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EXHIBITING THE "FORMER EAST": IDENTITY POLITICS AND CURATORIAL PRACTICES AFTER 1989 / A CRITICAL READER

EDITED BY CĂTĂLIN GHEORGHE, CRISTIAN NAE

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"Vector - critical research in context" is an experimental publication [intentionally left undefined] based on an open editorial concept, alternatively applied as "a book of artistic research", "a catalogue of critical art", "an experimental artist's edition" [...]

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ARGUMENT

CĂTĂLIN GHEORGHE

The internal relationship between the exhibitional thinking and the political practices exercised in a context generates various curatorial behaviours depending on the related ideological tensions, geographical positionings, economic complexes, and real facts. Insofar as art implies, and not necessarily reflects, the effects of a social reality created as a result of a series of circumstantial modellings of the public imaginary, one might draw the mechanism of a potential of the curated artistic practice as a form of power, manifest in the world. Beyond the political power which enables the implementation of the decisions derived from the economic philosophies and beyond the legal power which enables the implementation of the policies of social justice, one may notice the probability of an artistic and curatorial power to respond to the hegemonic modelling forms of the world by issuing various capital flows – economic, cognitive, cultural – by mapping the influential territories.

This volume of critical texts is thought as an instrument from a tool box necessary for the self-edification of students attending a university of art. Insofar as an institution constituted in an artworld can be considered a form of hegemonic manifestation of an outlook on the role of artistic education in creating a position in relation to the meaning of living one's life or the overvaluation of the importance of the market, one may speak about exposing the reader to a particular kind of knowledge that could be transformed into architectural material aimed at building a critical perspective on the emancipatory functions of art exhibitions.

Art exhibitions can be seen as products of a series of researches carried out in contexts defined by geocultural or historical and political interests. They can reflect the manners of formation and visual mediation of the policies of identities as forms of differentiation and positioning in a territory of decisional influences. In their action, the curatorial practices identify situations, analyse problems and try to creatively modify visions which can disturb the perception of the manners of living in destructured contexts depending on the standardisation of the data derived from the interpretation of the political imaginary.

The critical texts selected by the guest editor, Cristian Nae, intended for work with the students attending the MA course in *Policies of identity in East-European art after 1989*, do not constitute a collection of exhibitional studies but rather a methodological model of analysis by means of exemplification and theorisation which would re-historiographise and re-map the art production and the curatorial practices in the years after the reconsideration of the political and economic relations between Western and Eastern Europe.

The publication also becomes a mobile archive of theoretical performing based on some exemplifying elaborations which could mediate new configurational understandings of the condition of art and curatorial practices from the former Eastern Bloc countries, providing the opportunity for new theorisations, and respectively new perspectives on the underlayers of response of the context to determinative interpellations. The analyses of the exhibitional policies and the exhibitions reviews displayed in the publication document convocative relations among the artistic considerations, institutional strategies, authorial positionings and readers' experiences.

Translated by Andreea Bălan

THE PRACTICE OF ART HISTORY - ART EXHIBITIONS, BETWEEN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY POLITICS

CRISTIAN NAE

After 1989, a date conventionally associated with the end of the communist regime and the dissolution of the former Eastern European block, as well as of the former binary oppositions between East and West, art history entered a process of globalization which coincided with a process of cultural and political contestation and a new cartography of power. On the one hand, this process reflected new economical and political exchanges, contested hegemonies, deregulated routes of trade, unstable subjectivities and intensified migration that challenged the dominant representations that construct cultural geography and destabilized boundaries. On the other hand, the cannon of art history underwent a lot of pressure, both from within and from outside. For instance, Piotr Piotrowski suggested the existence of "two voices of art history", an idea that supported the existence of parallel narratives, which require distinct interpretive criteria, as well as distinct evaluative and descriptive concepts.[1] As a response to the "hierarchical" or vertical art history practiced by the Western art history, this "provincialization" of the West,[2] by means of which what would appear as the best (and the only significant) artistic production is recognized as just one way of writing history, would entail a "horizontal" art history. The latter would highlight the existing cross-cultural exchanges between the former regions on each side of the Berlin Wall and promoting an exercise of cultural translation which would render inadequate terms like cultural influence, domination and belatedness. Consequently, one started to question dominant art historical narratives which reduce the former Eastern Europe to a marginal cultural space as forms of historical conceptualization that translate geographical distinctions into temporal representations. At the same time, a renewed awareness of the links between geographically defined art history and identity politics was formed, the later being understood as a politicized practice of representation that uses art as a terrain of contestation of power and articulation of cultural identities against hegemonic cultural constructs and discursive practices.

These methodological shifts of art history as a terrain of cultural politics articulated on the one hand, on cultural geography, and, on the other, on post-colonial discourse were influenced by a renewed interest in exhibiting art from the former Eastern bloc both within the region and, especially (and perhaps most importantly) in the former centers of the Western artworld. This renewed interest raised concerns about the strategies of visualization and the way the political may be articulated on the aesthetic regime of the art exhibitions. It also questioned the position and place from where a certain cultural discourse is articulated and its specific modes of address. Major exhibitions of art from (Central and) Eastern Europe, taking place at the end of the nineties and during the

[1] Piotr Piotrowski, "On 'Two Voices of Art History'", in *Grenzen überwindend*, Katja Bernhardt, Piotr Piotrowski (hrsg.), Berlin : Lukas Verlag, 2006, pp. 42-56.

[2] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

2000's, were thus pointing out the importance of exhibitions as means of writing (and re-writing) art history. In this respect, given their heightened visibility and the interpretive apparatus they provide in conceiving the conceptual context and exercising the selection of relevant artworks, art exhibitions contributed to framing art produced in the former Eastern Europe in geo-political and post-colonial terms, commonly described as the "post-communist condition"[3]. Thus, they created the conditions for the performative production of a certain cultural identity, often substantialized and essentialized in exotic terms. They provided the rules and conventions according to which art created as a response to contemporary conditions of living could be associated if not with a certain style, at least with a common set of social and political interrogations and critical unrest. Exhibitions of art also constructed a discursive regime of spectatorship and visuality, according to which such common, trans-national identity was constructed out of various conflicting and overlapping identities, both in terms of community, race, gender etc. By various techniques and technologies of visualization, exhibitions of art not only provided a certain technology of subjectification, as Tony Bennett famously argued in relation to the social function of international exhibitions within the political regime of modernity[4] – in this case, associate with the subject of a "new Europe", or with the shifting subject of the "Balkans", recently position as a cosmopolitan, albeit nomadic subject of art; but they also provided the frameworks and power positions for the voices of the "periphery" to be heard, thus challenging the former East vs. West divide. Therefore, art exhibitions acted both as agents of cultural imperialism, promoting a multicultural ideology of neo-liberalism, as well as emancipatory agents that, one the one hand, promoted a form of "strategic essentialism"[5], while, on the other, fought against stereotypes and prejudices as critical agents aimed at disclosing the distance between cultural representations which risks to be erased through the naturalization of such cultural constructs. Last, but not least, some of these important exhibitions influenced the perception upon Eastern European neo-avant-gardes, legitimizing works that were previously scarcely exhibited in the West, or even completely not exhibited as art. Thus, they served at constructing what Svetlana Alpers aptly termed as "the museum effect" in art history[6], retrospectively bestowing artistic meaning and value upon various forms of artistic documentation.

The present reader gathers critical texts, including theoretically-laden exhibition reviews and short essays that reflected, most often, almost immediately on the importance of exhibitions presenting and framing art from former Eastern Europe after 1989. The selection includes both retrospective essays such as those signed by Svetla Kazalarska, Raluca Voinea, Louisa Avgita and Zoran Erić and elaborated exhibition reviews, written by Edit András, Marina Gržinić, Sándor Hornyk, Jens Kastner, Milena Tomic, Kelly Pressuti and Cristian Nae tackling specific art exhibitions taking place in Western art museums in the last decade that we considered to be significant in the way it influenced identity politics through curatorial discourse. The selection of the texts was also influenced by the fact that most of the authors live and work in the region in discussion, thus challenging the production of the relevant cultural discourse from a Western-based position of power. We hope that the present modest collection of critical texts would prove useful for students in art history, critical and curatorial studies, by pointing out not only the intricate relation between the practice of art history and curatorial practice today, but also the relevance of exhibition studies, as an emergent academic discipline, in shaping the way de-colonial thinking[7] may be produced in various places of the globe.

[3] Boris Groys, "The Post-Communist Condition", *Who if not we should at least try to imagine the future of all this? 7 episodes on exchanging Europe*, ed. by Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004), pp. 163-170.

[4] Tony Benett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 59-86.

[5] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*, London: Routledge, 2006.

[6] Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p. 26.

[7] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

GLOBALISATION AND ART EXHIBITIONS

ZORAN ERIĆ

Zoran Erić is an art historian and curator. He is currently working as a curator at the Center for Visual Culture at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade. He was a member of the IKT board between 2005 and 2008. He published articles in journals as *Third Text*, and in exhibition catalogues like *Rearview Mirror: New Art from Central and Eastern Europe* (The Power Plant, Alberta, 2012) or *Transitland: Video Art from Central and Eastern Europe 1989 - 2009*, (Museum Ludwig, Budapesta, 2010).

This text is based on a paper Zoran Erić delivered at the International Association of Art Critics' (AICA's) pan-African seminar and workshop, 'Art Criticism and Curatorial, Practices in Marginal Contexts', organised jointly with Zoma Contemporary Art Center in Addis Ababa, 26–28 January 2006.

Glocal Games

The state of affairs in present-day capitalism could be exemplified with the logic of multinational companies and their top down distribution or dissemination of the branded commodities worldwide, with a high level of sensitivity to local tastes and habits. The concept of "glocalisation", that is used to describe the intertwined and interconnected notions of the global and the local was developed in social theory, as an outcome of an analysis of marketing strategies which showed that the global outreach of a campaign for a product was more likely to succeed when it was adapted specifically to each locality or culture where it was being promoted. In Japanese business affairs and economic analysis in the late 1980s, the word Dochakuka was used to refer to the way goods and services are produced and, moreover, distributed, in keeping with the particularistic criteria of a given locality.

This term, according to Roland Robertson, could be understood as 'indigenisation', but is very similar to the theoretical concept of glocalisation, now seen as one of the facets of the whole corpus of ideas on globalisation. Theorists like Bruno Latour questioned the validity of the very concepts of the local and the global, as they were seen before, and claimed that these 'labels' were no longer of any use. He therefore proposed the term "glocal", as an amalgam of these two notions and concepts, as both encapsulating the wide range of possibilities, from the most local to the most universal and underlining the necessity for breaking down the simple binary opposition between the reality of local experience and global concerns. He demonstrated that it was no longer viable to opt for the idea of 'the local in itself,' without attempting to provide some kind of contextual framework for it.The actual concern that the local was being overwhelmed by the global might simply be a different way of claiming that disparate localities were becoming interconnected: in the same way as the local had been globalised, the global had been localised.

I would like to give one example here: The increasing presence of McDonalds restaurants worldwide is an example of globalisation, while the restaurant chain's efforts to vary this menu, in an attempt to appeal to local palates, is an example of glocalisation. Perhaps an even better illustration of glocalisation is provided by the fact that, for publicity purpose in France, this fast food chain has chosen to replace its familiar Ronald McDonald mascot with Asterix the Gaul, a popular French cartoon character.

Robertson, who was one of the first to give theoretical articulation to this concept and tendency, claimed in 1997 that glocalisation could be understood as the simultaneous existence of both universalising and particularising tendencies in a certain local culture. This dichotomy of the global and the local was emphasised in the anti-globalisation

movements as well, where the local was set up in opposition to the global as if it had to resist the process of globalisation. Robertson was right, when he pointed out that, in spite of the resistance of local cultures, they were all caught up in the same wave of the same process of globalisation/ glocalisation. Indigenisation could be thus better understood as the need of local cultures and traditions to be recognised and incorporated in the global arena, and not just simply to reject it. Thus, a possible strategy for achieving this goal and 'democratising' the process of globalisation might be called "globalisation" from below.

Rather than propose the stereotypical model of cultural consumption of the local, imposed by the market mechanisms of 'predatory' capitalism, I would propose a strategy of bottom-up initiative, based on a variety of local case studies. I would like to analyse how images, meanings and values associated with specific localities are generated and circulate within the global cultural economy.

Global Flows

Another way of looking at the same problem would be to analyse the process of globalisation through the tensions between cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation that is, for Arjun Appadurai, the central problem of today's global interactions. But what actually quite often happens is that homogenisation is regarded as synonymous with Americanisation or commodification, and consequently the later two arguments are closely connected. Here, the basic element omitted from the account is the fact that, no matter how fast the impulses from various metropolises are introduced into different local societies, they themselves soon enough become indigenised.

