media



Barging into the Collective Body of Images

The wish to live, to live differently from the way we are forced to live in our everyday existence, to discover different kinds of wishes, is one of the more elegant definitions of art that exists on the margins of politics. The Italian artist, writer and videographer Agnese Trocchi in the MaMa net.culture club, Zagreb, presented one of such possible alternative worlds to us. She acquainted us with the activities of the so-called autonomous group Candida TV. This audio-visual underground culture group modeled its programme along the lines of creative unveiling of the malignant manipulative power-holder: television.

An important aspect of an independent television's activity is the reversal of roles, turning spectators into creators, a reverse engineering. As an answer to Berlusconi's media empire, underground culture activities are intensifying in Italy. Wishing to directly intervene into media space using the Do-It-Yourself principle, Candida TV was established and it started to broadcast in some city districts...

Trocchi: As a group working on the production of independent video concepts, Candida TV was founded in 1999. It was based on different experiences: street performances, independent radio stations, occupied social centers or some other revolutionary activities. Working together at the underground film festival in 1999, we came to the conclusion that the moment for taking part in the TV programme was favorable. At the local TV-station in Rome, they asked us whether we had any material that could be broadcast. We decided to accept a contract according to which our

material will be broadcast within the local programme, for nine subsequent weeks, an hour a week. We called our programme Candida show, wishing it to be more pop than the pop ones. It is actually about some kind of supremacy of pop culture, intensifying the language of television to the maximum, so that we could take it to its limits.

On the Internet site titled Subsol – conceived by the philosopher and theoretician of new media Joanne Richardson in order to explore new forms of cultural activity, usually linked with concepts of artistic activism and tactical media – there is also a link to the site of the Italian group Candida TV...

Trocchi: The usage of tactical media means the usage of the already existing instruments in order to send messages or achieve goals different from the ones the medium itself is used for. We do not use the medium, we are the medium. Candida identifies with the instrument itself, we are television and we circulate messages that disturb and change the spectators' usual perspective. In this way we stimulate criticism, we create visions of multiplied reality. Our programme is: make your own television! to have the experience of communication, but on the underground level, directly, socially. We create events in the streets and the videos, short films etc. are based upon them... We go into the streets and create television, we invent happenings in which superheroes interact with passers-by.

A Vision of possible Words

When we speak about activist work, it is usually associated with the need for depicting reality as faithfully as possible. But in the Candida programme, instead of stressing verisimilitude, the word is: reality fiction

Trocchi: Our production from 2002, called Super Video >>> G8, (the well-known Genoa conference) is a reality fiction; our



“How to build your own antenna”
Hackmeetingo4. Candida TV interview
LOA, Turin, June 2003.



December 2003, Geneva “Wsis? We
seize!” event about the World Society
Information Summit. Candida TV
with different mediactivists all over
the world setting up a video stream
called “Highnoon”.
<http://www.geneva03.org>

intention is to show possible ways of narrating reality. While documentary films want to display reality as it is, we know that everything that is videotaped manipulates reality, this is why we rather choose to tell stories, create fiction and construct our own visions of reality. Our intention is to open the door to everybody, so that everyone might be able to broadcast his own, multiplied visions of reality. This is the only way to surround a void, which is the essence of things. So, reality and fiction are two elements interwoven in our visual productions, creating visions of possible worlds.

The Candida TV programme also included the interview with Ricardo Dominguez, a representative of the famous American activist group Electronic Disturbance Theatre. The activity of this group is directed exclusively at the World Wide Web, hacker performances like the Floodnet, electronic floods that cause sudden server overload while browsing the pages of big world banks or multinational corporations.

Trocchi: Meeting Electronic Disturbance Theatre was very important for us, because it clarified certain elements of our own work. We edited the interview with Dominguez with the street ac-

tions scenes from previous years: they are as screenplays, which use the city as a theatre. When power suddenly walks on stage it shows itself for what it really is. So we create a fiction, which incorporates different forms of power and makes them visible. Electronic Disturbance Theatre has given us elements to analyse our own work.

One of the procedures in the Candida TV programme is base on the practice of “reverse engineering”: the way of using a tool is reversed. An important aspect in the activities of independent television is reversing the roles, turning spectators into creators with the intention to radically remould the perception of media, which means eliminating the prejudices about its non-interchangeability. Instead of one-way communication, from one to many, Candida stresses the communication going from many to many.

Trocchi: I would like to point out the importance of laboratories for alphabetisation in audio-visual language, especially among young people from the suburbs. We play the game of television; it descends from its throne to the streets, where it came from, because if television killed the streets, we return it to the site of the crime. For a few months, we have been doing workshops about the use of: TV cameras, editing software... Together with those young people, we tried to imagine what their television might be like. During that game we learned to deconstruct the language of television and construct a new one – our own language.

With the Telestreet network and the Guerrilla Marketing crew the Sky project was carried out in 2002: a football match between Roma and Lazio telecast by the Sky Channel was stolen and brought back to the people by means of street television. This was actually a Robin Hood style action, because something shut off and inaccessible was taken and made available to the masses – because football is absolutely a public matter. At the same time, this gave us a chance to access the collective body of images, because everyone watches sports and street television spots were inserted in the half time break.

Manipulation as Creation

Inheriting avant-garde strategies, the group around Candida has put together a manifesto of battle cries under the title Swarm declaration: TELEVISION IS A WEAPON. THE SCREEN REALITY MUST BE SQUATTED. WEAPONS ARE IN OUR HANDS, BEWARE! IF THERE IS A BIG BROTHER, CANDIDA IS ITS LITTLE SISTER...

Trocchi: That declaration was written in 1999 as a playful, provocative manifesto. It is about very broad and very underground cultural production, independent press and radio...which together with Candida try to penetrate into mainstream media space. This is a programmatic declaration bringing into doubt everything, which is coming from the media, everything people believed in.

Considering Candida's performances regarding the exposure of the media manipulation strategies in the first place, it is impossible not to notice the connection with last century's avant-garde movements like dada or surrealism. In spite of the clearly expressed critical engagement, Candida skillfully evades socialist-realistic dogmatism, charmingly uncovering the political reality by nonsensical humour.

Trocchi: In Barcelona, at the CopyLeft conference (April 2004), we discussed what audio-visual language represented for us. We said we considered it something that manipulates reality. The language of television is especially manipulative. Because of that, we decided to manipulate reality in our own way, to create our own reality without any shame. That evening I talked to a Conference participant, who enthusiastically followed our presentation, especially the discourse on manipulation. She remarked: "If you manipulate with very clear intentions, with a certain amount of humour and without a final goal, that procedure does not belong into the realm of manipulation anymore, it becomes creation, it is art."

(Broadcasted in the *Triptych* programme of the Third Channel of Croatian Radio, July 6, 2004, published in Zarez VI/ 134-135, 2004 and in the online magazine Art-e-Fact, no. 3, 2004)

Translation: Susan Jakopce

Cosmic Techno-Snake

Whereas techno-aesthetics of avant-garde glorified utopian vision of progress of the new industrial society, techno-aesthetics of neo-avant-garde was created in laboratory conditions, aiming to achieve a synthesis of science and art. Now techno-aesthetics does not only imply an exclusive, autonomous contemplation in the spheres of “high” art, but in its desire to achieve a healing quality of ecstasy the approach to technology is again and again carried out by means of popular culture.¹

Modern ways of surviving in the post-industrial age have created an atmosphere of fragmented views. An ability to note the connection between cause and effect have become an unnecessary effort, which one can easily abandon by pleasant indulgence in the shift of rapid sensations. It seems as though an authentic grip of reality, as well as of spirituality, is no longer possible in the media-contaminated world. Only few people, those who do not recoil from the use of technology but at the same time do not wish to glorify it, still believe in intuitive spiritual shifts that should happen parallelly with its development, and help us to survive.

