

< rotor >

association for contemporary art

Volksgartenstraße 6a, A 8020 Graz
Phone+Fax +43.316.688 306, rotor@mur.at
<http://rotor.mur.at>

*

WHERE TO GO?

Notes on Transformation after 1989

Curatorial Statements of the guest curators

Ivana Bago / Antonia Majača

Leader of g-mk (galerija mirsolav kraljević) in Zagreb

Joanne Richardson's video *In Transit* functions in a way as a bildungsroman, although without a usual resolution pointing to an emerging future – the ending, instead, is more like an extended pause in the present after a narrative of the past had been told. Narrated in the first person (with the voice of an actress 'performing' as the artist's voice), the video intertwines the story of the artist's childhood and the 'childhood' of the new Romania, born after the dissolution of the socialist system. The video begins with the episode of this very birth: the 1989 revolution, embodied in the events/scenes from the Timisoara square which filled TV screens in Romania and the whole world at the time. From the very beginning, Richardson's narrative links the childhood and adolescence of the country with her own childhood, displaced after she emigrated with her parents to USA in 1977, left to be reconstructed from the ten remaining family photographs and, together with the footage of the Romanian revolution, now becoming symptoms of the impossibility to resolve the workings of remembrance, personal and collective memory, the process of writing history where the insertion of each new line is necessarily an erasure of at least one other. The 'case-studies' of the four Romanian cities and their post-socialist transformations (Bucharest, Timisoara, Iasi and Cluj-Napoca), whose narratives evolve around four separate 'leit-motifs' encompassing the history of the whole 20th century, *In Transit* not only deconstructs this history and the present as its result, but admits its own complicity in history writing as a crime, or at least, an unstable lie where the only certainty lies in the making visible the process of its creation.

Renata Poljak's film with the symptomatic title, *Great Expectations*, traces the transformations of urban landscape and the results of the mass constructions and architectural violence on the Croatian coast during the past decades. At the same time, the artist reconstructs the development and transformation of violence in her surroundings (from war violence to 'wild capitalism' violence) through a personal – and gender-conscious – perspective. Renata does so by exploring three generations of the same patriarchal family line in traditional Dalmatian surroundings. The often grotesque architecture that the artists observes is a pre-figuration of the 'erective', chauvinistic Croatian society in which the dominance of the patriarchal nuclear social structure is mirrored in the accumulation of violent intrusions in the natural and urban environment. This binary coding brings up a narrative filled with the iconography of the transitional arrogance, greed, wild urbanism but also post-war social traumas. Furthermore, the film tackles upon the newly established 'morality' of the new nation state and the perplexed and often perverse ways in which 'modernization' takes place. This 'development', when we take it to a higher level, outside the

small-scale, ignorant private investors, is still legitimized on the grand level by the authorities as a need to modernize, enlarge, and improve, oftentimes as a cover for massive privatization robbery.

Finally, both works deal with a traumatic personal view of joining the 'grand narrative' of the capitalist, progressive West in one way or another, whereby modernity-as-a-fact (modernization) is discovered as a modernity as- a- social myth. In the collective temporal trajectory from an inferior past to a 'superior future' radical disjuncture between the two takes place in the forms we can track down from our own courtyard to the government. The diffusion and appropriations of these disjuncture in local contexts often appropriate the narratives of 'improvement', and 'the will to be modern(ised)'. The implementation of new types of private, social, economical and political models of 'evolution' in a vague state of transition establish themselves as legitimate often to easily and without criticism. In the in-between state these countries, after almost 20 years of their democratic turn, still find themselves in, the great expectations seem to keep defining the social and individual imaginary...

Matei Bejenaru

Director of Periferic Biennial in Iași

Most of the contemporary artproduction from Romania from the past 20 years reflects the profound changes in the society and in the people's life. "The street and its pedestrians" have become the "raw material" for critical, ironical, pathetic, or nihilistic approaches. For more than a decade I claimed that it was no time for personal mythologies and now, in the time when the private commercial galleries are becoming more and more influential in the art scene, when the society is less traumatized than 15 years ago, a new generation of artists is no more interested in using art for change and transformation. In the 1980iesRomania, the independent artists were using art production as a tool for intellectual survival (protest was almost impossible in communist Romania). Today the situation is completely different: Making art is an individual choice to achieve recognition, prestige and economical success. My choice for the exhibition was driven by the interest to discover poetical and metaphorical works of art related to political issues.