Here, we would do well to take note of the fact that the present model of disorganised capitalism is creating a new, multifaceted, intertwined, disjunctive order within the global cultural economy.

This resists falling into the category of a binary oppositional model of the analysis of societal processes deriving from various discourses or practices, such as neo-Marxism (consumers vs. producers), or traditional trade (surplus vs. deficit). However, the model cannot any longer be understood in terms of an antinomy between centre and periphery.

It has, therefore, become a commonplace, to state that today's world is principally characterised by objects in motion. If we were to draw up a spatial flowchart, it would encompass objects, such as ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, and technologies and techniques.

Appadurai proposed the model of "scaping" and defined the flow of images, histories and information as "mediascapes"; the flows of cultural and political ideologies as "ideoscapes"; finance flows as "financescapes"; and flows of migrants, tourists and refugees as "ethnoscapes". Finally, adding to this analysis, he introduced us, later on,to the most interesting notion of "artscapes".

Global Art Exhibitions

I will, therefore, now try to shift this rhetoric from social, political and economic references to the field of art references. When it comes to placing products related to art and culture in the global cultural economy, it comes to the point where adding a geopolitically infused "local flavor" to works conceived within globally accepted paradigms, adds much more to the prospects of successfully marketing an art project than any consideration of its conceptual background, or framework of internal artistic references.

The process of globalisation in the realm of contemporary art has been manifested in the proliferation of biennial exhibitions, disrupting the old geographical hegemonies of the big art centres and revealing the multifaceted, disjunctive order of the new global art space. Curators frequently turn into globetrotters, competing in global cities, producing discourses for contextualisation and developing new formats for artistic display. The side effect of this phenomenon is that many global biennials are becoming as alike as if they adopted the logic of multinational companies which disseminate their commodities worldwide, always adding a touch of a local flavour to the product, to improve the prospects of marketing it within a local context. For me, this process is a very good metaphor for what is happening with the big international biennials. The same "flavour" is to be found anywhere — it just needs to be branded — and linked to the global cultural economy.

There is mostly some minor local flavour but these biennials are all, basically, large-scale events, in which the art market has a major presence. No wonder that big art events attract sponsorship from multinational companies. It was not the curator, Dan Cameron, who presided over the inaugural press conference at the opening of the last but one Istanbul Biennial, but a representative of a Japanese tobacco company! Of course, there is more to it than that, and it is not only the art market that initiates big events, like biennials, in different cities around the globe, but there must be a connection with the local structures that are willing to support these biennials.

The process described above could be regarded as an example of cultural homogenization, but then it should be noted that a process of cultural heterogenisation – the acknowledgement of cultural differences goes on at the same time. This tendency has a genealogy extending onwards from the exhibition *Les Magiciens de la terre*, in 1989, to its peak at Documenta 11, in 2002.

Here I would note that after the colonising gaze of the Western countries, post-colonial discourse and emancipation, we are witnessing the most recent, and most sophisticated tendency in the global cultural economy to explore local ethnicities and cultural specificities. The logic of multinational companies that I was describing in the sphere of visual arts is exemplified by the globally understood requirements of the art market, that the artistic language, media and visual articulation of the artworks conform to recognisable, and acceptable, (Western) standards and, still more importantly, that the content, topic and subject relate to local ethno-cultural habits and tradition, to folklore, and to local anthropological distinctiveness.

The same phenomena can be observed, not just in the visual arts, but in many cultural disciplines, such as music (world music), cinema (viz the boom in small national film industries in the nineties), through which we can trace a similar exploration of 'world art' or, as we might choose to call it, "ethno-cultural global art".

Does this mean that all local cultures should reproduce the Western art system, foster global art market and indulge global artistic celebrities? No! On the contrary, as we said before, what could be at stake is a process of grassroots globalisation in the cultural field, and the incorporation and contextualisation of a variety of different histories of art. We could, therefore, argue that the globalisation of culture should not be understood merely as homogenisation, but, on the contrary, as the interrelation between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation, which, as we have noted, is beginning to emerge as one of the key issues of global interaction, in our time.

We should be constantly seeking to demonstrate that the "genealogies" of modern art in different regions of the world are not necessarily the same as in Western European countries. The history of art that was in the period of Cold War "normatively" presented to us was almost entirely based on readings of its development in the Western world, at the

price of neglecting the developments in for example Eastern Europe, or sometimes including them, as marginal offshoots to the prevailing movements and "–isms" of the time. This was reinforced by the "self-marginalising" cultures that did not try to "produce" their own art history and inscribe it into a wider context, as a global asset, but tried to copy the existing models of analyses. Here I would fully agree with the group IRWIN, from Slovenia, with their *East Art Map* project, that the art history of, in their case, East Europe has to be "produced", and written. For this purpose, we also need to map, document, analyse and interpret all the important initiatives emanating from different regions of the world.

THE REWRITING OF ART HISTORY AS ART: MAPPING THE "EAST"

LOUISA AVGITA

Louisa Avgita is an art historian and art theorist based in Thessaloniki, Greece. She holds an M.A. in Art History, from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, an M.A. in Art Criticism and Management, from City University London, and is currently working for her Ph.D at the Department of Cultural Policy and Management, City University London. Her research centers on the criticism of multiculturalism and the discourse on cultural identity, with special emphasis on issues of globalized capitalism, ideology and the politics of representation and display in the visual arts, with a special area study of the Balkans. She co-edited a special issue, entitled *Balkans*, of the March 2007 edition of the journal *Third Text*.

Paper presented at the international seminar "Art History on the Disciplinary Map in East-Central Europe", organized by The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamston MA, in collaboration with Masaryk University and the Moravian Gallery, Brno, November 18-19, 2010

In the last decades, alternative to art history narrations of the past have been extensively presented in curatorial projects which show art from geographical and cultural margins.[1] The increasing role of criticism, theory and curating in the field of visual arts has put under question art history and its methods which have been criticised for their authoritative character: the West-centred structure and scope of the established art history, with its linear and "objective" perception of time has been widely considered by art theorists, curators and artists alike to exclude marginal histories and alternative understandings of the past.[2] The substitution of History with plural histories is sustained by the very rationale of temporary art exhibitions which construct multiple and often contradictory meanings about a topic, all substantiated by the curator and the institution. The exhibitions, as constellations of meanings, provide a completely different model of narration: the exhibition space suggests a reading of the past through the present, and reconsiders the linearity of art history by synchronising the past with the present. However, the question is whether these alternative perspectives on art history can work against dominant institutional mechanisms and whether they can actually be as anti-authoritative discourses as they claim to be.

The projects examined in this paper, namely, *Retroavantgarde* (2000) and *East Art Map* (2002) by the Slovenian art group Irwin, have been presented in the context of exhibitions about the Balkans, such as *In Search of Balkania* (Graz, 2002), *Blood and Honey: the Future's in the Balkans!* (Vienna, 2003) and *In the Gorges of the Balkans: A Report*, (Kassel, 2003). In these projects, Irwin use methods such as the retro-principle and overidentification in order to elaborate their perspective on Eastern European Modernism, not just as supplementary to the Western dominant art history but as an altogether different approach to history. My purpose is to examine the projects in the context of curatorial narrations and critically address its methods which concern the re-writing of art history as artwork and the presentation of art history as curated object. In this framework, I discuss questions regarding the position and role of such alternative discourses within the dominant institutional context.

The project *East Art Map* is a response to both postmodern particularism and scarce personalised historicity, as well as to old and new discourses of Western truth. Irwin is the visual arts department of the artists' collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) which was founded in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 1984, also including the music group Laibach, the Theatre of Sisters of Scipio Nasica (renamed Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung) and the design group New Collectivism. NSK was formulated in the context of the alternative underground scene that emerged in Slovenia in the 1980s and developed its methods and

[1] Exhibitions such as the groundbreaking *Les Magiciens de la terre*, "the first truly international exhibition of contemporary art" (Michaud, 1989: 17) curated in 1989 by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, curated also in 1989 by Rasheed Araeen at the Hayward Gallery in London, inaugurated a series of "identity" exhibitions (Greenberg, 2005) which attempted to reconsider the Western modernist narratives of non-Western cultures and discuss marginality and otherness from a post-colonial perspective.

[2] Biennials and other perennial exhibitions and temporary shows have been organised around issues of cultural multiplicity and plural narratives of the past. *Documenta XI*, curated by Okwui Enwezor in 2002, signalled an exterritorial shift of the West-centric Documenta art towards non-Western cultures, raising issues of postcolonialism and globalisation (Downey, 2003). Enwezor (2008: 232) aimed to reconsider established linear art history and introduced the concept of "postcolonial constellation" in order to define "the site for the expansion of the definition of what constitutes contemporary culture and its affiliations in other domains

works according to the so-called "retro-principle", defined in Irwin's Manifesto 1984 not as a style or art trend but rather as a "conceptual principle, a particular way to behave and act" (Petresin-Bachelez, 2010). NSK develops in time, moving forward to the future by constantly referring to the past.

The discourse elaborated by NSK/Irwin, as well as by other artists from former Yugoslavia, like Mladen Stilinovic and the 1980s Malevich, was described in the 1990s by the curator Peter Weibel with the name "Retroavantgarde" (Grzinic, 2000: 41). Irwin adopted this name in an exhibition they organised under the same title in Ljubljana, in 1994. Retroavantgarde has been formed as the ideological artistic strategy of post-socialism. According to Conover and Cufer (2002: 67-68), Retroavantgarde

> is a complex artistic statement reflecting on the absence of a stable historic narrative on modern and contemporary art in Slovenia, Yugoslavia and in Eastern Europe in general. The artistic achievement of these places never managed to become a part of the Western canon, or even develop its own consistent metanarrative.

The project *Retroavantgarde* (2000) is an installation which includes works by various artists (Dimitrije Basicevic Mangelos, August Cernigoj, Braco Dimitrijević, Laibach, Kazimir Malevich from Belgrade[3], Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, Josip Seissel, Mladen Stilinović). The theoretician Marina Grzinic also participates in the project. The works are arranged on a tableau which positions them on a chronological chart and suggests the connections between them. This project addresses the gap in the art history regarding modern and contemporary art from former Yugoslavia. *Retroavantgarde* has been defined as "a strategy of mapping the history of the Yugoslav avant-garde from present to past, from Irwin to Zenitism" (Conover and Cufer, 2002: 68). The project *East Art Map* (2002) comes immediately after *Retroavantgarde*. It is a project of larger scale which uses the same strategy of "Retroavantgarde" in order to map the modern and contemporary art from former socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

This project is structured in two parts: *East Art Map I* was developed in 2001-2 and aimed to the production of a plan in which Eastern European post-war artists were presented in a unified scheme that indicates their interrelations. The selection was made by twenty-four critics, museum directors and artists who proposed ten artists from their respective countries. The map is organised both in chronological terms as well as in art movements, such as Moscow Conceptualism, Anonymous Authorship, Retroavantgarde, Sots Art.

The second part, *East Art Map II*, consists of a website, research in conjunction with a network of universities, research and reflection by experts on the relationship between Eastern and Western art production, and the exhibition *East Art Museum*. The website (www.eastartmap.org) opens up the process of the construction of the map to the public, enabling the visitors to propose additions to or substitutions of the already proposed artists. A network of universities has been initiated with the project *Mind the Map! History is not Given* under the leadership of Marina Grzinic from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and Günther Heeg and Veronika Darian from the Institute of Theatre Studies, University of Leipzig. The network aims to politicise and contextualise art history, to analyse and question the structures of art history and theory production, and to develop strategies of resistance against the capitalist mechanisms that control contemporary art (Grzinic, 2006b: 19). The methods and approaches for the politicisation of Eastern Art are distinctive. Misko Suvakovic (2006: 157) describes the different theoretical backgrounds and schools that met up in the symposium, indicating that

> Eastern European art and theory have grown out of a complex and often controversial inter-relating of traditional art sciences (art history, aesthetics, art critique, as well as the studies of theatre and film) with the interpretative

of practice", as well as "the intersection of historical forces aligned against the hegemonic imperatives of imperial discourse."

[3] Kazimir Malevich from Belgrade is an anonymous artist who signs using the name of the famous Suprematist Russian artist of the beginning of the 20th century. He appeared in 1985 in Belgrade and in 1986 in Ljubljana with the exhibition *The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10 (zero-ten)*, a reconstruction of the exhibition with the same title staged by the original Malevich in St Petersburg between 1915 and 1916 (Grzinic, 2000: 89).