The mythological name of the ambiance **Ananta**² refers to a cosmic snake that bites its own tail and squirts its poison into it, taking a strong hold of the base of the world. This base, or the centre, is the idea of the absolute, which is all and/or nothing. It is emptiness, a hole in its literal, architectural meaning, or,

1 Miško Šuvaković, “Tehnoestetika i tehnoumjetnost” [Techno-aesthetics and techno-art], Arkzin, No. 91

2 J. Chevalier, A. Gheerbrant, *Rječnik simbola* [Dictionary of Symbols], Nakladni zavod MH, Zagreb, 1983



Martina Mezak, *Ananta*, 2004, exhibition view.
Photo: Martina Mezak. Courtesy the artist.

symbolically, an invisible concentration of energy. By going the rounds this symbolical body of snake-time grows spirally with its material dialectics of life and death, creation of time out of itself. In part Martina Mezak's techno-spiritual ambiance is *site-specific* for it includes the spatial, architectural structure. It is also a scenography for some happening deprived of action, that is, a symbolical indication of an invisible continuous happening we do not even think about, buried in our microcosms. In an effort to achieve a complete spiritual experience, a particular importance is attached to the audio aspect of the installation.³ Goa-trance, one of many sub-categories of techno music, with its double frequencies of *alpha* and *theta* waves and their different vibrations

3 Ibidem. It refers to Indian mythologies where sound, under the influence of rhythmical vibrations on the sense of hearing, represents the source of the cosmos. Cognition thus manifests itself not as seeing but as hearing perception (auricular light).

affects the human brain. The rapid rhythm of *alpha* waves backs up ecstasy, while melodies of *theta* waves trigger off unconscious processes. Synthetic electronic sounds are mixed with the traditional sound of Australian *didgeridoo*, which has always operated on the same principle – high speed of *alpha* waves are combined with low-pitched sound. “Both evoke profound emotions and make us aware of humanity; the difference is that electronic music achieves it through programming and computer use, while didgeridoo operates in a primordial way and on the level of collective consciousness.” (Martina Mezak) While we are making our way in the dark of a giant fluorescent spiral, electronically generated music wraps up the circular flow of water and thus emphasizes the metaphor of continuous circular duration.

A grotesque mode is employed by most young artists to the contaminated environment that we are forced to live in, with all the consequences of dissemination of the virus of global culture. Parallely, alternative styles of all sorts with their specific cultures spring up offering new methods of living. Hippies never died out, they just turned into zippies.⁴ Modern “alternative lifestyles people”, prone to compiling all sorts of spiritual knowledge, believe in energy that is not only a starter of technological but also of human progress, if we accept the fact that we are its batteries, conductors and emitters.

(Published in the exhibition catalogue *Martina Mezak: Ananta*, Extended Media Gallery, Croatian Association of Artists /HDLU, 2004)

Translation: Miroslav Kirin

4 Jules Marshall, *There is no wrong reason to be a zippie*, <http://www.arkzin.com/ctheory/75.html> But one name stands out, maybe because it was designed to. And for the moment it's sticking: zippies. It stands for Zen-Inspired Professional Pagans, according to 50-year-old Fraser Clark, shamanic zippie spokesperson, club manager and editor of Encyclopedia Psychedelica (EPi), the magazine that first identified the “hippies with zip.” According to EPi, a zippie is “someone who has balanced their hemispheres to achieve a fusion of the technological and the spiritual. The techno-person understands that rationality, organization, long-term planning, consistency and single-mindedness are necessary to achieve anything solid on the material level. The hippie understands that vision, individuality, spontaneity, flexibility and open-mindedness are crucial to realize anything on the spiritual scale.”

The Obstacle

The attempts to define a confusing boundary that divides art and life have always invoked gestures that would push that boundary to its very end, almost erasing it. With the breakthrough of object art the space of the gallery ceased to be a neutral shell, which, according to Brian O' Doherty,¹ makes the history of the gallery as important as the artworks displayed in it. By following changes in contemporary art, the space of the Extended Media Gallery (EMG) has become well-recognized for its use of gallery space as gesture, its transformation into an empty stage, ready for the event of body and gaze in the space. Vesna Pokas held her first symptomatic installation titled *Sceno-graphy of Gaze* (1986)² at EMG at the time EMG was on Starčević Square and had a classic "white cube" shape. To phenomenologically experience the presence of gaze and body, her installations become increasingly reduced and in space she sets up fragile but efficacious obstacles. By establishing geometric relations she suggests movements that radically deny logocentric gaze, and the body is obliged to move around cautiously, thus abolishing a view from a static perspective. One of the artist's latest gestures was walling-in of the space and creating a "screen" with a dynamic light show. The content of the artwork has really become *imago*, a mirage-like experience, conditioned by abolished movement, complete immobility of the

- 1 See the collection of essays *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, University California Press, 2002
- 2 Leonida Kovač, "Vesna Pokas: Instalacije, 1986-1992", Kolo 5-6, Matica Hrvatska Zagreb, p. 545

body and focus on the gaze. This was preceded by the installation on the island of Lokrum, near Dubrovnik, where she obstructed walking up and down the stairs with a mirror, thus creating an illusion that merged with the landscape. On the other hand, radical blocking of the body with an obstacle in the liveliest part of the city of Poreč conditioned the search for an alternative way out, for new openings and therefore discovering other walks out of the usual and well-trodden tourist route. In the artist's vocabulary, the obstacle has two meanings – on the one hand, it enstranges immobility and ecstasy of the gaze in which the material world is transformed into a fantastic ethereal imago and, on the other hand, it invokes action, the body's participation in discovering and removing obstacles created by passivizing representation of the world as image. Two squares at the ends of Rigo Gallery were linked with thin, almost invisible threads, thereby closing their own space of communication. To get in between them would mean to transgress, and transgression sometimes equals danger.

In EMG the metal, pointed bar itself suggests some danger. Placed in the middle of its empty space, it delineates the circumference of the gallery with the gesture of a pair of compasses on a piece of paper. The mechanical rotation is accompanied by the raw sound of an engine. In this context, the perfect, circular shape of the gallery represents a neutral, sheltered and timeless place – an alchemical medium wherein a transformation takes place.³ The metal object looks like a watch-hand which intervenes into a perfect circle of cyclic rotation. The speed of rotation defines the visitor's advancement through the gallery and the advancement further affects the gaze which can only partially encompass the space. The visit to the gallery with a mobile, pointed metal bar calls for a focused, close attention. In the space with the body being adjusted to the mobile object one can almost sense the continuity of time; the body is immersed into

3 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthoods", *Artforum*, June 1967



Vesna Pokas, *Installation*, 2005, exhibition view. Photo: Boris Cvjetanović.
 Courtesy: Galerija proširenih medija (Extended Media Gallery), HDLU Zagreb.

the sensation of time that comes and goes away, approaches and vanishes.⁴ The moment of the body's self-awareness, established by the very presence of the object, is itself an event which theoretician Michael Fried almost religiously describes as – grace.⁵ The size of this theatre-like swing-gate dominates the space and therefore conditions distance, not only in its physical but also its psychological sense. The distance produces roles, as in theatre. However, the event of immediate presence obstructs the logic of theatre in whose centre is the object, not a viewer; the whole situation belongs to the viewer who is forced to adjust to this situation and establish his/her own situation. The viewer has to attentively control the situation because by imposing a physical obstacle in the space of the gallery the metal bar now becomes an upsetting experience. The routine visit to the gallery has been

4 Michael Fried, *ibid.*

5 *Ibid.* and Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, p. 52

R A D M I L A I V A J A N K O V I Ć

disturbed. There is no usual passing round the gallery or going around the objects on the wall or on the floor. There, where the gaze usually glides along the walls of the interior ring, now glides a strange body, a metal bar. The viewer becomes a captive of living art whose transformation takes place because of his/her presence.

(Published in the exhibition catalogue *Vesna Pokas: Installation*,
Extended Media Gallery, Croatian Association of Artists /HDLU, 2005)

Translation: Miroslav Kirin

Inside / Out

We are already used to interactions of virtual images and reality, as well as fencing the world in a representational apparatus. This usually takes the form of a “logical” screen frame, in order to provide the spectator with the best viewpoint, which assumes his immobility. In his papers devoted to the screen, the theoretician of the new media, Lev Manovich, points specifically to the principles of the screen’s presence in relation to the spectator’s body. Manovich compares representation, in traditional and modern media alike, to striptease in which space slowly divests itself “turning and showing itself from different sides, stepping forward and withdrawing...”. The principle of screen image has always been the same, from the Renaissance to the era of cinematography and even virtual reality, in spite of the fact that in the latter case the screen came radically close to the body.¹

At his exhibition in the cellar of Klovićevi dvori gallery in 2001, by interconnecting high and low technology, Ivan Marušić Klif invisibly operated the electronic representation. At this exhibition, relying on his knowledge and experience in technology, Klif takes special pleasure in going back, into the past of the media, manipulating just the screen as a basic tool of the media in an unpredictable way. Differently from the usual principle of movable screen and static spectator, Klif creates ambiances where the mobility of the spectator is assumed. Moreover, it is desirable. In his last electronic ambience, everything is mobil-

1 Lev Manovich, “An Archaeology of a Computer Screen”, In: *NewMediaLogia*, Moscow, 1996

ised, because along with the visitor strolling through the gallery, the cameras filming the space and transferring the image to electronic screens are mobile as well. Klif defines the TV screen as a stage, and the gallery as an auditorium. However, that division is fluid, because the image “pours” out, onto the walls of the auditorium / gallery, making the relations complex and creating chaos. When we enter the camera space, we see and know that we are being filmed, but we can not exactly determine from what angle and when we are watched and how many times we are “replicated”, i.e. when we would appear on which screen. As in the last ambience, in Klovićevi dvori, a computer is present again, but this time its function is reduced to the minimum – it serves only to control the movement of video-cameras on mechanical stands. The video is completely analogous here: the camera is directly connected to the TV and/or the projector.