Both of the selected artists, Dan Mihălțianu and Cristina David, belonging to different generations, offer a personal commentary to major events or themes: the (so-called) Romanian Revolution from 1989 or the "exodus" of Romanians to the West in search for a better life.

Dan Mihălțianu's *Révolution dans le boudoir* is a video installation which deals with the survival and the autonomy of private space. In the setting of the artists studio as it existed in Bucharest in the late 1980ies, two videos are installed. One shows views from the streets of Bucharest, the other shows close-up shots of the intimate aspects of life, such as washing and shaving. The tragic-comical contradiction between form and content is enhanced by the sound of the video, the pathetic broadcasts of the National Romanian Radio during the Romanian revolution days from December 1989. Dan Mihălțianu is one of the major Romanian contemporary artists being a key figure of the Romanian independent movements in the 1980ies.

In her video *The Real Reason of the Migration of People in Europe to West*, **Cristina David** speaks poetically about the flux of migrants from the East. The video has two paradoxes. First, it is shot in the extreme West of Europe at a border bridge between Portugal and Spain, and, in the commentary the artist speaks about the migration to the West (normally the Portuguese migrate eastwards to the rich parts of Europe...) and second, the commentary says that the real "reason" for migration is to live the happiness for one hour longer due to the change of the time zone. The video has all the ingredients to be classified as beautiful: the landscape and the poetical commentary, but, omitting the economical reasons for immigration, Cristina David drives us to a metaphorically subjective and ironical understanding of life.

Yane Calovski

Leader of press to exit project space in Skopje

On Freedom and the Streets of Belgrade by **Hristina Ivanoska** is, literally, taking on the issue of political and ideological decision-making behind the act of “naming streets” in the capital of Serbia, Belgrade. As a Macedonian, she is an outsider looking in, to present the apparent social, political and ideological gender misrepresentations in the public realm of the capital exhibited by the not-so-simple act of naming (and renaming) of streets, boulevards, parks and other public domain in a new democratic society. Every new ideological agenda brings newly bestowed heroes and sometimes appropriates the reading of others.

The work also functions as an archive in which Hristina Ivanoska has tapped into on several occasions to reinterpret the work for different contexts. In this case it emerges as a series of abstracted objects and details of the texts suggesting new discursive engagement with artistic research and its own analysis.

Aleksandar Stankoski is one of the most intriguing artists in Macedonia whose artistic oeuvre unfortunately, and surprisingly, is still better known in the country than abroad. His comic novellas remain extremely curious. Over some 900+ pages, 4 episodes of linear narratives engage with a masterfully established achromatic and satirical connotations over some of the most painful post-communist transitional traumas and experiences.

In the framework of this exhibition a selection of 50 drawings from two narrative series *Unidentified* (1993-997) and *Minorities of Reality* (1998-2000) is presented. In *Unidentified* it is the totalitarian system, both the Nazi and the Communist, personified by the characters of Hitler and Stalin, who by showing up in a surreal boxing match metaphorically resolve the conflicting and collapsing ideologies. In *Minorities of Reality* he tackles the illusory freedom suggested by television as the mass medium, its links to the political agendas and the illusory and manipulative nature in its discourse.

Nikolett Eröss

Director of Trafó Galeria in Budapest

The unknown consumer is our contemporary – we usually use this term when we don't want to talk about ourselves. A hero or a victim? – The genre of the monument gives way to both interpretations. For the point of view of the ever expanding advertising industry s/he is definitively a hero who desperately completes the task in order to find him / herself facing again the very same challenge: that of consumption. Consumption perpetually legitimates itself and reaffirms the consumer providing the illusion that this is the way to become someone, someone who differs from the others, other not less devoted consumers – who, by the way, think the same of themselves. The assertion that at the same time the consumer is the victim of the vicious circle called consumerism is a commonplace but this presumably does not blur its relevance.

On **Csaba Uglár's** monument the walk of life of the consumer is drawn by bills, long lines of ordinary items, documents of daily shopping – otherwise totally uninteresting and interchangeable information. Fugitive images on the marble plate erected for eternity.