> reception of contemporary critical discourses, from post-structuralism and studies of culture to bio-politics.

In the context of the research on the relation between Eastern and Western Art, Irwin asked experts from both East and West to contribute with texts on particular issues that reflect this relation. The texts are published in the second part of the book *East Art Map*; the first part presents the artists selected by the invited curators, as appeared in the map. The authors of *East Art Map* comment on specific topics related to art history in Eastern Europe, attempting a reconstruction of Western art history by politicising its discourse. Finally, the exhibition *East Art Museum* curated by Michael Fehr and Irwin was organised in 2005 at the Karl Ernst Osthaus – Museum Hagen and included about fifty works by a variety of artists from countries chosen from *East Art Map*.

The strategy of NSK/Irwin is to appropriate elements and motifs of the historical avant-gardes in conjunction with direct references to the art and aesthetics of totalitarian regimes, such as Nazism or Stalinism. The artists do not intend to simply criticise the ruling ideology and institutions in both East and West by creating a distance from them; they rather apply the tactics of overidentification or subversive affirmation (Arns and Sasse, 2006) which constituted common practice among artists in socialist times. According to these tactics, NSK replicates dominant structures and discourses, and appropriate symbols and methods that belong to the state and its institutions, excessively identifying themselves with them in order to shed light on their hidden mechanisms and expose their authoritative character to all its extent. According to Slavoj Zizek (Arns and Sasse, 2006: 448), who elaborated on the concept of overidentification drawing from Lacan, what dominant ideology mostly fears is "excessive identification […]: the Enemy is the 'fanatic' who 'over-identifies' instead of keeping an adequate distance". The power system depends its function on covert and censored mechanisms that cease to be effective when they are exposed. What their revelation actually does is the immediate politicisation of the a-political, disavowed, naturalised mechanisms and conditions.

Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse (2006: 444) claim that overidentification and subversive affirmation were methods extensively used during socialism out of necessity, because direct criticism was not possible. However, Ales Erjavec (2003: 10) mentions that these methods of political critique were introduced in many Eastern European countries in the period of late socialism, when totalitarianism and repression were in decline, and the socialist regimes were in the process of transformation, as they were unable to legitimise themselves. In this period, many artists introduced an art which

> consisted of the use of mimicry, of conscious and complete identification of the secondary discourse with the ideological discourse, thus paradoxically revealing the inconsistencies of the latter, the voids in its purportedly impregnable discursive armor, and especially its ideological nature (Erjavec, 2003: 10).

Is overidentification, then, part of the East or part of the West? Is it a reaction to socialism or a strategy of resistance elaborated on the ground of transition from socialism to capitalism? According to Erjavec (2003: 10), what he calls "national socialisms", that is the variations of socialism encountered in the countries of the socialist East, were nothing more than attempts to overcome the political and economic stagnation of socialism and to elaborate reforms for viable societies. Is overidentification, then, an Eastern or a Western strategy?

Of course, there is no doubt that there is a particular historical context and common experiences and conditions were generated both in socialist and post-socialist times, unifying Eastern Europe in a particular and distinctive social, political and artistic space. Although Arns and Sasse (2006: 444) consider overidentification as a site-specific

method which was elaborated within the particular cultural and social environment of socialist totalitarianism, they claim that this method is also the ideal form of resistance against the levelling attitude of "everything goes" within contemporary global capitalism:

> While in the context of openly repressive systems there were very narrow limits on what could and what could not be said, today we are confronted with a situation where everything (and thus nothing) can be said. The culture industry manages to co-opt and appropriate even the most critical viewpoints and render them ineffective. In both contexts, critical distance (an "outside") proves to be an impossible or inadequate position. In this situation brought about by the strategy of total recovery and appropriation of critical viewpoints by the dominant political and economic system is rather the vital stealth tactics of subversive affirmation that still seem to hold a potential for resistance.

What about *Retroavantgarde* and *East Art Map* then? Are they projects of overidentification in which Irwin openly and consciously demonstrate a process of the construction of art history, aiming to expose the arbitrariness of the official Western and socialist historiography – and of all historiographies for that matter, including contemporary relativist multiple histories of various "others"? Or, are they attempts for constructing an alternative art history, written in democratic and participatory terms, suggesting "a way of perceiving the (new) avant-garde movement not simply as the space of (disturbing) Otherness, but as the Other space", as stated by Grzinic (2006a: 486)? For Grzinic, contrary to postmodern, postcolonial depoliticisation and neutrality, Irwin construct the post-socialist space in which time and history are perceived in political terms. How, then, can we define the role of *East Art Map* in the contemporary setting of postmodern appropriation? Slavoj Zizek (1994: 71-72) replies to the reservations concerning the real meaning of Laibach's performances – "What if they really mean it? What if they truly identify with the totalitarian ritual?" – arguing that we should not search for an affirmative answer because "Laibach themselves function not as an answer but as a question". Before we examine how this question works within the context of the exhibitions on the Balkans, we will explore the concept of *East Art Map*.

The geographical designation which refers to former socialist countries of Eastern Europe brings up some questions regarding its meaning and its theoretical justification. Why do we need to maintain the geographical scheme of West and East in a project that claims to criticise and deconstruct the authoritative construction of Western art history? Why should our alternative perspective on art history be designated in geographical terms? Why *East* Art Map? Irwin and other participants in *East Art Map* indicate the need for mapping out the art from Eastern Europe, narrating its history and tracing the relationship between Western and Eastern art production. As Irwin say, in Eastern Europe there were no transparent structures that would enable the writing of an art history of the region; there were only national historiographies subjected to local needs. Irwin (2006: 12), thus, designate the aim of the project as follows:

> The aim of *East Art Map* (EAM) is to present art from the whole space of Eastern Europe, taking artists out of their national frameworks and presenting them in a unified scheme. We do not seek to establish some ultimate truth; on the contrary, our aims are much more modest and, we hope, more practical: to organise the fundamental relationships between Eastern European artists where these relations have not been organised, to draw a map and create a table.

The need for drawing *East Art Map* has been dictated by the exclusion of artistic events, artworks and movements of Eastern Europe from the official narratives of both socialist regimes and of the West. According to Eda Cufer (2006: 375), Western art historiography

of the 20th century included only those "outsiders" who left the East and worked within the Western system of galleries and art market, like Marina Abramovic and Branco Dimitrijevic. Furthermore, as Boris Groys (2006: 406) indicates, the lack of an art market in the Soviet Union positions Soviet art outside the Western system of evaluation and, thus, outside Western art history.

The retro-principle plays a role here, as a methodology which examines the art of the past not as part of a linear progressive perspective but through the eyes of the present. The contemporaneity of the past is discussed by Foucault (1977: 30-31), who uses the concept of the "history of the present" to describe the need for a narrative of the past that would involve the perspective of the present. Along the same lines, Zizek argues for a history that "is filled with the presence of the now", as Benjamin has claimed (Zizek, 1989: 156). The narrative of discontinuities in historical materialism opposes the linearity of official historiography.

In *East Art Map* the contemporisation of the past is apparent in the very form of the project: the map spatialises and visualises art history, turning it into a tangible object, into an artwork. This development of history in space constitutes a response to the universalisation of Western modernism as manifested in the chart created in 1936 by the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York Alfred Barr, for the catalogue of the landmark exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. This chart, in which Barr featured the time line of the development of modern art, has been severely criticised, especially in the context of postcolonial discourse, for its purely Western character and the exclusion of modernisms from other parts of the world. The authoritative character of the map constitutes a very visible proof of how art history is naturalised and the Western narrative of modernism universalised.

In her book *The Power of Maps*, Denis Wood (1992) describes the way that maps reproduce the cultures that bring them into being by selecting elements of the past and projecting them into the present. According to her (Wood, 1992: 2),

> the conservative forces, whose end is social reproduction in general (and, let us face it, the position of those dominant in it) and the transformative forces, attendant to the interests of this or that particular class or industry or part of the country, conspire to mask their interest, conspire to naturalise this product of so much cultural energy.

Irwin (2006: 12) opposes the naturalisation process of mapping by stating that *East Art Map* is a construction which does not aim to "establish some ultimate truth". The title of the symposium organised by the network of universities participating in the project was also indicative of that: *Mind the Map: History is not Given*.

With reference to the method of overidentification, we can say that Irwin expose the authoritative and arbitrary character of art history as produced by Western discourse. A similar process of overidentification is taking place in *East Art Museum*. The curator of the exhibition Michael Fehr (2006: 471) explains:

> The *East Art Museum* is to be understood as a reflection on the concept of art history as embodied by MOMA. In this, art is seen as a permanent process of innovation driven by individual developments, and the related claim of comprehensiveness, to covering all of modern art history. The critical engagement with the East European MOMA will take place by way of its radical affirmation in an attempt to copy the successful concept for use with East Art. The necessary failure of this attempt will reveal that MOMA does not present a universal model for understanding modern art, but that its success is due to a specific historical situation, in terms of both its holdings as well as the founding of the museum.

Is then *East Art Map* aiming to fail as a "democratic" process of art history construction in order to expose – in a gesture of subversive affirmation – the authoritarianism of naturalised Western art histories, but also of the supposed open histories of multiple modernisms narrated in the context of postmodern multiculturalism? Or, is it aiming to succeed as a construction of a politically activated space of Eastern art history, in which East is the Other space, as Gržinić claims?

In addressing the signification of *East Art Map* and *Retroavantgarde* we should not forget the fact that these are artistic projects which curate art history from Eastern Europe in their installations and related publications, as well as in the *East Art Map* website and the *Eastern Museum of Modern Art*; this curated art history is an artwork which has been itself curated in the context of many exhibitions – among them, *In Search of Balkania*, *Blood and Honey* and *In the Gorges of the Balkans* which are examined here. The arrangement of art history in space that *East Art Map* and *Retroavantgarde* undertake takes place in a highly charged institutional framework.

The above mentioned exhibitions have been the most acclaimed and documented exhibitions among those organised around the topic of the Balkans. They were organised in Central European countries (Austria and Germany) and were strongly related to the politics and the cultural profile of the host countries as well as with their indented political and economic role in the Balkans after the collapse of the socialist regimes. Due to the internationally acclaimed curators involved, the institutional framework, the high number of participations from all Balkan countries, the extended publicity and the criticism they received, these projects are considered as the most distinguished Balkan exhibitions.

In Search of Balkania was organised in 2002 at the Neue Galerie of Graz (Austria) and was curated by Roger Conover, Eda Cufer and Peter Weibel. It is considered as the first big scale exhibition about the Balkans that took place in Europe, and initiated the "Balkan trend" in visual arts. *In Search of Balkania* lies between the real and the virtual, the present and the future. The three curators express the need, for the construction – or reconstruction – of a symbolic space of flexibility and multiplicity, in which the consolidated, imposing identities of the Balkans are reconsidered or dissolved. The identity of the symbolic geography of Balkania is defined in opposition to the identity of reality that intends to replace. Thus, the rigidity of the real past is being replaced by the fluidity of the virtual future.

The curators' main objective is the re-evaluation of the Balkan stereotypes and the abandonment of the prejudices attached to them. For the curators, the exhibition shapes the Balkans in the form of the multiple metaphoric spaces of Balkania which can be applied to all cultures and countries. The Balkanic spaces of the exhibition include such diverse topics and art expressions as avant-garde and banality, kitsch and folklore. The concept of Balkania as it is used in the exhibition is based on the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia. The curators relate Balkania to the metaphoric space of heterotopias and the continuous movement of a journey. The exhibition employed the structure and atmosphere of the Balkan flea markets, which are considered by the curators to be the heterotopic spaces of Balkania.

The official historiography of the Balkans, as well as Balkan customs, traditions and rituals that have been built in the course of time and compose the Balkan identity, are re-evaluated within the spaces of Balkania which, according to Foucault's (1986: 26) definition of "heterotopia", do not exist in "traditional time". History floats in the a-historical heterotopic Balkania which becomes part of the new "humanitarian" profile of the West. In this context, Irwin's retro-principle in *Retroavantgarde* disrupts conventional time, constituting yet another heterotopic space, together with traditional narratives and Balkan open markets. In this way, Irwin's project becomes part of the heterotopic dehistoricisation of the Balkans and its systematic exoticisation in the spaces of Balkania.

The exhibition *Blood and Honey: the Future's in the Balkans!*, curated by Harald Szeemann took place in 2003 at the Sammlung Essl Kunst der Gegenwart, the gallery space of the Essl family's contemporary art collection.[4] According to Szeemann (2004: 26), the title reflects the two oppositional poles that characterise the Balkan experience: anger and tenderness, disaster and idyll, "something deeply human and universal". This description corresponds to Balkan ambiguity which characterises the standardised images of Balkanism, according to Maria Todorova (1997: 18).