Klif does not belong to the group of media artists who work on technological innovation in order to create conditions which would enable surprising deviations from the mainstream media. By interconnecting highly sophisticated and low technology, he playfully and intuitively manipulates the tool of media representation. Rather than striving forward, he goes back to the early era of video art, based on analogous technology, spontaneously proving the thesis of the French sociologist Bruno Latour that technology can devise nothing radically new, because old forms of representation are just transformed into a new format.

A surplus of images contributes to disintegration of undivided space and radical discarding of Descartes’ illusion of homogeneous space.² The realities of physical space and the virtual one exist simultaneously; in the space dismantled by screens, we exist in both at the same time. However, the result is not schizophrenia, but pleasant feeling. The dimension of being unrepeat-

2 Marina Gržinić, “Virtualna realnost i odnos prema tijelu, pogledu i gledatelju/publici” [Virtual Reality and the Relation to the Body View and the Spectator]. In: *U redu za virtualni kruh* [In the line for virtual bread], Meandar, Zagreb, 1998, pp. 108-120.



Ivan Marušić Klif, *Inside / Out*, 2005, exhibition view.
Photo: Ozren Drobnjak. Courtesy the artist.

able, mostly governed by chance principle, as well as the sensation of freedom created by his electronic ambiances, puts Klif in a rare context within the framework of the media art. It is in the line of the group of sovereign media, described by the media theoretician Geert Lovink and the philosopher Joanne Richardson as new and still undefined.³ Other than Indy and tactical media, which appeared during the 80ies and 90ies, as well as the initial phase of media art in the 60ies and the 70ies, sovereign media do not take a critical attitude towards the environment overloaded with data, but simply consider it a material to be used freely. This was especially expressed in Klif's musical performance for the exhibition *Here Tomorrow* in 2002, named *I Am DJ I AM What I Play*.

Free from financial motivation, sovereign media draw their material for fertile chaos from information waste, without a de-

³ Geert Lovink & Joanne Richardson, "Notes on sovereign media", www.subsol.cu3

finer goal. What they communicate is not information. In Klif's case, it is mostly about care-free handling of the universal archive medium or, in other cases, creating pre-conditions for pleasant dwelling in electronic landscapes, liberated from set definitions or any other obsessive categories. Klif works outside the criteria of old and new, often outside ideological criteria.

If we accept the existence of the sovereign media category, we accept a fact which is not about phenomenological purification of the language characteristic of the "medium as such" or some conceptual project, but it is simply an aesthetic search: self-sufficient, self-centered, ecstatic and free. As a media opposition based on radical criticism of the capitalist artistic production, sovereign media cut down all the dated sets of images linked to truth, reality and representation.⁴ Emancipating from any kind of commercialization, say Lovink and Richardson, they offer the deserved royal space to the public.

(Published in the exhibition catalogue *Ivan Marušić Klif: Inside /Out*, Extended Media Gallery, Croatian Association of Artists /HDLU, 2005)

Translation: Andy Jelčić

4 Ibid.

Electronic Palimpsest

During the exhibition *Device Art*, Ivan Marušić Klif put on the performance *Synchronicity* in the premises of Zagreb's Glyptothèque. The artist was divorced from the audience, yet what happened in the space he was in could be followed at the same time on the external wall of the gallery, transmitted electronically by video cameras and microphones. Klif produced these visual effects with "primitive" technology: ordinary light bulbs, an old record player, speakers, a dictaphone, the tools that in fact he commonly uses in his effective multi-media inventions.

From the room inhabited by the artist, four cameras transmitted four different views of the same time and space. Each view was different, the same scene being shot from different viewpoints. The artist himself had no idea about what precisely the audience could see outside. Trying to guess, he occasionally adjusted his actions to the camera eye. The computer countdown makes the time for which the duration of the performance was organised seem almost palpable.

The fragmented images and sounds at the origins of which we can make a guess, though not with any complete certainty, create a suggestion of peeping through the keyhole of an artist's studio in which the process of creation is taking place. In this case the artist's working material is sound that, like the pictures, is synchronously transmitted beyond the walls of the gallery.

The performance *Synchronicity* is almost diametrically the opposite of Klif's electronic happenings to date, in which the artist would wilfully vanish, leaving the visitors the narcissistic pleasure of enjoying the spectacle of themselves produced by the cameras

and computer sensors on the premises. Now there is an absence of spectacle, and without any over-the-top, interventions Klif is affording a view of the process of improvisation and creation. The parameters are set indeed, but nothing is defined in advance. The artist dances, adjusts his speakers, his old record player, turns on a dictaphone although he does not know what has been recorded on it, is ruffled when he realises that he doesn't want the audience to hear it, feels awkward. From time to time he likes what he is doing, dances to the rhythm of the faulty record, produces dramatic and almost unbearable feedback with the microphone, or just unusual sounds created by putting things to hand on the record as it turns.

The whole process, in real time, without any later interventions into the temporal flow of the video, is recorded on DVD. As well as constituting an integral document of the performance, the DVD is an independent interactive work in which once again, but now in a different manner, the issue of synchronicity is put into effect. This time with the overlapping of the four original shots of the same space and time, shot from four different points of view, in a single static image. Via the remote control, the observers can change and combine the channels, the sound, video, and the text in which the author subsequently attempts to reconstruct what was actually going on.

What is being created? Why the apriori imperative for the documentation of something that happens with an uncertain outcome? Why the presentation of synchronicity with the transparent overlaying of images of the same space and time, recorded from various different points in that space?

The process of transferring documentation into another medium, supplemented with authorial comments, is somewhat like an electronic palimpsest, something that is written on top of the original. The text super-imposed in the second layer attempts to explain the event in the first, through spacial, rather than temporal, juxtaposition. Some of the parts are still empty, without any signs for decoding, without explanation, but they are not a whit the less important.



Ivan Marušić Klif, *Synchronicity*, video stills from multichannel media performance. Courtesy the artist.

I believe in the idea of spontaneity, improvisation, chance. Above all, I believe in synchronicity. Writing about this work of Klif's overlapped with the reading of a text "Palimpsest"¹ in which Hakym Bey elaborates a proposal for the need for the elimination and realisation of art, standing up for the rejection of the thirst for spectacle and the transfer of art to the level of everyday life (i.e. life instead of spectacle), as passionately argued in the last century in a never completed project by the artists of Dada, Situationism and Fluxus.

Instead of a spectacle ready to be consumed, Klif provides us with a look into the process, mechanically recorded by cameras in the area, with all their hesitations and empty running. The creation of a multi-layered electronic palimpsest is revealed as an idea with two very contradictory and confusing sides. On the one

1 Libra Libera, no. 8, 2001 (A Journal of Literature)

hand is the romantic image of the artist as bard, whom we follow, as far as the cameras permit it, in the process of creating a sound sculpture. On the other hand the author's need to do away with this romanticist image is discerned, through deconstruction, which the author deliberately produces in order to lay bare and reveal the actions and states through which he is going, giving the observers, finally, the option to share in the action, when with the remote-control in their hand they can recreate the event, select, play with it. The function of the bard and the process of abolition of this function are fulfilled with the same utopian purpose of integration, necessary to bridge the gap of isolation and alienation of the artist who wants to show that he is "not a special person, but instead every person is a special sort of artist".

What emanates the anxiety and creates the tension stems from the fact that every post-avant-garde gesture is usually swamped in the sea of utopia. Everything inevitably takes place within the art institution. Art of improvising, chance and finally of being, raised to the level of event that surpasses the understanding of art as commodity fetish, does at the end nevertheless become just this. Klif knows it, and instead of the gift-wrapped spectacle, consciously offers by way of compromise, as artefact, this unusual electronic palimpsest of synchronous images, some of which, created as random camera frames, curiously prove to be aesthetically poignant enough.