The project *Airways* is an attempt to create a symbolic public space which manifests the discrepancy between the idea of the Hungarian nation state and the actual Hungarian society. At the same time, it offers to shift the conflicts to a different level – albeit temporarily. The Polish artist **Joanna Rajkowska's** works deal with spaces of social contact and the conflicts and communities forming these: They suggest simple yet far from obvious encounters.

The artist was spending a few months in Budapest in the autumn of 2007, during which she happened to be present at the inauguration ceremony of the Hungarian Guard – a paramilitary nationalistic group without deniable public support – on Budapest's historically most burdened public space: the Heroes' Square. Lacking knowledge of the Hungarian language and public life, she viewed and filmed the event as a performance whose frame of reference was made up of historical images and contemporary demonstrations following similar choreographies. She observed the order of bodies, the rhythm of steps, the disciplined faces and the reactions of the audience. And, above all, the airplanes.

Returning to Budapest a year later she invited fifteen people on a nearly one-hour 'flightseeing tour'. The guests included a representative of the Hungarian Guard and one of the Goy Motorbikers, two organisations of the Hungarian far-right known for their specifically strong public appearances (hardly admissible euphemism in the case of the power demonstrations in Roma-populated villages). These two groups are expressing their visions and formulating their image of the enemy and group identity in a way that has been unheard of in Hungary until recently (yet is familiar from another time). The other thirteen participants were foreigners living in Hungary, former refugees, Roma and Jewish Hungarians, members of sexual minorities and a homeless person; in a word, all those who often appear in nationalist rhetoric as potential sources of conflict, and whose appearance in the public space regularly excites severe counter-reaction on that side.

Providing a temporary in-between position the plane has its capability to suspend certain experiences and methods of using a space in order to create new and temporary consensuses. However, the manner of participating in consensus, that is, the way the passengers relate to one another and the situation, does not remain intact in pre-takeoff and post-landing reality, by the way they view themselves and one another as members of the same society.

The two films – the silent documentation of a paramilitary group's inauguration and the 'flightseeing tour' – mutually interpret each other via their parallel projection.

Alenka Gregorič

Director of Galerija Škuc in Ljubljana

Slovenia belongs to the so called New Europe, to the Balkans, bearing the stamp of post-communist politics; its geographical position is determined by the gaze of the 'observers', depending on the part of the world they come from. Who we are or, more precisely, who we want to be, is a question coming generations will not dwell upon much, as the all-mighty Europe will have consumed their minds and views of their own identity. Perhaps my generation belongs to the last remnants of the socialist generations but we cannot say much about socialism, as we have only experienced it from afar. Younger generations will learn about it from history books.

Is today's Europe what we dreamed about? The work by the Croatian artist **Nemanja Cvijanović** entitled *The Sweetest Dream* speaks of Europe as a 'Second Empire' which is united by dreams and symbols. Its boundaries are open to the circulation of goods but waterproof to the circulation of people. As the artist puts it, "Near customs houses there are CTPs (temporary permanence centres, along the entire Mediterranean coast. They look like concentration camps, from an age not so far, where people had no freedom, no justice and no culture). CTPs are managed by a shameful society that lives of the wars and the misery of exploited countries (its new 'colonies'). Without any problems, the EU approves the co-existence of the 'first and second degree (level/class)' citizens within the community, and if we wanted to we could name even a group of 'third' degree invisible citizens".

The effects of wars and particularly a poor economic and political situation constantly drive people into exile. Poor living conditions and the desire for a better life are skilfully exploited by others who turn them into huge profits for themselves. Yet the diaries of immigrant traffickers juxtaposed with video records in the video entitled *Cona Turism* by the Slovenian artists **Irena Pivka and Brane Zorman** arouse mixed feelings – is it really just about the blatant trade in human souls or are there situations in which it is almost possible to talk about heroic deeds?

And Karl Marx would most probably just shed a tear.