Blood and Honey was among the exhibitions on the Balkans with the highest number of participants, 73 contemporary artists and 33 artists from the mid-16th century to the 1980s. The works of the second group of artists has a mainly informative, rather than an artistic role, especially since the emphasis is put on their content and connotations rather than on the artists. The curator aims with these works to create a certain atmosphere that could provide the historical and social context for the reading of the contemporary artworks. Most of these works refer to the nationalistic, authoritarian, cruel Balkan past in order to sustain the first part of what the authentic Balkans, according to the title of the exhibition, consists of: "Blood". Accordingly, we encounter a 16th century painting of Vlad IV Tzepesch, or Vlad the Impaler, Prince of Wallachia (now in Romania), most widely known as Dracula.[5] There is also the hearse of the Archduke of Austria Franz Ferdinand[6], as well as a poster of the Greek actress Melina Mercouri and a painting of Romanticism style by Agim Zajmi, made in 1978[7]. The sculptures of socialist realism, which had been previously presented at the exhibition *Homo Socialisticus* in Tirana (1999), represent the authoritarianism of the socialist period and its committed art.

All these works constitute points of reference for the understanding of the contemporary artworks – but mainly for the development of a certain kind of awareness about the Balkans: the stereotypical Balkans of blood and honey. The images of Balkanism are reconstructed in the brutal image of Dracula; the bloodstained hearse of Franz Ferdinand; the birth of Balkan nationalism; the authoritarianism and despotism manifested in socialist realism; and the charm of the Balkan essence.[8] In this narrative, the Balkans has a consistent history of nationalisms and authoritarian ideologies. Thus, although Szeemann (2004: 26) declares that the exhibition is "not a matter of displaying exotica, but of awakening Western sensitivity to the existence of this cultural landscape", it seems that his curatorial choices do not allow for an approach liberated from stereotypes; on the contrary, the images that the curator uses in order to awaken Western sensitivity to the Balkan culture are all exoticised: even the brutal images of Balkan barbarism become exotic fragments of the past, in a period that the Balkans is in the process of transition to Europe. The Balkan profile he composes through the artworks is a mixture of tradition, old customs, folk, religion, war, and authoritarian symbols on the one hand, and Eastern European avant-garde, as well as "Westernised" conceptual art on the other. *East Art Map* becomes part of this curatorial narrative, adding to the exoticised Balkan avant-garde and the stereotypical narrative of Szeemann. In this curatorial context, the alternative post-socialist perspective on history elaborated by Irwin is juxtaposed to the authoritative narrations of nationalism and socialism, represented mainly by the second group of artworks described above, justifying thus the new, "democratic" profile of the Balkans. The transition from the socialist past to the capitalist future is positively delineated in the exhibition catalogue, and particularly so by Erhard Busek, the Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.[9]

Busek's catalogue text mixes elements of the discourse of multiculturalism and postcolonial tolerance towards otherness with the neoliberal and neo-colonial aspirations of the European policy propounded by the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, an international institution which aims to the stability in the Balkans and the integration of Balkan countries into the capitalist global structures. Busek (2004: 43) claims that Balkan

[4] The gallery is situated at Klosterneuburg, a suburb of Vienna to the North.

[5] Vlad was known for his resistance against the Ottomans and his cruelty turned him into a myth.

[6] The Archduke of Austria Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by the Serb-Bosnian anarchist Gavrilo Princip in 1914, an event which is considered to have sparked the First World War.

[7] The painting represents the raising of the flag in Decic in 1911, an event which signalled Albania's independence from the Ottomans.

[8] The poster of the film "Phaedra" shown in the exhibition is accompanied by the following text: "More than any other Greek artist Melina Mercouri embodies the temperament and sensuality of her country" (Szeemann, 2004: 21).

[9] The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, launched in 1999, was an initiative of the EU, supported, among others, by the UN, NATO, the IMF and the World Bank which "aimed at strengthening the efforts of the countries of South Eastern Europe in fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity" (stabilitypact.org, 2010). Its main objectives were stability in the region and integration of the former socialist countries into "European and Euro-Atlantic structures" (stabilitypact.org, 2010). The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe has been actively involved in the organisation of some of the exhibitions realised in Europe around the topic of the Balkans, a fact which suggests the connection of art and culture with the political and economic interests of the capitalist establishement in the region.

difference enriches European diversity: "we must shape the face of Europe, learn how to live with 'otherness', for diversity is the truly exiting element on our continent". For Busek, the rewriting of history is a priority. One of the ten attitudes that need to be altered so that the fate of the Balkans will change is the approach of the past. The unilateral interpretation of history and the intolerance towards religions that prevailed in the years of communism need to be replace by multicultural openness and the understanding of the other; these will be achieved through the rewriting of textbooks and dialogue (Busek, 2004: 42). Under this perspective, *East Art Map* becomes part of Busek's project of rewriting history. However, his idea about history reproduces old depoliticised Eurocentric considerations: The recent wars are perceived as "a kind of historical 'catching up' with the nationalisms that we in the West and centre of Europe have already gone through" (Busek, 2004: 41). Busek's declared Europeanness justifies even colonialism as a manifestation of an excessive form of European curiosity; as he says, "...this continent has always been open and never self-contained. Sometimes it was aggressive, as in the times of Colonialism, but it was always curious" (Busek, 2004: 43). In this context, *East Art Map*'s open, alternative history becomes part of the neo-colonial plans of post-socialist European "curiosity", expressed by institutions such as the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The exhibition *In the Gorges of the Balkans: A Report* was the third in the row of the three big Balkan exhibitions curated by international curators, and – inevitably – responded to the two preceding ones. It was part of the series of events *Balkan Trilogy* which took place in various Balkan cities in a two-year period (2003-2004); the exhibition was organised by the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel in 2003.

René Block (Block, 2003: 7) delineates the concept of the exhibition in the catalogue by contrasting it to the geographically defined exhibitions which focus on non-artistic issues. Unlike them, *In the Gorges of the Balkans* intends primarily to provide a "neutral" platform for the expression of the artists – "a stage on which artists can articulate themselves" (Block, 2003: 7) – as well as for the presentation, communication and promotion of the unknown or misrepresented art scene of the Balkan countries. Block makes apparent the genuine, first-hand experience of the Balkans offered in his exhibition by adding in the title the specification "A Report". By doing so, the curator underlines the authentic and "objective" character of his narration, as well as distances himself from the subjective, biased approach of the previous curatorial representations of the Balkans. In his catalogue interview, Block (Block, 2003: 7) suggests that the title of the exhibition clearly delineates his "neutrality": "By choosing this title I wanted to highlight once again that there is so much to report from these journeys. Although it is not me who is reporting, but the artists themselves. Their works will render my words superfluous. I am not conjuring a vision of the Balkans... and I have refrained deliberately from making any interpretations". Despite his claimed differentiation, Block, like the curators of the two previous big Balkan exhibitions, mingles history and myths in order to produce his own Balkan profile.

Block chooses to open the exhibition with a symbol which belongs to the "Balkan approach" to history, namely, the photo of the monument to Gavrilo Princip, the Serb-Bosnian anarchist who assassinated the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914.[10] By doing so, he endeavours to confirm the neutrality of his Western gaze, in opposition to Szeemann, who had chosen to open his exhibition with the original hearse of the Archduke. In contrast to *Blood and Honey*, the storytelling about the Balkans of *In the Gorges of the Balkans* is claimed to be made by the people of the region and not by the West, in an attempt to remove the guilt related to the stereotypical discourse of Balkanism from the latter's shoulders; the curatorial concept grants neutrality and objectivity to the Western part and the feeling of sovereignty over themselves to the

[10] This monument was made by Vojo Dimitrijevic in Sarajevo in 1949 to commemorate the event and was destroyed during the war in Bosnia in the 1990s. Dimitrijevic used Princip's original shoes to make his footprints in the pavement where the event took place, using an original photo of the event to reconstruct the positioning of the shoes.

Balkanians. In this context, *East Art Map* is for Block one more indication of his neutrality, alongside with Princip's monument: the Balkanians write their own art history themselves, without any interference from the curator; the institutions become invisible.

In the context of the exhibitions, *East Art Map* can be easily perceived as a manifestation of Balkan excessive impulsiveness or as a sign of the Balkan obsession with history and politics. *Retroavantgarde* disrupts conventional historical time and provides the curators of *In Search of Balkania* with yet another heterotopic space in the a-historical exotic Balkania, together with traditional narratives and Balkan open markets. *East Art Map* also provides Szeemann and Busek with a paradigm of rewritten history which verifies the tolerant character of Europe, while adding to the exoticised Balkan avant-garde and the stereotypical narrative of Szeemann. On the other hand, *East Art Map* verifies and justifies Block's supposed impartiality, as long as it suggests that, finally, the Balkanians speak for themselves.

One of the exhibitions' objectives was to overthrow the authoritative character of History as a Westernised structure that has imposed an idea of progressivity, excluding the histories of minorities. The curatorial discourses suggest flexible and incongruent Balkan identities which appear to be protected from their institutional framework, despite the fact that this framework is strongly and explicitly there: in *Blood and Honey*, the directives of Busek in the exhibition catalogue do not allow for any misunderstandings. In the curatorial context, history is disjoined and dilapidated, whereas selected historical references are mingled with myths in order to support vague concepts of Balkanness. The historical moment in which these exhibitions are taking place is not taken into consideration. Balkan identities are displayed in "neutral" exhibition spaces which only selectively incorporate the social and political environment, without any binding to truthfulness or historiographical commitment.

What is the meaning of *East Art Map* in the context of these exhibitions? Seen through the perspective of overidentification, we could probably assert that *East Art Map* exposes the arbitrariness of the concept of the Balkans and the impossibility of the curator's neutrality. *East Art Map* constructs its own space within the space of the exhibition, copies the implemented methods of selection, verifies the constructed character of history, and reveals that the choice of a curator is always political and never neutral.

However, overidentification, due to its indirect character, has rather ambiguous significations. This is evident in the case of Irwin: the endorsement of Nazi and totalitarian symbols in their work can be easily interpreted as a sign of Slovenian nationalism and superiority over the rest of the Yugoslav people, particularly in the crucial and agitated period around the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Toma Longinovic (2001) has addressed such criticism against both the NSK and Zizek. Arns (2002), in her response to Longinovic underlines that NSK's critical position against totalitarianism does not form a comment on the barbaric Serbs but addresses totalitarianism as a universal phenomenon. However, this statement opposes Irwin's main objective of contextualising and politicising history: if NSK's work is seen in the particular social and political context of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, then their criticism against universal totalitarianism is charged with a signification that allows for Longinovic's position.

This ambiguity which characterises overidentification with regard to its meaning as a strategy of resistance, undermines its political and revolutionary character. Sean Homer (2009) also questions the effectiveness of overidentification in his response to Zizek's severe criticism against Kusturica's film *Underground*. Homer (2009) finds this method problematic, because "what one critic (Gocic) can take to be the ironic overidentification with Western stereotypes and myths, another (Zizek) takes to be the unconscious ideological fantasy of the director. How one is to distinguish between the two remains

unclear." Besides, nothing can make the strategy of overidentification immune to the assimilating competence of capitalism. If it is true that today "everything (and thus nothing) can be said", then ambiguous overidentification can certainly be among them.

As an art installation and curated object, art history – and history in general – becomes a private matter. According to Groys (2009: 60), an installation designates the sovereign space of the artist which is under his/her control: in an installation, the selection and mode of representation "is based exclusively on his or her personal sovereign decision that is in no need of any further explanation or justification". The visitors of the installation are subjected to the authority of the artist, "even and maybe especially so if the law that is given by the artist to the community of visitors is a democratic law" (Groys, 2009: 62). In this sense, *East Art Map*, presented as an art installation in the exhibition space, reinforces the idea that art history is an authoritative construction. However, if art historiography is unjustified and free from any commitment to truth, it becomes privatised and copyrighted, one product among others in the market of personal mythologies.

Irwin in their projects reproduce – rather than deconstruct – the bipolarity of the "West" and the "East" and, therefore, the logic that sustains the essentialisation of these concepts. Commenting on postcolonial theory and the contribution of anti-Eurocentric ideas in the bracketing, displacement and euphimisation of the capitalist social relations, Neil Lazarus (2002: 54), suggests that "[o]ne cannot hope to displace or overturn Eurocentric reason by inversion, not least since such a strategy merely replicates, rather than challenges, the thoroughgoing essentialism of the dominant optic". I therefore contend that the contradistinction of "Eastern" or "Balkan" particularity and "Europe" or "the West" sets a framework of analysis that maintains rather than undermines Eurocentric thought, insofar as it ignores the material basis of capitalism that sustains Eurocentrism. As I suggested above, whether as overdetermination or as alternative Other space, *East Art Map* becomes part of the dominant institutional mechanisms that confirm the logic of neoliberal capitalism.