"Galleries thrive (or at least survive) on nihilism, which only irony can keep in check, and which without it would corrode and bring down the walls of museums," writes Hakym Bey, and ends his essay with the words: "Well, fuck irony. We can only hope that every compromise is the last."

(Published in the exhibition catalogue *Ivan Marušić Klif: Synchronicity, multichannel media performance*, Dante – Marino Cettina Gallery, Umag, 2006)

Translation: Graham McMaster

The Archive as a Medium

Darko Fritz: *Emerging Archives (projects 1987-2007)*,
Home of HDLU (Croatian Association of Artists),
Zagreb, 2007

It is not unusual for an artist in his prime of creativity to organize a retrospective for himself – without the intervention or mentoring of a curator. When the artist in question happens to be Darko Fritz, such an initiative is far from unusual, for two reasons. The first is the fact that the phenomenon of archive has been a vital part of his artistic work, not only as art documentation, but also in the context of creative processes, in his fascination with transposition from one medium into another, one space into another. The second reason is his rich curatorial experience: a number of concept-based exhibitions dedicated to media artists of his own generation, as well as his systematic research on the archaeology of the new media, which has been crowned this year with a major exhibition on *bit international – [New] Tendencies – Computer and Visual Research*, organized at the 'Neue Galerie' of Landesmuseum Joanneum in Graz. Living between Amsterdam and Zagreb, Darko Fritz has also been participating in very prominent media networks, such as Syndicate, Spectre, or Nettime. Finally, he has made a rare attempt, although not as an art historian, at defining media art in Croatia, looking for its manifestations in all those phenomena where he has observed a conscious manipulation of the media – beginning with simple reproductive Xerox techniques, often applied in the early practices of conceptual artists, to complex interactive and multimedia achievements.

In the exhibition at the HDLU Centre, twelve projections in a row have filled, in a dense rhythm, the entire volume of this ring-shaped venue. It is not merely an action intended to pre-

sent the past work, since the artworks performed in a particular space and time, and presented in a documentary form, can also be considered – art. The question why we experience it that way, or rather, why documentation can function as an artwork rather than its substitute, has been answered in an intriguing way by Boris Groys in his essay “Art in the Age of Biopolitics”, where he inevitably referred to Walter Benjamin, as has always been the case when discussing the relationship between the original and its copy, or the transposition of an original into a different form. The emphasis is therefore not, or at least not only, on offering a retrospective of one’s own work, but also on investigating the possibilities of using archival instruments (audio-visual media) artistically, and “pure information” as a “form of art”.

The *Cathedral* project, in which Fritz participated as part of a group of artists and musicians, outlined to some extent his future orientation. This complex multimedia project was installed at the Gallery of Extended Media in 1988 as a specific Gesamtkunstwerk with reminiscences to the ideas of three artists (Mus-sorgsky, Kandinsky, and Beuys). It not only combined various visual, audial, and tactile sensations, but also dislocated images by moving them from one space to another, while sounds were produced in real time, in interaction with the visitors, tracking their actual presence while moving through space.

This accent on dislocation, in terms of dissolving the gallery space into one of the media, was also the main subject of Fritz’s next work called *Theatre Time* (1994), in which the cliché of exhibition openings with speeches was transposed from the television studio into the gallery. Shifting information through space, time, and the medium gradually became the basis of Fritz’s various projects, such as those in which he used the unconventional medium of telefax messages, sent more or less successfully to various art institutions, which served at the same time as typographic images. *End of the Message* was the title of a major project in which Fritz probably expressed more radically than anywhere else his poetics based on the archive, producing in seven stages an art-



Darko Fritz, *Emerging Archives (projects 1987–2007)*, 2007.
Photo: Boris Cvjetanović. Courtesy the artist and Croatian
Association of Artists, Zagreb

work that extended through a period of five years in various times and spaces. The first stage took place in the Dutch town of Enschede, within the international project *From Miracle Room to Cyberspace*, where Fritz exhibited, at the end of the 20th century, masterpieces from the holdings of Rijksmuseum belonging to the respective ends of the four previous centuries. Besides this selection of artworks characteristic for the end of a century, there were three-meter long telefaxes “streaming out”, sent from another place, with messages that questioned the value of the exhibited originals and eventually decided that the message was over: “Value on, No value, End of the Message.” Focus on the actual happening was ensured by means of surveillance, with the help of security cameras that are used to monitor the museum, while a Mannerist convex mirror on the ceiling represented the idea of heterotropic multiplications: challenging the place where we actually are in order to see ourselves over there, with the reverse

effect of becoming aware of that place. I am emphasizing this very aspect of Fritz's work because it communicates his preoccupation with various archiving models: video-stills that condense the actual time of the event, photographs – portraits of visitors who came too close to the surveillance camera while observing the artworks, the recorded sounds... These fragments of individual stages would later be exhibited again in different places, not only in the context of art institutions, but also at conferences or techno-parties. In an artwork where form had become content, one read messages on how the originals no longer possessed any value, while the reality was subject to multiplications, true and false at the same time, transferrable to an unlimited number of possible places. Creating a bridge between virtual and real spaces while shifting and merging different realities was also the topic of a project called *space is space*, which used the technique of “close circuit” transfer in order to blur the edges of architectural space and create virtual gaps. Very simple procedures of real-time projection were used – for example, projecting windows into a niche of a baroque chapel in the Czech Republic, transposing the surrounding landscape onto the façade of Le Corbusier's L'Esprit Nouveau building, or transferring a busy city square into a clock without arms and at the same time into an empty Renaissance building – a gallery featuring in the project called *Zadar Live: Close_circuit_city*. Fritz's verbal artworks – words-images from the “Internet Error Message” series – likewise use displacement, this time from the virtual environment of computers into the real one, as well as its mediated contextualization. The visually attractive installation called *204_No_Content* – 31 meters long and made out of 2220 cacti – has been set up recently in the desert landscape of Fuerteventura, a volcanic island in Spain.

Coming back to the topic of archive as the final domicile of Fritz's projects: carefully constructed, they are hybrid in nature, a mixture of documentary film, art documentation, video art, and cinematic animation. Their actual purpose and meaning is not to merely reproduce the past projects, but to reconstruct the

context in which they were created. By introducing textual narration and the voice of a professional speaker, by comprising, slowing down, or accelerating time by means of montage, the artist reveals things that would remain imperceptible in direct visual presentation. In view of Benjamin's hypothesis on the triumph of technological reproduction over real life, the issue of abolishing the material difference between the copy and the original seems to become topical again. The premise of the loss of aura in mechanical reproduction is usually accepted without further reflection, even though this obscures an extraordinary potential for fresh speculation – for the distinction between the original work of art and its copy makes it possible not only to produce copies from the original, but also to use a copy to create an original work of art by reconstructing the context in which the latter has been created. This is what Darko Fritz, an artist who knows and handles media art in its very essence, has been doing successfully and inventively for the past twenty years.

(Broadcasted in the *Triptych* programme of the Third Channel of Croatian Radio, October 23, 2007)

Translation: Marina Miladinov



5. The Transparency of Impermeability



Emptiness and Substitutes

Interview with Zoe Leonard on the occasion
of her exhibition at Dante – Marino
Cettina Gallery, Umag, 1997