Michal Koleček

Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University in Ústí nad Labem

Last year **Slaven Tolj** realized a series of performance-reenactments that paraphrased different works, mainly from the 1970ies. *Volim Zagreb / I love Zagreb* (2008) was a reference to the performance *Zagreb I love you* by Tomislav Gotovac from 1971. Performed as part of a series of events entitled *Operation: City 2008* Tolj's trigger for this performance was the assassination of Ivo Pukanić, the owner of the newspaper *Nacional* – or more precisely, the security camera footage showing the suspect leaving the crime scene with his face hidden behind a motorcycle helmet walking in the centre of Zagreb. In the performance Tolj reenacted his walk wearing a motorcycle helmet himself. *I paraphrased the title of Gotovac's performance and the place of the action – Zagreb city centre. While Gotovac walked naked and lay down on the asphalt of the Zagreb highstreet Ilica thus “making love” with the city, I walked the city centre completely masked and covered, assuming the image of the assassin. This way I emphasized different contexts of these two performances, the difference between the conditions of these two actions, the differences between social and cultural environments of time when they were created,; the differences between understanding and showing artists' actions and the differences in the meaning of art then and now.* (Slaven Tolj)

The project called *Famous Brno Villas II* presents results from **Barbora Klímová's** personal research focused in housing between the years of 1968 and 1989, i.e. the period of political "normalization" and of so-called real socialism. The aim of the project is to see the theme of the villas not only in terms of their architectural form, but also as a cultural-political phenomenon. The artist's comment of the project is: *I consider the characteristic attributes of the period architecture, urbanism, and environment in general to be a crucial aspect of the common identity of several generations. I tried to recall a "normalization" era villa. I don't think I've actually ever been inside one before. I imagined a house with the characteristic attributes of the architecture of that time, but primarily it was a house in a garden hidden behind pine trees. My interest probably originated in the inaccessibility, the tinge of decadence, and ideological suspicion related to such villas that I had felt as a child perceiving reality from the perspective of the majority culture.*

In her project, Barbora Klímová consulted experts (architects, sociologists, and historians), but above all, she set out for journeys through Brno to look for concrete examples of houses representing the aesthetics being studied, as well as the general atmosphere of the defined period. Barbora Klímová's ambition though was not to evaluate the quality of the individual buildings. She focused above all on comprehending the complex structure of relations, causes, and consequences which generally influenced and determined the life amidst the totalitarian system.

Monika Szewczyk

Director of Galeria Arsenal in Bialystok

Jacek Malinowski's works are an example of artistic video which, based on fiction and playing with it, aspire to the authenticity of a document. They strive for full authenticity in the creation of an image of the contemporary reality. It is a peculiar and converse way of "lying with the use of truth" where the artist, in his meticulously constructed fiction, reveals important yet marginalized aspects of reality. The protagonist of *Marker* is a member of an unofficial group of Alterglobalists, "passive terrorists" who want to reclaim the "human right to the world". *Marker* is a revolt against the *Matrix* fiction of the world of global capitalism, against the "system" as such, slavery and regimes. Yet the revolt seems as unreal as the ubiquitous "global fiction", which forces the protagonist to use such atavistic gestures as marking his territory with... urine. This attempt of a personal record, of taking over, of reclaiming oneself, further enhances the frustration and, consequently, is bound to lead to aggression and authentic, active terrorism. The manifesto, or rather a list of charges, provided by the character becomes clear in the third part and sounds equally true in the US., UK or Poland, 20 years after it regained independence. And yet it is slightly different, as can be seen here with regard to the question of independence itself. It is not enough to regain independence; one needs to learn how to live with it as well.

Moral themes served with a healthy dose of irony, an absurd image of the "global village" based on quotations from the media and observations of stereotypes and prejudices are the essence of **Radoslaw Szlaga's** work. His *Bad Drawings* came into existence in London, where the artist went in search of a job. His plan was typical for young Polish artists – three months of physical labour abroad, return to the country, spending the money to produce new works.

Problems such as the lack of tolerance, xenophobia and racism are equally relevant in the Western societies as well as in those who went through political transformation after 1989, even if they seem more visible in Eastern Europe. The situation of the artist themselves, their double role, and the reflection on the condition of art and the artist in the "worse" part of united Europe is a theme that is strongly present in recent Polish art. The political transformation of 1989 also brought a readiness for reflection in the field of contemporary art – this readiness materializes in an extremely sublime way in Radek's works.