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RE-DRAWING THE ART MAP OF "NEW EUROPE"

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Notwithstanding the long asserted crisis of the legitimacy of metanarratives, the "battle" of the narratives for Europe is still being fought on all fronts. Whereas the problems of reconstructing and rewriting the recent histories of Central and Eastern Europe have been exhaustively examined by historians and social scientists, the shifting art-historical interpretations of the visual arts of the "other" Europe have until recently escaped an in-depth scrutiny. Moreover, in spite of Arthur Danto's infamous end-of-art thesis, entailing the end of art history too, narratives about the art of Europe's former East have been proliferating since 1989. The newly written art narratives of Central and Eastern Europe, however, have been caught in a peculiar ontological trap. On the one hand, Central and East European art evokes the history of this part of Europe; on the other hand, the history of Central and East European art itself has been largely shaped by the Cold War and ideologies. Groping for a way out of this trap, the emancipatory quest for new narratives about Central and East European art has become further enmeshed in a complex web of predicaments.

Whereas the most immediate reaction of Eastern curators after the fall of the Berlin Wall was to try to accommodate Central and East European art into the master narrative of universalist Western art history by emphasizing similarities and parallel artistic developments, the opposite strategy was to accentuate on local and regional contexts, on the plurality and distinctiveness of Central and East European art, by highlighting the incomparability between the artistic processes on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Taken a step further, the latter approach towards a "horizontal, polyphonic, and dynamic paradigm of critical art-historical analysis",[1] privileging comparative and transnational examination of local canons and value systems, along with their stylistic variations and mutations, situated in the context of diverging historical processes and political circumstances in the individual countries of the former Eastern Bloc, eventually faced the risk of dissolving any narrative structure at all.

This essay looks into the curatorial narratives underpinning the exhibitions of modern and contemporary, socialist and post-communist, visual art from Central and Eastern Europe, put on display after 1989 in different parts of the world. Positing that these exhibitions may be examined as powerful tools for remapping the art geography of "united" post-Cold War Europe, I have tried to single out a set of master narratives that have been recurrently brought into play.[2]

Why deal with **exhibitions** in the first place? The importance of exhibitions as the medium through which most contemporary art becomes known and its cultural meanings are established and administered has been widely acknowledged. As Reesa Greenberg,

[1] Piotrowski 2008, 4.

[2] This essay is based on research carried out during my stay as a Körber Junior Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna from January to June 2007.

Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, editors of the *Thinking About Exhibitions* anthology, maintain, "[e]xhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed."[3] Writing about exhibitions and their curatorial concepts rather than the works of art within them is further justified by Boris Groys' claim that "the traditional, sovereign authorship of an individual artist"[4] has been replaced by a new regime of authorship – that of multiple authorship, co-shared by artist, curator, gallerist, and funding institution. Under this new regime of authorship, the elementary unit of art today is no longer an artwork as object but, as Groys claims, an art space in which an object is exhibited: the space of an exhibition. Consequently, artists are no longer judged by the objects they have produced but by the exhibitions and projects in which they have participated.

The **curator** appeared as a completely new figure on the Eastern and Central European art scene in the post-communist transition period. Although it was usually the art critics, art historians and sometimes artists, who took up this position, they were gradually to adapt to an essentially new system of art production and art presentation while developing this system at the same time. Paradoxically, the curator, a figure that is admittedly a product of the (Western) contemporary art system, happened to be a "curator without a system" in the Eastern part of Europe, as Viktor Misiano argued.[5] The power of the curator in the East, however, extended beyond that of constructing intellectual, aesthetic, and practical context for the presentation of art. The lack of an adequate art system turned the new-born East European curator into a one-person orchestra, a "multifunctional mediator", as Iara Boubnova put it, for he/she had to take up tasks, usually performed by a whole array of institutions in the West.

Post-colonialist narratives

Apart from institutional hindrances, the task of curating the art of Central and Eastern Europe has been burdened with the power-bound tensions between the East and the West in the course and in the wake of the Cold War, evoking justified, even if not unproblematic, post-colonialist parallels.

The first shows exhibiting the art of the European East to the West were primarily concerned with the issue of "how to integrate the region's art practice into the universal art canon, or, more precisely, into Western art history."[6] The paradigmatic exhibition for the art relationship between the East and the West and "its ambition of inscribing the art of Eastern Europe […] into the universal context of modern art history"[7] is the exhibition *Europa, Europa* (1994) in Bonn, curated by Ryszard Stanislawski and Christoph Brockhaus. This exhibition, as Piotr Piotrowski points out, "subjected the art of Eastern Europe to an inspection of the West, an inspection that used its own language and its own value system as the criteria of significance and excellence."[8] East European cultures are often described as "self-colonizing" cultures, i.e. cultures which "import alien values and models of civilisation by themselves and […] lovingly colonize their own authenticity through these foreign models."[9] Similar concerns about the "selfcolonization" of the East are often guiding the curatorial narratives of East European curators, as the curatorial statement of the exhibition *Body and the East* (1998) in Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, succinctly illuminates:

> If we talk about art creativity in Eastern Europe, which until recently was relatively isolated from the world, as being a separate phenomenon, we risk pushing it even further into the world of otherness. We risk making its otherness even more evident, even within institutionalized frameworks, since we mostly present ourselves – consciously or not – in the way we believe the Other world want to perceive us. But we would be risking more if we simply

[3] Greenberg/Ferguson/Nairne 1996, 2.

[4] Greenberg/Ferguson/Nairne 1996, 96.

[5] Misiano 1999, 2.

[6] Piotrowski 2009, 12.

[7] Piotrowski 2009, 24.

[8] Piotrowski 2009, 19.

[9] Kiossev 1999, 114.

> forgot about its otherness and presented ourselves – in the spirit of the newly united Europe – as being equal, and if we pointed to those cultural-historical characteristics which comply with the recently very popular slogan that we have always been part of Europe.[10]

Post-colonialist curatorial narratives, incorporating a range of self- and neocolonialist claims, are ardently engaged in questioning and problematizing the positions of the center and its peripheries, the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, the construction of otherness, and the negotiation of geopolitical hierarchies and boundaries. The title of the inaugural First Prague Biennale (2003), *Peripheries Become the Center*, clearly demonstrates the emancipatory standpoint taken by its curators, pronouncing the dissolution of the dichotomy of the center and periphery concepts and thus alluding to "a liberation of plurality in terms of both identity and artistic practice."[11]

Post-colonialist curatorial narratives employ different means of legitimizing the new positions they assert – often times through apologetic claims about the East's "underdevelopment" because of its totalitarian past, viewed as a historical "injustice", as illustrated through the tropes of "severed avant-gardes", "interrupted" or "impossible histories", and combined with victimization rhetoric based on accounts of the totalitarian repressions against Eastern artists. Postcolonialist narratives also feature emancipatory art-historical claims, which attempt to challenge the postulates of Western art theory, typically presenting socialism as the factor putting an end to modernism, as essentially "low" culture in comparison to the "high" Western culture of neo- and post-isms.[12] The arguments intended to restore East European art's "high" status abound: tracing historic avant-garde's origins back to the East; challenging Western modernism's exceptionality through the notion of co-existence of parallel modernisms in the East and the West; emphasizing the similarities between American Pop Art and Soviet Sots Art; underscoring the concurrent development of conceptual art in the East and the West; interpreting body art, performance practices and conceptual art in the East as innately "progressive" and antitotalitarian; examining links and contacts of East European second avant-garde artists with Western neo-avant-garde movements such as Fluxus and Wiener Aktionismus; "rehabilitating" the art of Socialist Realism as a legitimate successor of the early avant-garde, and others. The exhibition *Dream Factory Communism* (2003), curated by Boris Groys, had a particularly strong resonance in endorsing the continuity between the Russian historic avant-garde, socialist realism and sots art. This whole array of complementary sub-narratives comes to support the upgrading of the status of East European art in relation to its Western counterpart.

A revealing example of an exhibition inscribed in the post-colonialist discourse is *Living Art – On the Edge of Europe* (2006) at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, the Netherlands. The exhibition's concept highlights its aim of restoring "justice" to the previously marginalized East European artists, rightfully comparable to Western European ones:

> *Living Art – On the Edge of Europe* (2006) aims to give centre stage to those artists who have not received the artistic recognition they deserve because for too long they had no access to the international art scene (or market). Due to political circumstances they were sidelined from the international artistic canon, but are now once again ready to take up a central position.

A range of supplementary narratives go along with the post-colonialist curatorial narratives I have outlined above, such as narratives informed by the concepts of a-historicity and post-historicity, particularly popular with the "end of history" and "end of art" discourses. Such narratives posit the fall of the Berlin Wall as the new point zero in history and are often coupled with post-colonialist rhetoric implying the dissolution of the

[10] Badovinac 1998, 9.

[11] Prague Biennale 1.

[12] Peraica 2006, 475.

center-periphery model into a more complex constellation of power relations and the replacement of "grand narratives" by small and fragmented ones.

The most recent development of the post-colonialist master narrative is seen in the concept of de-colonial aesthetics endorsed by the Transnational Decolonial Institute – a group of artists from the former Eastern Europe and the"Global South".[13] De-coloniality implies "de-linking" from capital and power, tied in with the contemporary processes of coloniality and capitalism, rather than opposing or overturning them, thus divorcing itself from post-colonialism.

[13] Transnational Decolonial Institute, "Decolonial Aesthetics (I)", http://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/ (accessed December 14, 2011).

[14] For instance, the so-called April Plenum of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1956 which gave rise to a new generation of poets and artists in Bulgaria, the "April Generation".

Contextualizing narratives

Curatorial narratives employing strategies of relativization and (re-)contextualization are an off-spring of the post-colonialist narratives. Contextualizing narratives entail the deconstruction and demythologization of both regional contexts of art production by focusing on the diversity and specificity of national and local contexts. Such narratives are inclined to introduce country-specific art-historical taxonomies and periodizations, marked by the political events that influenced the entire Soviet Bloc (the events in 1956, 1968, etc.) or the individual countries.[14] These narratives are also based on the disparities in the repressive regimes, on the varying status of artists in society, as well on the specificity of local artistic traditions. Furthermore, contextualizing narratives attempt to break down clear-cut dichotomies by arguing for their relativity. For instance, they are likely to draw attention to the ambiguity of the distinction between official or state art, and unofficial or dissident art, through introducing in-between categories, such as semi-official art or semi-nonconformist art, and by pointing at the compromises that both official and unofficial artists were to make in their work and life.

Instead of underlining the similarities between artistic developments in the East and in the West, which is an approach common for the post-colonialist narratives, contextualizing narratives insist on the specificity of Eastern art in terms of its particular content and context of production, nevertheless acknowledging certain similarities, at least in the realm of artistic forms. Contextualizing curatorial narratives typically focus on the characteristics of artistic practices in culturally and historically distinctive regions such as Central Europe, the Balkans, the Baltics, and the countries of the former Yugoslav Federation.

Another curatorial strategy which attempts to overcome the post-colonialist rhetoric by going beyond the local and national specificity, stylistic tendencies, East-West parallels, etc., is one guided by the specific problems that engaged individual artists across the region, such as social critique, recent history and collective memory, personal and artistic subjectivity, body and gender, around which the iconic *After the Wall* (1999) exhibition in Moderna Museet in Stockholm, for example, revolved.

Strategies of historicization and institutionalization

The efforts made at historicizing, institutionalizing and musealizing East European art have been directly correlated to the post-colonialist ambitions of Eastern artists and curators. The fledgling art market in the East and the interests of the well-established Western art market in the East might have also come into play here. Consequently, the number of collections, archives, museums, art biennales, and research institutes dealing with the presentation, historicization and preservation of the late socialist and post-socialist art of Central and Eastern Europe has dramatically increased in recent years. The major outcome of these undertakings is the establishment of an East European art canon.

There is already a solid number of works and artists that are repeatedly represented in the larger topological, thematic and media-focused exhibitions. Furthermore, the firmly established positions of certain curators indicate the formation of new centers in the East European art scene, which in turn brings about new tensions and power struggles, this time within the East.