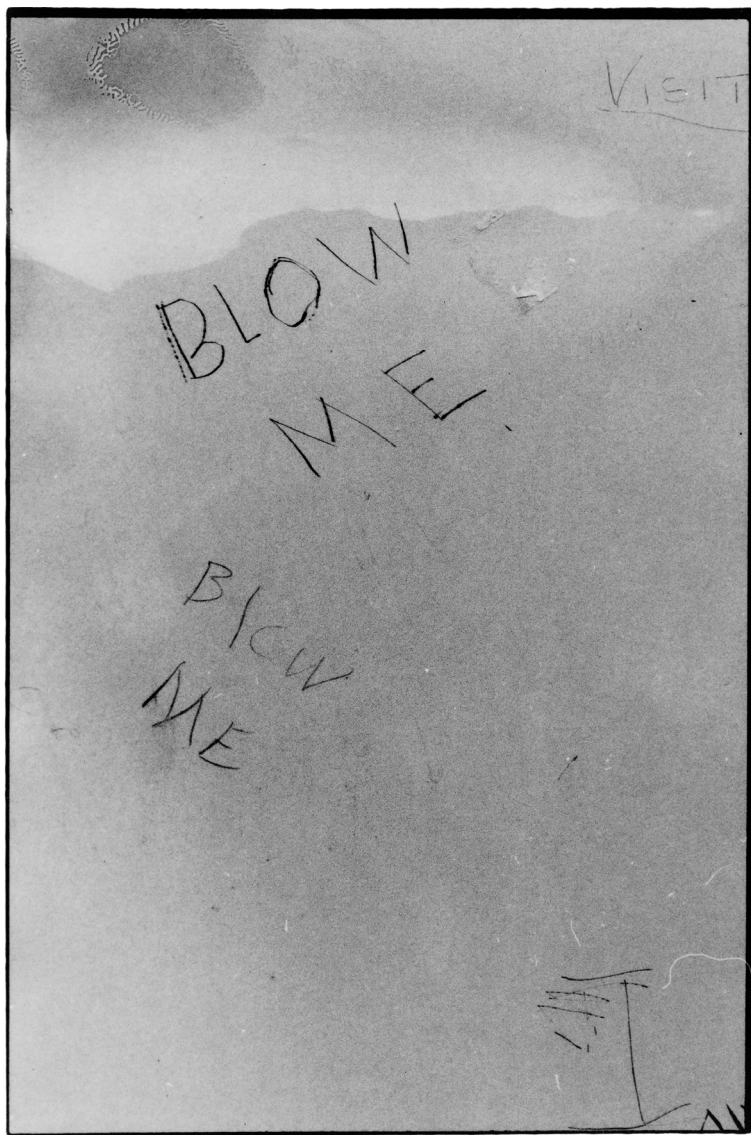
Owing to a collaboration between gallerist Marino Cettina and the prominent New York gallery Paula Cooper, Umag has had the opportunity to host the exhibitions of Robert Gober and Jack Pierson, and during the summer months also the increasingly popular photographer Zoe Leonard. The thirty-five year old artist has attracted attention at Kassel's *Documenta* two years ago with a direct intervention in the permanent exhibition of Neue Galerie. Between the salon-type portraits of gracious distinguished ladies, against the background of wallpapers in tender pastel colours with flower patterns, Zoe Leonard inserted contrasting black-and-white close-up photographs of vaginas. In the early 1990s, focusing on the position of women and female sexuality, she produced a photo-series on Jennifer Miller, a bearded woman who owned a circus, which was preceded by shots of an anonymous female bearded torso discovered in under a bell jar in a corner of a medical museum. This year, at the Whitney Biennial, she presented a series of photographs simulating the biography of Fae Richard, a fictional African American actress, lesbian, and singer from the beginning of the 20th century. Most of the artworks exhibited at the Umag gallery, however, do not speak directly of sexual or racial discrimination, but rather point to the traces of silenced communication in an associative and poetical way.

Photographs that you have presented at Umag, compared with the previous ones, show a complete lack of aggression. Is that a turn or a change of strategy in your work?

— I mostly work very slowly and I never follow a predefined path. I think that the photographs exhibited here, although silent and nostalgic, have an equally powerful impact. To scream is one form of communication; another is to whisper. These photographs are more contemplative. Perhaps they indicate a new, quieter, phase – learning how to listen. Earlier I often used to think of the viewer and made conscious decisions about how the work would be received. That was the case with the series on Jennifer Miller, the bearded woman, as well as the photographs for *Documenta* in Kassel or the Fae Richards Photo Archive at the Whitney Biennial, when I really had the audience in mind. Parallel to that, I also work on photographs for myself, following my own thinking process, my own curiosity, without a particular strategy. That is why the titles of my photographs often have two dates: the first is when the photo was taken and the second when I printed the edition. Even though some of them were shot ten years ago, I just printed them recently, and consider them recent work.

It is impossible to avoid the question about the series created during your last year's stay in Alaska. There motifs appear that could be classified as classical, such as trees in a landscape or fruit in a still life.

— I've thought a lot about metaphors and the historical references of fruit in the still life: the connection between their symbolism and sex, reproduction, beauty, sexuality, health. Over the last few years I made a work consisting of around three hundred peels of oranges, bananas, and other fruits I had at hand, stitched together. These small sculptures speak about death, human fragility, and the desire to make things whole again. In some ways, the making of that work was an act of mourning my friends who had died of AIDS. Sculptures of trees made of trees came about



Zoe Leonard, *Blow Me*, 1994, gelatin silver print, 17.8 x 12.7 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth Gallery.

in a similar way. I collected dry leaves from Europe, Alaska, and New York. I dried them in order to preserve the colours, immersed them in wax, and hung them on a tree with pegs. A tree is a powerful image. It can mean lots of things: heaven and earth, stability, home, shelter, wood, fire, beauty, food, fruit.

Your most recent series of photographs contains many melancholic objects, mute witnesses of absence, such as clothes in display windows, on drying racks, as fetish symbols, clothes of Ginger and Fred, as substitutes for memory. Often there are mannequins, one of your favourite motifs...

— These are all some sort of substitute. An object that serves as a stand-in for something else. For example the mannequins and dolls, such as the *Male Fashion Doll*. It has the same face and small pink body of a “female” doll, but also has a thin moustache drawn on and is labelled a “male fashion doll”, which made me think of the bizarreness of how we construct or define gender.

One can see relatively few portraits or group photographs of people, and when they occur, they seem as if they had been taken from an ambush...

— Much of my recent work speaks of distance between people, of the wish to be close to one another, a desire to be intimate, which we rarely succeed in doing. It suggests how much we miss each other; speaks of hidden signs and traces of our lives. Moments that is difficult to describe or understand. It is not the moment of interaction, but the time before or after the interaction the traces that remain: dirty laundry, clean laundry, scars on the body, words written anonymously on a wall. There is no logical thread or theoretical line that gather these photographs together, but rather something more like a stream of consciousness. Clothes on the line, a scar, the back of someone’s head, all that is somehow interrelated in my consciousness, but in a way that is internal, or personal.

Photographs have an autobiographic character?

— Yes, but never directly. It is not like for instance Nan Goldin's work, which is almost diaristic. I am trying to *capture* intimate moments, but in an indirect way. The work speaks of love but also of absence, loss, emptiness, and substitutes. Of things that should be spoken, but are not. The photographs are imperfect and that's one part of it: one sees the traces of dust that remained on the negative, things are in half-light and revealed only by looking slowly. There is a story, but all that is seen are fragments. They are not abstract, they are narrative, but the story is incomplete and fragmented.

(Published in *Vijenac* 95/5, 1997)

Translation: Marina Miladinov

The Transparency of Impermeability

Exhibition *Lokrum, December 2000 – April 2004*
of photographs by Antun Maračić, Sebastijan Gallery,
Dubrovnik, 2004

At Dubrovnik's Sebastijan Gallery, Antun Maračić has presented a series of photographs showing a single motif viewed from an unchangeable angle. In the centre of our field of vision, there is the small island of Lokrum. Maračić has been shooting these photographs since 2000, when he became the director of Art Gallery Dubrovnik.

Time appeared as the central subject matter of his art as early as the mid-1970s, when he started taking self-portraits every single morning, at 8:00 a.m.

For his series *May 1977 – November 1979*, he shot photographs of himself for one year and a half, in longer time spans, documenting changes in his face – the growth of his hair and beard. In the 1970s and 1980s, such documentation of the passing of time was a full-fledged and legitimate concept, which many artists discovered while shaking off the yoke of tradition. New fields of thematic interest, which relied on impressionist postulates, were opened by the very technology of photography: its instrumentalized and mechanized processuality. "The innovation of impressionist painting." Dimitrije Bašičević noted in his text on the "Consequences of Photography", published in the exhibition catalogue *Innovations in Croatian Art during the 1970s*, "was in its programme. The programme of impressionist painting consisted in not painting the painting, but rather in painting the light, and the painter's paint was not only a question of experience, but of the light spectrum. This painting programme and the method of spectral analysis led to a change in the symbolic,



Wednesday, 2/5/2001, 19:25 h; 8/30; ceremony of sky immersed in the sea making a light silence. With a violet horizon. Miracle of clearness.

Antun Maračić, *Lokrum*, December 2000 – April 2004, color photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

ideological structure of the painting, while the method of experiential processuality was substituted through that of reflexive processuality, the intellectual approach, processuality as a thinking method; perhaps this intellectual approach did not destroy the emotional one right away; however, it certainly blocked it.”