The largest artistic/curatorial project of historicizing East European art is the *East Art Map: A (Re)Construction of the History of Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, initiated by the Slovenian artists' group Irwin in 2001. The project addressed the lack of a "referential system for the art-historically significant events, artifacts and artists that would be accepted and respected outside the borders of a given country,"[15] which is observed in Eastern Europe. The aim of *East Art Map* (EAM), as its authors assert, is "to present art from the whole space of Eastern Europe, taking artists out of their national frameworks and presenting them in a unified scheme."[16] Such an aim is justified by the need for an in-depth study mapping the developments of East European art and its complexities and situating it in a larger context. Still, as the members of Irwin acknowledge, their ambitions were not so lofty:

> We do not seek to establish some ultimate truth; on the contrary, our aims are much more modest and, we hope, more practical: to organize the fundamental relationships between East European artists where these relations have not been organized, to draw a map and create a table.[17]

Apart from a web-based platform where East European art relations were visualized, the project also resulted in an exhibition, *East Art Museum*, held at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum in Hagen, Germany, in 2005. The East Art Museum had been envisioned as a proposal for the establishment of a Museum of Modern East European Art, critically reflecting on the Western model of a museum of modern art, embodied by MOMA in New York.[18]

Another project that operated with the concept of historicization of East European art is the *Interrupted Histories* exhibition (2006) which took place in Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana. The exhibition presented itself as a tool for creating history in the context of the West's domination in establishing its art history as the only internationally valid canon. The invited artists and groups thus acted themselves simultaneously as archivists ("of their own and other artists' projects or of various phenomena in the national history"), curators ("who research their own historical context and establish a comparable framework for various big and little histories"), historians, anthropologists, and ethnologists ("who record current and pertinent phenomena in the interaction between tradition and modernity as well as rapid change in the local landscape").[19] The purpose of these self-historicizing strategies, however, was "not to establish yet another collective narrative such as the Western world is familiar with."[20] As Zdenka Badovinac, curator of the show, remarked, "[t]hese artists are not interested in creating a new big history, but are rather interested in the conditions that sustain the tension between small and temporary histories and what is defined as big history."[21]

The establishment of specialized collections with a focus on art production from Central and Eastern Europe and the extension of the collecting scope of existing collections has played a defining historicizing and institutionalizing role, for in comparison to exhibitions, collections have a more lasting impact on the way art history is framed in stable narratives.

Kontakt. The Art Collection of Erste Bank Group, set up in 2004, is one of the most ambitious collecting endeavours in this realm. Kontakt's collecting strategy combines elements from the narratives of contextualization ("its aim is to develop a collection with a sound art-historical and conceptual basis that deals with artistic positions rooted in a

[15] Irwin 2006, 11.

[16] Irwin 2006, 12.

[17] Irwin 2006, 12.

[18] Fehr 2006, 471.

[19] Badovinac 2006, 11.

[20] Badovinac 2006, 11.

[21] Badovinac 2006, 11.

specific location and context"), Europeanization ("[the collection] aims to present works that play a decisive role in the formation of a common and unified European art history"), and postcolonialism ("reformulating art history and thus questioning the Western European canon of art"),[22] although it has also been "accused" of employing a neo-colonialist approach. The collection vehemently rejects such allegations by organizing exhibitions not only in Austria but also in the countries where the collected artworks originate from, such as this year's *Kontakt Sofia* (2011) exhibition in Bulgaria.

ArtEast 2000+ Collection, started in the 1990s, pursues goals similar to those of Kontakt ("to help the idea of Eastern Europe as a blind spot of history to finally disappear from the map of Europe"[23]), the difference, however, being that the initiative comes not from a financial group in the West, but from an art museum in the East – Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana. Despite of its seemingly "politically correct" statements ("[we] dedicate our new collection to the newly established dialogue between the East and the West",[24] etc.), the collection and the exhibitions based on its artworks, have been subjected to some criticism from the East. The exhibition *ArtEast 2000 + Collection* (2000) in Ljubljana, for instance, which took place in the same year Ljubljana hosted the third Manifesta biennale, did not present a single Slovenian artist, which gave grounds to the critics to interpret is as "prepared precisely for the international audience, counting on Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana."[25] With the recent opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova in Ljubljana in November 2011, housing the *ArtEast 2000+* collection, a certain phase in the historicization and musealization of East European art has come to a close.

Heroic narratives

Heroic narratives are to be found both in Western and Eastern contexts alike, but they are most common in the United States where many of the Soviet dissident artists emigrated in the 1980s and where several large private collections of non-conformist art from the former Soviet republics are hosted. The Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection at the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick, N.J., for example, claims to be the largest and the most comprehensive collection of its kind, comprising of more than 20 000 works from some 2 000 artists.[26] The collection and the museum take great pride in embodying "the purest rationale for the creation of art: the struggle for freedom of self-expression in spite of – and in defiance of – a repressive government."[27] Heroic narratives thus often go hand in hand with strategies of victimization and martyrization, bestowing an aura of sainthood upon the Eastern artists and presenting them as martyrs in the struggle for freedom of self-expression, unquestionably a major factor in the development of modern art. Not surprisingly then, it is the term "non-conformist art" that plays a central role in this narrative. The term itself was introduced in the United States against the term "unofficial art" and the variations on the avant-garde (neo-, post-, retro-, etc.) used in Europe.

Here is how a typical heroic narrative sounds like:

> It has not been emphasized nearly enough that the history of nonconformist art is one of the great heroic stories of the last half of this century. It is the story of several generations of artists who had learned their skills in the rigorous state-supported system of training, but who insisted on the kind of interior freedom that was anathema to the authorities… The desire to create from a sense of utter necessity and honesty prompted their refusal to accept the authority of the state in matters of art.[28]

Another representative example of an exhibition based on this premise is the *Artists Against the State: Perestroika Revisited* (2006) show at the Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York, a gallery that prides itself in its historic association with non-conformist Russian

[22] Marte 2006.

[23] Badovinac 2001, 62.

[24] Badovinac 2001, 59.

[25] Gržinic-Mauhler 2002.

[26] The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, "Introduction to the Dodge Collection", http://zamweb.rutgers.edu.audios/files/Introduction.mp3 (accessed June 22, 2007).

[27] Dodge/Rosenfeld 1995, 7.

[28] Baigell/Baigell 1995.

artists, dating back to 1976 when it put on an exhibition of smuggled works by the founders of the Soviet Sots Art movement Alexander Melamid and Vitaly Komar. The concept of *Artists Against the State* focuses on the survival strategies of non-conformist artists:

> Working outside the parameters of government sanctioned art, unofficial artists developed various strategies for survival that ranged from public confrontation to withdrawal into the private sphere. Subject to persecution, the underground existed at great risk. […] Nonconformist art evolved with its own systems of signage characterized by: text and commentary, the deconstruction of Soviet ideology, banalities of daily life, fictional mythologies and shifting truths, and arcane hermeneutics – an anti-utopian conceptualism laced with irony and biting satire.[29]

Frequent references in the heroic curatorial narratives are the Gulag and Stalinist terror. One of the first exhibitions to address the history and mythology of the Gulag through contemporary art is *Territories of Terror: Mythologies and Memories of the Gulag in Contemporary Russian-American Art* (2007) at the Boston University Art Gallery, curated by Svetlana Boym. Although the artists presented in *Territories of Terror* do not refer directly to the Gulag experience, they offer a space where such reflection can take place.

Europeanization narratives

Last but not least, Europeanization narratives were unsurprisingly triggered by the European integration process throughout the 1990s and by the two waves of European enlargement in 2004 and 2007. The first enlargement wave in particular was accompanied by an unprecedented number of projects and campaigns aiming at presenting the art and culture of the ten new European Union members to the old ones.[30] Similarly, although a significantly smaller number of projects showcasing contemporary and modern art from Romania and Bulgaria followed in 2007.

The huge wave of exhibitions on the so-called "New Europe", some of them celebrating individual member states' Presidency of the Council of the European Union, others commissioned by various European institutions, made use of a specific curatorial narrative, very close to the clichéd "European talk", emphasizing the role of art and culture in bridging the differences between the two parts of Europe, culturally and politically divided during the Cold War. Bridges, passages, crossing borders, transcending frontiers, and erasing walls, in fact appeared as central metaphors in the curatorial statements of these exhibitions. Whereas most of these exhibitions underscored the diversity of artistic processes in Europe, both diachronic and synchronic, they also insisted on the idea of Europe having a cultural and political identity of its own, as the title of the exhibition © *EUROPE EXISTS* (2003) most unequivocally asserted. The curatorial claims of aesthetic heterogeneity and homogeneity, independence and interdependence, oftentimes remain irreconcilable, simply reiterating the formula "united in diversity" and thus reproducing the major predicament of European cultural identity narratives as a whole.

As a prime example of the Europeanization curatorial narrative one might take the exhibition *Passage Europe: A Certain Look at Central and East European Art* (2004) at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Étienne, curated by Lorand Hegyi, who situated the exhibition in the context of the new chances, hopes and expectations for rebuilding the broken historical ties between the various European cultural centers and constellations, opened up by the European Union enlargement:

[29] Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, "Artists against the State: Perestroika Revisited", http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html (accessed December 14, 2011).

[30] These are some of the major "Europeanizing" exhibitions on display in the first half of the 2000s: © *Europe Exists*, Thessaloniki, Greece (2003); *Breakthrough: Perspectives on Art from the Ten New Member States*, Hague, The Netherlands (2004); *Instant Europe - Photography and Video from the New Europe*, Passariano – Codroipo (Udine), Italy (2004); *New Video, New Europe: A Survey of Eastern European Video*, Chicago, United States (2004); *Passage Europe: Realities, references*, St. Etienne, France (2004); *The Image of Europe*, Brussels, Belgium (2004); *The New Ten: Contemporary Art from the 10 New Member Nations of the EU*, Duisburg, Vienna, Mannheim, Oostende (2004); *Who if Not We Should at Least Try to Imagine the Future of All This? 7 Episodes on Ex(Changing) Europe*, Budapest, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, Ljubljana, Vilnius, Warsaw (2004); *Positioning - In the New Reality of Europe: Art from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary*, Osaka, Japan (2005); *The New Europe. Culture of Mixing and Politics of Representation*, Vienna, Austria (2005); *Central: New Art from New Europe*, Vienna (2005), Sofia (2006); *Check-In Europe: Reflecting Identities in Contemporary Art*, Munich, Germany (2006).

> Shortly before the inauguration of this exhibition, Europe celebrated the official accession of ten new members to the European Union. This rings in a new chapter in the history of the continent. Separation and mistrust, hostility and tension, will make way – or so we hope – to a new era of construction in a new European community.[31]

The exhibition highlighted the role of artists in the process of re-opening and re-establishing of what its curator called the "connecting passages" of Europe – "metaphorical meeting places, where the specific messages and forms of communication of the diverse cultural and intellectual constellations can be shared and compared in the authentic, fell founded statements of artists, writers, philosophers, architects, film and theatre experts, and musicians."[32] In fact, many "Europeanization" exhibitions seem to embody the utopian ideas of the authentic and subversive nature of creative work and the borderless potentials of contemporary art practices. Whereas contemporary art's unchallengeable power of subversion and deconstruction comes very handy when it comes to addressing the controversial nature of post-Cold War Europe's identities, it is still doubtful whether it has the potential for constructing and endorsing new ones.

As marginal as it may seem, the debate over rewriting Central and East European art histories and redrawing the art map of Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, only sketched out in this essay through curatorial narratives and strategies, does in fact relate to larger issues, including the limitations of narrativity in critical (art) historiography, the contestation of power relations embedded in artistic practices in a transnational, postmodern world, as well as the legacy of the modernist project and its place in the construction of "European cultural identity".

[31] Hegyi 2004, 7.

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GEOGRAPHICALLY DEFINED EXHIBITIONS. THE BALKANS, BETWEEN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE NEW EUROPE

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Slobodan Milošević is dead. After five years of investigations, gathering evidence and listening to witnesses, the tribunal at The Hague missed the opportunity of convicting 'the butcher of the Balkans' for crimes against humanity. While following the European news coverage of the Balkans or South-East Europe, describing its ever-changing boundaries, namings or belongings, one realises that the first phrase of this text is among the very few things that represent a certainty. One recalls the image Westerners had of the Balkans at the beginning of the twentieth century:

> They found its geography too complicated, its ethnography too confused, its history too intricate and its politics too inexplicable. Although there were plenty of books dealing with these matters, each year that passed made room for more, as the situation continually changed, always introducing something new to record, a new subject to depict, a new problem to explain, a new complication to disentangle.[1]

Not much seems to have changed and the image of instability continues to be projected on the countries of (South) Eastern Europe, even if it is an image originating in Brussels. Milošević's death allowed European Union Ministers to reaffirm Serbia's 'EU destiny'. One month later they were not so sure as the Serbian government failed to hand over to the same Hague tribunal the former military leader Ratko Mladić. Independently of their decision, Montenegro, a province that is already using the euro as an accepted currency, decided (21 May 2006) on its own separation from Serbia through a referendum opening up the possibility of joining the EU before Serbia. Whatever was left of the former Republic of Yugoslavia was relegated to the past.

In addition, the date for Romania and Bulgaria to join the European Union was likely to be postponed from 1 January 2007. These two countries are considered as separate cases in spite of both having signed the preliminary treaty at the same time and having followed the steps imposed by the EU. The potentiality of this decision prompted a vexed reaction from the Bulgarian prime minister: 'We are not second-class Europeans. Do not try to humiliate us!'.[2]

January 2007 was due to coincide with Slovenia's and Estonia's promotion to the eurozone. The ten Central European countries that joined the EU in 2004 seem to be behaving well and their acceptance did not prove to be as problematic as the eurosceptics had feared. However, the officials who gathered in Salzburg in March 2006 to discuss future enlargement invoked the limited 'absorption capacity' of the European family. Two months later, the International Commission on the Balkans elaborated the Rome Declaration saying that:

[1] Božidar Jezernik, *Wild Europe: The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers*, SAQI in association with The Bosnian Institute, London, 2004, pp 26–7.

[2] Associated Press in Sofia, quoted on euobserver.com

> The Salzburg meeting conveyed the message that the EU is neither ready nor willing to offer credible membership perspectives. We can only regret this unfortunate development. It is in the Balkans that the EU must show that it has the power to transform weak states and divided societies. This is imperative for the Balkans, but no less so for the EU. Unless the EU adopts a bold accession strategy which integrates all Balkan countries into the Union within the next decade, it will remain mired as a reluctant colonial power at enormous cost in places like Kosovo, Bosnia and even Macedonia. The real referendum on the EU's future will take place in the Balkans.[3]

Yet again, the future of Europe seems to be in the Balkans. And indeed, with the prospect of all the other countries in South-East Europe, up to and including Turkey, joining in the following decade, the EU will have to reconsider not only its absorption capacity but in the end its very nature and mission. Officials from the EU Finnish presidency, current at the time of writing, while discussing the possibility of Armenia and Georgia joining the EU, describe a set of abstract values to be followed rather than a set of criteria and obligations that determine inclusions and exclusions, saying: 'It's semantics. You can ponder whether the aspirations refer to EU membership or European values in the metaphysical sense.'[4] However, EU interest in the region is far from metaphysical especially when discussing the profits of Western companies in the new Eastern markets or the potential threat of highly skilled workers coming to take jobs in the West. It is certainly not just a question of semantics either when one refers to an otherwise not very clearly defined space as *the Balkans* or *South-Eastern Europe*, and it is not only a question of geography either.

To what extent do geographical exhibitions of contemporary art taking place in Western Europe address these questions? Do they aim to deconstruct the semantics, or merely to reproduce them? Is the curators' desire to expose artists who are not known and to raise awareness of the creative energies that exist outside the Western scene enough to compensate for the geographical-ideological frames within which they are presented? Does the frame come with the funding that is left behind when assembling the exhibition? Or is it dismantled in an attempt to change the discourse and to challenge expectations?

In the case of exhibitions about Eastern Europe – whichever part of it they referred to – there is at least one positive consequence, which shows the need for a more concerted local response and agency. After a long process of dealing with their own image, as seen through the eyes of the West, and basically reinventing this image for themselves, professionals in the East increasingly began to assume their roles locally and to organise the structures that would help them to dislocate their constructed histories and replace them with their own syntheses. As Boris Groys wrote in 2001:

> But it would be neither wise nor fair to demand of western art institutions that they perform a task which instead is actually the duty of eastern European artists, curators and art critics: to reflect upon the specific context of contemporary art in eastern Europe through its own art. Those who refuse to contextualise themselves will be implanted into a context by someone else and then run the risk of no longer recognising themselves.[5]

This seems to be happening extensively today although one can ask oneself pragmatically if this is also the result of the respective societies taking the path of a developing economy, of a relatively stable political situation, or even of conditions and funding coming from the West precisely in order to 'stimulate' local reflection. Whatever the case, the series of large and ambitious projects dedicated to this region after 1990 was more than just a way to satisfy the need for covering a socalled unmapped territory. They represented a necessary step of selfredefinition: a geographical one (where was the East and of what did it consist?) and a historical one (what were the historical legacies that

[3] Available at: http://www.balkancommission.org/, the Rome Declaration, 9 May 2006.

[4] Available at: http://euobserver.com/9/22183

[5] Boris Groys, 'Back from the Future', in *2000+ArtEast Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe*, exhibition catalogue, Orangerie Congress Innsbruck, 2001.

shaped it – as a region and as individual divisions – and which part of this history needed [or still needs] to be rewritten, according to which criteria, or whose criteria?).

In his text for the Manifesta 2 catalogue, Robert Fleck identified the wide and frantic exposure of artists from Eastern Europe in the West after the revolutions of 1989 as a wave that lasted until 1992. It was followed by other waves of fashion in contemporary art, such as the British and Scandinavian ones, and by the constitution of Manifesta as an institutional enterprise to project a borderless Europe. The assumption was that the East had by then left behind the communist past and internalised the differences in its art production that this past might have produced. About six years later, analysing the project of European enlargement as the ultimate stage of Western Europe's 'heroic endeavour to cope with countless differences… through the relation to the Other of Europe, the Other of its communist past, the East, its cultural, religious, underdeveloped, backward, belated Other', Boris Buden[6] identifies the ideological background against which we can understand the 'unexpected and curious' rise of interest in Balkan art. This interest manifested for example in the exhibitions 'In Search of Balkania', 'Blood and Honey' and 'In the Gorges of the Balkans'.[7]

Both the 'fashionable wave' at the beginning of the 1990s and the 'sudden' interest in the Balkans at the beginning of 2000 can be connected to political events and the funding subsequently made available for such projects. However, were they only that – the consequence of an official focus on a certain region, with a cultural programme resulting from this interest – they would have indeed remained a wave and a curiosity. This is precisely the ideology that Buden talks about, the ideology which 'affects again today's political reality',[8] and links the two moments to which he and Robert Fleck refer. It is not only that artists from that part of Europe keep being discovered and rediscovered, but that there is also an apparently inexhaustible desire to present them in 'Eastern art' frames.

Big historical surveys like 'Europa Europa: das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel - und Osteuropa' ('Europa Europa: a hundred years of the avant-garde in Central and Eastern Europe'), Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 1994 and 'Aspects/Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949–1999', Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1999, or halfgeographical and half-thematic exhibitions like 'After the Wall: art and culture in post-Communist Europe', Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1999 and 'L'Autre moitié de l'Europe', Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2000 dealt more or less with the concept of Eastern Europe as the legacy of the Yalta agreement. Whether presenting the East as the other, lost half of what was in essence one piece, and trying to show that Eastern artists are still able to speak the 'universal' language (ie, the Western one) of modern and contemporary art, or by aspiring to show the differences, the strategies and vocabularies developed during and after communism, through art historical revisionism or the creation of new theoretical premises, these exhibitions should have represented important achievements that would enable curators to move a step forward from divisions which were obsolete and ideologies that needed many historical and analytical approaches rather than homogenising big blockbuster exhibitions.

Instead, at the beginning of 2000, another spectre was resuscitated and came to replace the general East with the more specific and more problematic *Balkans*. If being associated with the former or postcommunist/socialist/Titoist East was something that more or less all the countries from that part of Europe had to go through, as a process accompanying their passage to the status of capitalist societies, whether they liked it or not, the new label of Balkan that came to be attached to countries which until then had been part of Eastern and even Central Europe was much more violently rejected.

[6] Boris Buden, 'The Revolution of 1989: The Past of Yet Another Illusion', in *The Manifesta Decade*, eds Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipović, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005.

[7] 'In Search of Balkania', Graz, 2002, 'Blood and Honey', Klosterneuburg, 2003, 'In the Gorges of the Balkans', Kassel, 2003.

[8] Buden, op. cit.

The Balkans, far from being only a neutral geographical or historical denomination, began to carry from the end of the nineteenth century 'the negative connotations of filth, passivity, untrustworthiness, disregard for women, conspiracy, unscrupulousness, opportunism, indolence, superstition, sluggishness, unprincipled and overzealous bureaucracy, and so on'.[9] The wars in Yugoslavia, unjustly generalised as 'Balkan wars', have generated nevertheless a Balkan crisis. The region suddenly came to be perceived as a threat to the security of its Western neighbours and it brought back to the surface a concept that apparently had faded during communism. Unlike 'the former East' the Balkans had never been fully accepted as part of Europe but always confined to its margins, somewhere close to the Orient. 'In the region itself the Balkans are always thought to be elsewhere, to the south-east of wherever one is',[10] the author Vesna Goldsworthy writes, and thus a process of Balkanisation became equivalent to an identification with the Other, or, even worse, with the dark side of an incomplete self.

Erhard Busek, the Austrian politician heading the Stability Pact for South-East Europe, recognised that in order to change the attitude towards the Balkans that sees it as a region of permanent instability, one has to start by changing the name:

> We need to say farewell to the term 'Balkans' and call this part of the continent 'southeast Europe'. Why is that? The term 'Balkans' is associated with a psychological note of condescension which most certainly affects the people thus denominated.[11]

Despite his paternalist tone, Busek openly admits that the reason for integrating the Balkans is primarily one in the interests of the EU itself – not only to make sure that 'the war in the backyard' does not reach 'Europe', but also to recuperate the region which was always considered a fundamental part of Europe, and which Churchill was proud of, having saved it, namely Greece, the cradle of European civilisation itself, from the Soviet influence in 1945:

> Europe bears full responsibility for southeast Europe. The EU needs to realise that closing the gap between us and Greece is a prime task, for there is no other way of truly integrating the Greeks, and without the prospect of enlargement the region will hardly gain stability.[12]

With the rise of Balkan art shows in the late 1990s, the discourse changed from the more specific condition of post-communism to the more general condition of the 'other'. Geographically these exhibitions also brought to attention countries like Greece and Turkey that had not found a place in any of the previous Eastern shows, and gave a particular focus on the countries of the former Yugoslavia and Albania.

More than in the case of other Eastern European shows, the focus on the Balkans was not merely geographical but directly addressed the Balkans as a mental construct. Even if it was not older than the construct of Eastern Europe,[13] and in great parts it coincided with it, the construct of the Balkans nevertheless had a stronger impact and touched the most sensitive chord of Western Europe's cultural (ie, ethnic and religious) identity. The choice to deconstruct the Balkan(ist) clichés or to reinforce them was obviously a curatorial decision, and the exhibitions 'Blood and Honey' and 'In the Gorges of the Balkans' represent two possible models of expressing this decision.

The paradoxical Balkans as a place of permanent change (making the attempt to capture its features an impossible task) and at the same time as a place where history is suspended and the relationships between people have an essential character (in the sense of both archaic and universal) seems to have been the starting point for Harald Szeemann when approaching the Balkans for the making of the exhibition 'Blood and Honey: the Future's in the Balkans' (Klosterneuburg, Austria, 2003). With the declared

[9] Jezernik, op cit, p 26.

[10] Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT–London, 1998, p ix.

[11] Erhard Busek, 'Austria and the Balkans', in *Blut und Honig: Zukunft ist am Balkan* (Blood and Honey: the Future's in the Balkans), Sammlung Essl, Klosterneuburg, Austria, 2003

[12] Ibid.