This focus on the issues of process and memory is also quite evident in Maračić’s later project, *Emptied Frames / Vanished Contents* (1991). There he appropriated some empty wooden frames, which used to contain some bits of data concerning a company that no longer existed – or at least not in that place – by adding a metal plate with his own name and the title saying *An Emptied Frame* or *Vanished Content*, 1991-1994, with the corresponding date. The surface within the frame was only apparently an empty content. The bare wall within the frame evoked some modernist painting variants: monochrome painting or matter painting. However, the crucial aspect in this act of appropriation was the

fact that the frame had changed its function, becoming a “silent indicator or the organic pulsation of the city in time,” as Maračić indicated.

Many years later, when the artist moved to Dubrovnik, he realized that the view from his studio was so different at any given moment that it required fresh attention. It opened towards the high sea and seemed like a postcard. With the time of shooting carefully noted down, these photographs remind of some intimate diary notes rather than a conscious intention of exhibiting them in order to propose a new hypothesis for reflection.

In this series of shots from the same angle, with Lokrum as their motif, and there are hundreds of them, none are quite identical. In his book *La vitesse de liberation*, Virilio divides time, as a form of matter in movement, into the universal, exotic time of light, and the deep, geological time.

When looking at Maračić's photographs, we are constantly facing a paradox. Even though the main motif remains the same, immovable, mute and apparently timeless, what inscribes the category of the passing of time is the quantity of light. Time (duration) and space (extension) cannot be imagined without light. And photography is indeed writing by means of light. On the other hand, being immovable, it resists speed. Owing to its power to bring time to a standstill, to preserve the unrepeatable moment that has passed forever, it is nostalgic in its very nature.

In the Lokrum photographs, the horizon cuts across the materiality of the island. Static and silent like a sea monster, Lokrum halts the gaze, absorbing it. Like the lizard Lucumone, the immovable, bizarre reptile from a story of the same name written by poet Danijel Dragojević, it paralyzes the gaze and turns it back to the earth. But here, Lucumone-Lokrum has been tamed. The feeling of geological time has been defeated by the chronological, exotic time of inscribing light, which incessantly changes the colour of sky and the sea: from azure to aquamarine, from turquoise to the dense, immovable cobalt, and then through the

shades of grey to white, during the fog season, when the island is barely visible or vanishes from the picture altogether.

Condensing time through the medium leads to its deceleration. Duration is fragmented into a series of static frames, and each of them, as Evelina Turković has acutely observed in the catalogue preface, is a frozen frame of time, a perfectly framed scene that allows us to take a long, detailed look at all the things that would normally pass unnoticed.

While taking a long look at Maračić's photographs, we enjoy the halted time in each individual scene, as well as the accelerated, condensed time that we are becoming aware of while comparing the photographs. However, as we romantically dive into the photographic image of the so-called "real world," which the photograph actually keeps at a modest distance, protecting us from the immediate presence of objects, one should not forget Baudrillard's warning: "A photograph is not something real, it is fiction!" What remains from the series of so-called photographic notes are merely romantic, virtual scenes or retro images. Unlike the analytic shots such as Maračić's early self-portraits, the photographs of Lokrum make it impossible to avoid the symbolic stereotypes that we unconsciously employ. "From beyond the sea to beyond the sky, the horizon discloses the transparency of impenetrability," Virilio writes, and this transparent impenetrability creates desire, desire to escape.

(Broadcasted in the *Triptych* programme
of the Third Channel of Croatian Radio, July 13, 2004)

Translation: Marina Miladinov

In the Height of a Child's Eye

"The image is no longer given the time to become an image," this is a sentence which, in its different variations may be found in many forewords, especially those dealing with photography. Let us also quote here the rest of Baudrillard's thought devoted to photography: "To be an image, there has to be a moment of becoming which can only happen when the rowdy proceedings of the world are suspended and dismissed for good. The idea, then, is to replace the triumphant *epiphany* of meaning with a silent *apophany* of objects and their appearances."¹

In the cycle *Child's Perspective* Silvia Potočki elaborates on the paradoxical collision between immobility and movement. In a number of small series, an identical or insignificantly changed point of view is repeating at intervals of one or several steps in the horizontal movement of the lens vertically fixed to the height of a child's gaze.

Though photographs in a temporal sequence always provoke the need to create a narrative horizon, in Potočki's photographs one does not look for it at any cost. As opposed to film time, photographic fragments gather an aimless quantum of details, and, instead of creating a narrative horizon, they merely analyze the trajectory of a moment. The varying number of photographs that make up a series thus becomes an indicator of the varying duration of intensity or specificity created by the experience in

1 Jean Baudrillard, "Photography, Or The Writing Of Light", translated by François Debrix, www.ctheory.net, 2000



SofijaSilvia, *From the series Beatrice – Child's Perspective*, Lightjet print, 32 x 62 cm, 32 x 86 cm, 32 x 110 cm. Courtesy the artist.

question. The potential for a short haiku verse definitely is present in every scene.

The enigma of the recorded will probably not be resolved even by Potočki's comments, but they will surely constitute a good introduction to understanding her decision (or need) to lower the perspective: "...what is very important in a child's perspective and what will be evident once the project is exhibited in a gallery, are the details achieved by the close range and the narrow angle... the details I am talking about are the chewed-up skin around the fingernails of the girl standing on a bridge; the irritated, red hands, especially the knuckles of the girl with the white cat: the veins on the hand of the girl standing in a poppy field: the lightness of candle smoke: the water pouring from the coffee pot in the red kitchen; the flies on the irises..."

Even stronger than on the intention of "showing", the emphasis here is put on "observing", by a gaze with arbitrary criteria, unchained from the stereotypes of learned norms. The gaze moves like the sometimes cruel and sometimes just curious and spontaneous, wandering gaze of a child -which is eloquently described by the title of this whole cycle, periodically taken up by the artist ever since her university days. Although it is close to the photographed object in terms of physical distance, this is a somehow alienated gaze, described by Potočki as "the invis-

ibility in the movement of something inhuman, of something not interfering with the situation but only recording, not in a quest for meaning and story but in a quest for some place to linger". Having a strong auctorial intention inscribed in it, the halted gaze will not at all impose an interpretation nor call for a meaning. Despite the beholder's curious wish to detect a scenario, the photographs will soon become what they are— a brittle magic of the moment.

Is what we see here an attempt at impressing art onto a prosaic moment by means of photography, or is it prosaic art only transferring the poetic power of the real moment?

No other medium has opened such a vast field for philosophic speculation like photography with all its aporiae. The silent and seductive wisdom of Sophie's world and her child's perspective seem to lie precisely in resisting to answer the question of what happens, and why when transferring what we call "pure reality" into an image, and what consequences this may have. One thing is certain: by reminding us of the wisdom of photography, she is trying to re-establish its endangered autonomy, devotedly, persistently, each time anew with equal persuasiveness.

(Published in the exhibition catalogue *Sofija a.k.a Silvia Potočki*, <križić roban> Gallery, Zagreb; Extended Media Gallery /Galerija PM, HDLU, Zagreb; Gallery Rigo, Novigrad; Kula Lotrščak, Gallery Klovićevi dvori, Zagreb, 2006)

Translation: Ivir & Karaman, Zagreb

Ding!

In what is probably one of the most beautiful essays on photography (*Photography – The Art that Hides Itself*), Gerry Badger has indicated that the discouraging situation in which the medium of the so-called “quiet photography” has found itself may not be as black as sometimes implied. The time of great discoveries, both formal and conceptual, is now behind us, and the future brings, among other things, a quest for the etymology of intimacy – by no means innovative, yet somehow, from a new and suggestively articulated individual perspective, welcomed as gladly as ever.

Presuming that there is a group of “quiet” artists in the photographic medium, those who avoid unusual tricks in technique and angle, pompous subjects, and stylistic provocations of imposing mediations between the reality and its representation, preferring instead to swim out of current, one can soon recognize Marko Ercegović as one of them. The position he has chosen is a casual view “in passing”, a gaze with which he unobtrusively and without any corporal action (such as leaning or approaching) documents the reality that surrounds him. The poeticism of his video art reflects the same attitude; in fact, some of his videos can be understood almost as statements: for example, his *Merry-go-round* (2006), in which he detached himself from controlling the camera and the angle in order to fulfil his

desire for non-mediation, renouncing his own or any other gaze that would disturb the natural rhythm of things.

When looking at each of his photographs separately, without considering the next one, one may not see at once what they have in common. As for their form, one may notice the prevalence of wide angles, the preservation of spatial distance from the motif, and some tiny “events” that the camera focuses upon, which tend to hover around the centre of the photo. Sometimes it is not quite clear what they represent, and when we finally realize, attracted by the detail, what they are all about, we will probably ask – why? Why would it be a brush in someone’s hand at a car window, for example, or a cloud above a group of tourists? And what about those hands above a monumental architecture? Nobody will actually try to find the answer: neither the photographer who has offered the scene to our eyes nor we who observe it. Our gaze will mostly slide over the surface of things, revealing a world composed of fragments and short-lived moments doomed to vanish quite soon. The feeling of intimacy is something that is anyway experienced quite rarely and thus the distance that the photographer keeps with regard to the motif cannot be ignored in interpretation. But then again, each scene in this series contains a sign that reminds of the human presence, the existence of micro-worlds that are known to be there, even if we cannot come closer to them or decipher them. In those distant views, we sense that familiar, anxious situation of missing communication. The world is here, but remains unattainable.

I cannot find an exact expression that would link together the motifs the photographer has chosen to focus upon. A single video in this exhibition, with an onomatopoeic title that has come to stand for the whole series, may perhaps serve as a secret key for breaking the code. The camera is static, the angle documentary: one sees a table with randomly scattered objects,



Marko Ercegović, *Brsalje, Dubrovnik*, 2006, color photograph. Courtesy the artist.

a window, a curtain flapping in the wind and lightly hitting the
lamp – *ding!*

(Foreword to the exhibition *Marko Ercegović: Ding*,
<križić roban> Gallery, Zagreb, March 20 – 31, 2007)

Translation: Marina Miladinov



6. Any Other Business



Phobias on Stage

Igor Rončević: *Fears*, CEKAO Gallery, Zagreb, 1995

About a year ago, at the magnificent venue of Gruppo bancario Credito Valtellinese in Milan, an exhibition took place under the title LANORMALITÀ dell'arte (not a typo: the title is intentionally ambiguous) and can be understood as normality, La normalità, and abnormality, L'anormalità), sponsored by the Swiss pharmaceutical company Sandoz. It featured the work of various artists, all somehow connected to the idea of creating in the climate of extreme psychological tension, altered or disturbed mind. However, the exhibition also aimed at destroying the myth of the creator as someone who occasionally falls into unusual mental states, which results in ingenious creations. This unusual umbrella concept included artworks by Van Gogh, Jean Dubuffet, the previously almost unknown Icelandic eccentric naive painter Johannes Sveinsson Kjarval, the surrealist Victor Brauner, Roberto Matta and Henri Masson, Andy Warhol, Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Arnulf Reiner, Cindy Sherman, and others.

Anuptophobia – fear of solitude; ecophobia – fear of one's home and homeland; eosophobia – fear of dawn or daylight; epicaricacy – fear of someone else's success and deriving pleasure from other people's misfortune: these are only some of the titles in the latest series of paintings by Igor Rončević: *Fears*. Judging from the titles, the entire series seems to fit very well into Sandoz's project. But let us not jump to any conclusions. Those who have followed the evolution of Rončević's work may recall his exhibition *Trace of the Hand* (Forum Gallery, 1994). What hap-

pened in the meantime? The vibrant play of interweaving the foreground and the background, where the artist avoided any association with the classical notion of perspective, has now been completely reversed. Painting on a hostile tin surface has been substituted through Masonite boards, where paint is applied by means of a spatula, with some brushwork and surgical suture – an ultrathin linear mesh in pastel chalk – providing the connection. Rončević's familiar repertoire of trans-avantgardist small talk has now been permeated by a hint of aggression in his colour gamut, as well as a hallucinatory quality that used to be incompatible with his painting. (By coincidence, and perhaps also by providence, while reflecting on Rončević's recent exhibition, I came across his "Coma" produced in 1992, during his stay in the US. Three clumsy shapes in an indefinable role of something organic and symbolic, classically positioned against a background defined by the horizon line. All the elements were already there – only that the effect was bizarre rather than hallucinatory, as the prevalent tone of the painting was a diluted reddish oxide reminiscent of dry blood.) Since any attempt at identifying his symbolism evades the parameters of standard language, one may say instead that some of the Rončević-type forms may now be easily mistaken for a morphological repertoire of some painter from the older generation of surrealists, while the Freudians would certainly find a rich terrain for their own interpretations.

In one of her interviews, psychoanalyst and linguist Julija Kristeva (*Flash Art*, 126, 1986) has defined abstract art as emphasizing the mentally incoherent, fragmented image. "Modern art insists upon an individual as fragmented, wandering, at loose ends, as one who cannot find himself in the mirror of any ideology. Postmodernism, on the other hand, tries to integrate this wandering in an eclectic unity, retaining regressive elements to be sure, but taking a step beyond the avant-garde idea of transfer through content and execution."

If one takes literally this distinction between modern and postmodern abstraction, one will not be disappointed by



Igor Rončević, *Ecophobia – fear of one's home and homeland*, 1995,
oil and pastel on MDF, 104 x 80 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Rončević's *Fears*. What may seem at first sight as the classical need of a die-hard abstractionist to cross all limits and to use the automatic script in order to record the invisible mental turmoil in microscopic detail, is certainly present, but with a detachment, like a well-packaged quotation. The names of various fears, taken randomly from the rich phobic heritage of psychoanalysis and ordered alphabetically, may function as an artwork per se, isolated from their context. But there is a capricious, schizoid arabesque caught in the net of language – from scattered forms to those more condensed, which desperately cling to the centre of the painting. The structures of *Fears* are set into a scopic field, onto a clearly defined surface-stage: a podium illuminated by spotlights and a dark horizon. In the hallucinatory play of theatrical effects, which always shift things into the “as if” sphere, the result is witty – almost cathartic.

(Published in *Quorum* 3, 1995)

Red Peristyle

In January 1968, under the cover of the night, a group of Split's artists – Pavao Dulčić, Slaven Sumić, Nenad Đapić, Tomo Čaleta, Ante Aljinović, Srđan Blažević, Denis Dokić, and a few other participants whose names have fallen into oblivion – used brooms and thirty litres of washable paint to colour the Peristyle square of Diocletian's Palace in red. This action, planned several months in advance, was publicly denounced as an "act of vandalism" and the police arrested its protagonists on the very next morning.

All significant artistic events, such as street actions in the spirit of Fluxus performed by a group called "Penzioner" (The Senior) – Tihomir Simičić, Braco Dimitrijević, and Goran Trbuljak – occurred a year later, in 1969. That year of 1968, simultaneously with the global trends, was also marked by the activity of OHO, a Slovenian art group that had been using various strategies of resistance against the "bourgeois" culture since 1966, at first in their actions at the intersection of literature and visual arts – the concrete poetry or reism based on existentialism – then with their own version of *arte povera*, processual art, and land art, and eventually by developing their own, specific expression in the so-called mystical or esoteric conceptualism.

Nevertheless, none of the actions from this period, performed by long-haired rebels in the spirit of the time marked by student protests, anarchism, hippie movement, and new artistic freedoms, resounded so powerfully in the media, be it then or later on, as Red Peristyle did.

In one of his numerous newspaper articles on the Peristyle phenomenon, Zlatko Gall focused on the dilemma that would persist for a long time concerning the reception of this act: “The question of all questions has remained open: was painting the Peristyle an artistically articulated act or simply an expression of ’68-ish rebellion?”¹

Both premises are actually true. If the rebellion of ’68 had never happened, the Peristyle most likely wouldn’t have happened either. The intention behind the act is evident from the fact that Red Peristyle planned their action for months. Moreover, the group had performed street actions before, although they largely remained undocumented, making it difficult to ascertain which of them happened at all, if any, and which were simply oral tradition, coming mostly from Vladimir Dodig Trokut. Nevertheless, his role in perpetuating the “myth” of Red Peristyle should not be underestimated, since his anti-museum preserves the photographic documentation as well as some written records, among them a notebook with plans regarding the Peristyle performance.

The group that performed Red Peristyle almost dogmatically rejected all cooperation with art institutions. It was not the time to make concessions. One should recall, for example, the way in which the Gallery of Tenants operated in the 1970s between Zagreb and Paris: in the streets, metro stations, and shop displays, with its founder Ida Biard demonstratively announcing the dissolution of the group the moment its artists – despite their radical, revolutionary, even utopian ideas – started to get institutionalized and commercialized.

Little is known of Red Peristyle’s other actions, such as wrapping up a skyscraper and a tree, painting the fountain water at the promenade, or dragging Diocletian’s Palace into the sea. Few testimonies have remained, mostly oral, and a few written traces:

1 “Peristil — Mladalački bunt ili umjetnost?” [The Peristyle — Youthful Revolt or Art], *Jutarnji list*, 20.1.2008.



Red Peristyle, 1968/1998, color photograph. Photo: Zvonimir Buljević.
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art.

notes on unrealized concepts, such as the design of houses in which the wind produced sounds, the sea as a sound organ, and alike. In the year of Red Peristyle's action, the group appeared illegally at the Venice Biennale, wearing red scarves with a Peristyle stamp, dressed in orange op-art costumes, and reading out anti-Biennial leaflets as living exhibits. In one of the most extensive texts on Red Peristyle, Željko Kipke² has described their strategy as acting "in conflict with the rusty network of art 'clubs', at the same time inviting them to join a traditional folk festival, a *buffoneria*, *furbaria*, or *dispetto* – Split's style." "The living individual," Kipke concludes "is a memory cell of Split's dialectics of oblivion," as Red Peristyle has uncompromisingly opted for direct action in the street, among the people, for a spontaneous, Fluxus-like processuality, for the art of conduct, and eventually for underground culture. One should keep in mind that the

2 "Dossier: Crveni Peristil" [Dossier: Red Peristyle], *Quorum*, Year V, No. 2, 1989.

members of Red Peristyle were also the first to involve in squatting in Split. The rooms were located in an attic at Andrija Aleši Street no. 6 and soon became an almost mythical meeting point for the off-circles. The legend long perpetuated by the group's associate member and spokesman Vladimir Dodig Trokut that the hardboard floor, signed by everyone who passed through that attic, also bore a "blood manifesto", as well as various other mystifications concerning the tragic death of two group members, was denounced by another group member, Slaven Sumić, after ten years of silence, who nevertheless offered some other interesting facts that add colour to the image of the atmosphere within Red Peristyle. The group chose the *Luxor* coffee house as their informal meeting point, a place where they discussed their ideas and projects. There they communicated with the cultural elite of the city, but also with various marginal figures such as the homeless or prostitutes, as well as the first drug dealers of Split – which would have grave repercussions on the lives of two group members.

The only published written document signed jointly by the group members appeared in Split's *Vidik* journal in 1968. It was a sort of manifesto titled "Six Pages of Red Peristyle". Having returned from Paris, a city in which the rebellion of '68 had reached its pinnacle, the group thought globally and acted locally, directing their fierce anarchist discourse against stagnant parochialism that they, injected as they were with the virus of struggle for new freedoms, subjected to a critical gaze:

"We do not intend to play the reformers," the group wrote "but at the same time, we will not allow parochial bourgeois elements, joined into a force that represents culture, to shut our mouths, or even worse, to lull us in sweetish satisfaction spiced up with the possibility of achieving a more or less solid financial state as individuals owing to the Yugoslav standard." Entirely in the spirit of their time, they likewise directed their sting against the logic of the market, at the same time lucidly observing: "even though... it is not a market, but an exchange of services between

neighbours, as the socialist filter is not yet dense enough to prevent the posthumous bourgeoisie from playing some bygone lives taken over from the yellowed pages of the world classics.” They denounced this socialist bourgeoisie as “Secessionist puffed-up paunches and refrigerator-automobilized souls”. Having made some observations about the situation of the literary scene and the sad state of the Artists’ Association, still dominated by Impressionism and the Flemish school, they also commented on the pedagogical work “done according to archaic curricula” and eventually, referring to Marx, questioned the meaningfulness of artistic action if it remains alienated from the social reality. These theses support the supposition that the Peristyle action was inspired by the immediate events in the group’s surrounding rather than the popular “new art practice,” which was only beginning to gain ground in the Croatian capital.

Their action, a striking optical warning against the stagnant climate of bureaucratisation and institutionalized art, has remained one of the most intriguing gestures in Croatian art until the present day. For several years after Red Peristyle, artists used to paint a small section of the square in red on its anniversary, and in black on the anniversaries of the deaths of the two group members who ended their lives in 1972 and 1974.

(Broadcasted in the *Triptych* programme of the Third Channel of Croatian Radio, November 11, 2008)

Contacts and Influences – Joseph Beuys and Croatian Contemporary Art

Summary

Joseph Beuys was never in Croatia, except in an airplane flying above Lučko during World War II (in the seventies of the past century he was a guest at the April Meetings in Belgrade, but not in Zagreb), but his activities left a strong direct or indirect mark on Croatian artists, who accepted his methods and sometimes even reinterpreted his works.

The text follows various strategies used by Croatian artists from the early seventies of the past century to recent works, which manifest ideas linked to certain stages in Beuys's activities – from Braco Dimitrijević's cycle *Casual Passer-By* from 1971, in which he stopped passers-by on the streets of Zagreb, photographed them and displayed their enlarged photographs in public places in the manner of political posters current at that time, to Nikica Klobučar's and Gordan Karabogdan's guerrilla-like gesture from 2005, when they briefly "borrowed" materials about Beuys's performances, not without legal consequences, to multiply and freely distribute them. Besides in some works by members of the Group of Six Artists in the seventies, Vlado Martek and Željko Jerman, Beuys's thoughts and direct references to his ideas are also present in some early, and especially in the later works and actions of Igor Grubić, reflective works of Zoran Pavelić in the manner of Fluxus, and also in the activities of Ivan Ladislav Galeta who is, in his artistic explorations, increasingly devoting himself to ecologi-



Vlado Martek, *Beuys*, 1985/6, natron, acrylic, pencil, 90 x 46 cm.
Courtesy the artist.

cal subjects and in his lectures/performances developing his own theory of deep ecology of the subatomic concept.

Beuys paved the way for two currents which are still present today – an extreme subjective approach to attesting his own microcosm and, on the other hand, faith in every individual's potential and possibility to influence the field of social changes. Nevertheless, it is impossible to disregard the artist's changed role in the sphere of public activities; instead of being a prophet, shepherd and showman, attention is increasingly focusing on the artist's collective, non-personal and sometimes anonymous gesture.

(Broadcasted in the *Reviews and Debates* programme of the Third Channel of the Croatian Radio, March 3, 2010)

Translation: Nikola Jovanović



Biography

Radmila Iva Janković (b. 1966 in Zadar) is an art critic and curator. She graduated in art history and comparative literature at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb in 1991. She began to write on visual art in 1994, and has since then continuously been publishing reports, reviews, critiques and essays in art and culture periodicals (*Vijenac*, *Quorum*, *Kontura*, *Glasje*, *Život umjetnosti*, *Zarez*, *Čovjek i prostor*, *Kvartal* and others). She wrote contributions on visual art for radio and television. From 1998 to 2001 she collaborated with Croatian Television on the programme *Transfer* featuring contemporary art, and from 1995 she collaborated with the Third Programme of Croatian Radio (*Triptych*, *Reports and Discussions*).

From 2000 to 2007 she was curator at the Extended Media Gallery. She has written many introductory texts and edited exhibition catalogues. She also prepared several major thematic exhibitions, a kind of trilogy, each of which examined one of the positions of artists in the context of contemporary art: *In First Person Singular* (HDLU, 2004, Art Gallery Dubrovnik, 2005); *1:1, Interpersonally in Contemporary Art*, (HDLU, Zagreb, 2006, collaboration with Evelina Turković), *Looking at Others* (Art Pavilion, Zagreb, 2009). From 2001 to 2004 she organized *Zadar_live*, an international event devoted to artistic interventions in the public space, which had four editions: *Closed Circuit City* (2001), *Inter muros* (2002), *Artistexture* (2003), *Refresh!* (2004). From 2000 to 2007 she collaborated with the Dante – Marino Cettina Gallery in Umag.

Since 2007 she has been curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, where she is head of The Kožarić Studio Collection. She received the AICA annual prize in 2012.



Radmila Iva Janković

Inside Out

Selection of Texts

1995–2012

Copyright © Durieux i Croatian section of AICA, Zagreb 2015

PUBLISHERS

AICA Croatia, Zagreb, Rooseveltov trg 5
Durieux, Zagreb, Šulekova 23

FOR PUBLISHERS

Marko Golub
Dražen Tončić

Special thanks to Branko Franceschi, HS AICA President 2009 – 2015,
for his help and support in the making of this book.

The author wishes to thank Evelina Turković for her help in preparing the book.

PROOFREADING

Nikolina Jovanović

Published with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia
and the City Office for Education, Culture and Sports of the City of Zagreb

LAYOUT AND PRINTING

Durieux, Zagreb

ISBN 978-953-188-426-6 (Durieux)
ISBN 978-953-56967-1-1 (HS AICA)

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the
National and University Library in Zagreb under the number 000925534.

Printed in February 2016