[13] As Larry Wolff demonstrates in his book *Inventing Eastern Europe*, the West/East pair as representing the difference between civilisation/barbarism replaced in the eighteenth century the polarisation that had existed until then between South/North. According to him it was this older set of cultural prejudices and not only the economic disparity between the West and the East that made the shadows persist even when the Iron Curtain was gone. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenmen*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1994.

aim of raising Western interest in the region, as opposed to 'displaying exotica', Szeemann created an unambiguous frame through which the region was to be discovered. Between 'the poles of anger and tenderness, disaster and idyll' – therefore *ab initio* a place of contradictions: a place where one can find all these 'multilingual ethnicities and religions, majorities and minorities', and at the same time where people attach a lot of importance 'to being represented as nations'; a place where the future of the Balkans lies and where one can at the same time be transported to the past. While this swinging between past and future could have been an interesting context in which to place the contemporary works of artists in the region, in the exhibition Szeemann assembled the past rather selectively and the image of the future was delegated to the public. By focusing on works that had an explicit connection to violence, war or to the extreme opposite (loud music, weddings, etc), and bringing historical elements to the configuration of the landscape such as the series of sculptures from the National Gallery of Tirana, grouped together as 'Homo Socialisticus' or the hearse of Franz Ferdinand (recollecting the image of Sarajevo as the place where the First World War started), the installation was set to correspond to an image the public would recognise immediately. The use of such devices was not unusual for Szeemann, nor was the interest in geographical representation, despite the fact that the other exhibitions he declared as part of the same series ('Visionary Switzerland' [1991], 'Austria in a Lacework of Roses' [1996], 'Beware of Leaving Your Dreams, You Might Find Yourself in the Dream of Others – 100 Years of Art in Poland' [2001] and the last one, 'La Belgique visionnaire – C'est arrivé près de chez nous' [2005]) were always about one country and not a whole region. More problematic is the question of what he was ultimately trying to achieve through such framings, which was 'to give shape to the spirituality of a region, of a country and its inhabitants'.[14] Whether one uses spirituality as a metaphor, or the other 'abused mythologem' of mentality,[15] in the effort to find a collective generic attribute with which to balance the lack of thorough analysis, because this can prove to 'be too difficult or time-consuming', the result is the same: the inevitable stereotypical traps, which the Macedonian curator Suzana Milevska admitted were embedded in the 'honey and blood' pair, in 'its etymological and mythical weight and its dichotomized structure'.[16]

While Harald Szeemann based his selection on the recommendations of the curators and artists in each country, his preconceived image of the Balkans was more powerful and pigeonholed the realities he found 'in the field', not least because his own aura created certain expectations of the people he met, and it is not unlikely that they delivered him the image he was looking for.[17] René Block, the other very well known curator who approached the region in the same year, 2003, gave a more nuanced understanding, first of all by moving away from an authorial position to the position of a reporter who always mediates his account through the voices of the local professionals. The show in Kassel was, for René Block, just a part of a bigger project entitled 'The Balkan Trilogy', which took place over a year (2003–04). The debut of the trilogy, the exhibition 'In the Gorges of the Balkans: A Report' was founded on his knowledge of the region since 1995 when he was organiser of the Istanbul Biennale. The exhibition was also intended as a reference to its location in Kassel, as a way of pointing to (or compensating for) the relative absence of Eastern European artists in all previous Documenta exhibitions.

The second part of the trilogy consisted of a series of independent projects organised by the partners represented in the exhibition, 'in the cities of the Balkans' themselves, for which René Block delegated the decisions to local curators. Taking different forms – conferences, publications, exhibitions, biennials – in Istanbul, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Sofia, Belgrade, and up to the Kurdish town of Dyarbakir, they not only gave the local curators the possibility of organising something that was particularly relevant for their context, but also fostered relationships between those places which are by no means as connected as

[14] Harald Szeemann, 'On the Exhibition', in *Blut und Honig: Zukunft ist am Balkan* (Blood and Honey: the Future's in the Balkans), Sammlung Essl, Klosterneuburg, Austria, 2003.

[15] Maria Todorova, 'Introduction: Learning Memory, Remembering Identity', in *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, ed Maria Todorova, Hurst&Co, London, 2004, p 5.

[16] Suzana Milevska actually first put forth the concept of an exhibition with the title 'Honey and Blood', starting from the etymology of the word Balkan, which comes from the Turkish 'bal' (honey) and 'kan' (blood) and refers to the region encountered by the Ottoman soldiers, and which surprised them as warm and welcoming in the summer but with very harsh winters. Suzana Milevska, 'The apparent charm of the Balkans. Some background information on the project "Honey and Blood"', in *Artelier*, 8/2003, MNAC & ICCA Bucharest, Romania.

[17] In analysing the Western reception of the situation in Bosnia during the war as a typical manifestation of the Western gaze, which wants to see in the Balkans the perpetual victim, Slavoj Žižek tells the story of 'an anthropological expedition trying to contact a wild tribe in the New Zealand jungle who allegedly danced a terrible war dance in grotesque death-masks. When they reached the tribe in the evening, they asked them to dance it for them, and the dance performed the next morning did in fact match the description; satisfied, the expedition returned to civilisation and wrote a much-praised report on the savage rites of the primitives. Shortly afterwards, however, when another expedition reached this tribe and learned to speak their language properly, it was shown that this terrible dance did not exist in itself at all: in their discussions with the first

the Western perception would suggest. The trilogy ended in Kassel again, with a historic retrospective of the Croatian artist Mangelos – as an acknowledgement of his influential role among the artists in the former Yugoslavia – and with a site-specific project developed by the Slovenian artist Marjetica Potrć.

'In the Gorges of the Balkans' was a title René Block borrowed from Karl May's *Oriental Odyssey*, but the project itself deconstructed the German novelist's prejudiced approach towards a place to which he never travelled. That is why not only embarking himself on a journey through the Balkans but also facilitating all these projects to develop there was the way for the curator to stress in the first place that perceptions of the region can start to change in the region itself.

We go back and keep talking about these exhibitions because the EU and enlargement still makes the subject relevant for more than just historic interest, since, although the 'Balkan' wars are over and the 'other' is now moving further East, the EU still decides, as in a sort of über-school, who will pass the grade and become first-class Europeans. As it happens, under different names (such as *the new Europe*) these exhibitions continue to be organised, predominantly in the West, and few of them redraw the mental maps of the region they frame. This, however, might not be possible as a unilateral process, and it would require a revision of the hierarchies and (art) histories of the West itself. As the curator Maria Hlavajova points out, the East cannot really be considered as the 'former East' unless this challenges 'the West to rearticulate itself, despite its economic superiority, as the "former West"'.

The task would then be to find ways of overcoming the asymmetry residing in the chronic debris of post-cold war divisions in Europe. This cannot happen by repressing the differences, or by absorbing them into the Western narrative, but rather by constant dynamic remixing of changing aesthetic, cultural and political positions in Europe, itself in flux.[18]

But this is a task for other exhibitions to assume – it is the curators' choice not to confine them geographically.

group of explorers, the aborigines somehow guessed what the strangers wanted and quickly, in the night following their arrival, invented it especially for them, to satisfy their demand… In short, the explorers received their own message back from the aborigines in its inverted, true form' (Slavoj Žižek, *Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causaliyt*, Verso, London, 1994, p 213). The relationship between artists and curators cannot be compared to that between anthropologists and a tribe; however, the story can provide interesting reflection on the sometimes perverse and manipulative nature of this relationship.

[18] Maria Hlavajova, 'Towards the Normal: Negotiating the "Former East"', in *The Manifesta Decade*, eds Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005.

EXCITING AND NEW: EUROPEAN IDENTITY OR THE ARTISTIC FIELD AND THE PRODUCTION OF A CONCEPT OF "FRIEND"

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Culture is in danger and looks as if it might lose its hard-won autonomy as neo-liberal globalisation takes its course. Pierre Bourdieu has delivered this warning and, to avert the threat, the sociologist doesn't advise returning to the opposition between globalisation and cultural nationalism. Instead, Bourdieu advocates the "tradition of artistic internationalism".[1] Such a tradition can only be conceived of as one that works its way into other fields starting out from the autonomy it has achieved. This is something practices in the cultural field do anyway, for this is where, among other things, politically effective affiliations are created and identities are constructed. Even during the present-day transformations of the nation-state, it has not lost this constitutive function. A truly effective cultural internationalism thus has to take account these changes as well. If it is conceived of as European, it turns out to be extremely prone to exploitation by every hegemonic project and is thus really no internationalism at all. Bourdieu's warning words also imply a dilemma. By opposing the culture seen as "European" to a form of economisation perceived as being largely American,[2] he is conducting identity politics for Europe. For Europe is thereby charged with positive contents and meanings that push others into the background. Even exhibitions of contemporary art dealing with this topic are always in danger of illustrating the politics of the European Union, precisely because "Europe" is a concept that supposedly can be filled with any content whatsoever.[3] And even those other meanings of Europe – its colonial past or its present restrictiveness in the area of immigration policies – are open to being co-opted by the hegemonic politics of the European Union if they are addressed in the cultural fields. Like the philosopher Étienne Balibar in his book *We, Citizens of Europe?*[4], exhibitions such as *Exciting Europe* in Leipzig[5] and *The New Europe* in Vienna[6] have addressed the topic and attempted to take a critical look at Europe. What they all have in common is the way they try to open up perspectives for a different, better Europe by engaging with the real, present, prevailing Europe. The titles of the exhibitions function like the question posed in the title of Balibar's book (even if they do not perhaps sound quite as dry), which must elicit a spontaneous and emphatic "yes" from most of those who are structurally among its potential readers before they have even taken a look inside. But those who find Europe "new" and "exciting" are in the situation of Bourdieu described at the beginning of this article – in a dilemma at best. The decisive question to be asked of every such point of view would thus be whether the artistic tradition can be updated in the sense of giving it a critical distance to hegemonic projects and politics. If this does not succeed, artistic internationalism ends at the borders of Europe at the latest.

Balibar, probably one of Louis Althusser's most famous pupils, uses the borders of Europe as the springboard for his treatment of the theme. He is concerned with "historical and

[1] Pierre Bourdieu, "Kultur in Gefahr" (Culture in Danger), in Pierre Bourdieu, Gegenfeuer 2, Constance 2001, p. 82–99, here p. 91.

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, "Die Durchsetzung des amerikanischen Modells und ihre Folgen" (The Imposition of the American Model and Its Effects), in Pierre Bourdieu, Gegenfeuer 2, Constance 2001, p. 27–33.

[3] And for this to be the case they do not even have to be conceived in a manner as immune to every issue of representation as the "The New Ten", which, in keeping with the EU enlargement, assigned an artist to each new national flag. "The New Ten. Zeitgenössische Kunst aus den 10 neuen Mitgliedsstaaten der Europäischen Union" (The New Ten. Contemporary Art from the 10 New Member States of the European Union) was put on jointly by the Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur e. V. Bonn, the Künstlerhaus in Vienna, the Mannheim Kunsthalle and the Museum voor Moderne Kunst Oostende in 2004/2005.

[4] Étienne Balibar, We, Citizens of Europe? 2004, University of Princeton, Princeton NJ.

[5] "Exciting Europe", curated by Margarethe Makovec and Anton Lederer, Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2 July to 22 August 2004.

political borders in the sense of touchstones for citizenship and civility (borders) and in the sense of powers and lines of division where democracy ceases or revives (frontiers)".[7] For Balibar, thinking of borders in connection with Europe means directing one's gaze, on the one hand, at the colonial division of the world or its post-colonial consequences, and, on the other, at exclusions within present-day Europe. These two gazes converge, among other things, in the diagnosis of the "recolonialisation" that Balibar discerns in consideration of the situation of migrants in the European Union and which, he says, is reflected both in the conception of people (Menschenbild) and in everyday life. Taking this as a starting point, he reflects on identity and concludes that he can only accept a European "we" if it is a radically democratic "we". If work is to be done on a European identity, then it should only be with the goal of overcoming inner divisions between indigenous Europeans and those who have been declared "aliens" on the one hand, and of achieving an unspecified, newly understood role of Europe in the world on the other.

Pepper and honey

The exhibition *Exciting Europe*, like Balibar, starts with the borders: borders where people are stopped, filtered and monitored are central arenas of migration. But the borders and their course have changed and are no longer necessarily identical with the edges of the nation-states.[8] For example, the outer edges of the states that have signed the Schengen Agreement are still more sharply defined than those of the enlarged European Union. The art works shown in the exhibition also address aspects of migration into these regions that, from a Schengen point of view, are defined as "safe third countries". The most convincing are the works that give particular aspects of this status quo their aesthetic attention. The video projection *Paprenjak Prison* (2004) by the group Social Impact is mainly about pointlessness. The hopelessness in Jezevo, a so-called "reception camp" for refugees, is illustrated by a view of the motorway from Zagreb to Belgrade, which goes past the Croatian camp. If the road reverses its meaning from mobility to mindlessness, the title of the work also refers back to symbolic markings: paprenjak is a Croatian pepper-honey cake, which serves as a nationalistic symbol for a self-ascribed bulwark function against Islamic invaders of all types and is advertised with the words: "They were after the honey, leaving us the pepper." While Social Impact anticipate the future of EU politics as well in their projections, the work by Adrian Paci derives its effect mostly from the traditions of people who have already immigrated. Here, instead of being shown dressed in their Sunday best in front of their new home, migrant families pose before backdrops of their former surroundings. Only at second glance do you notice that the Albanian immigrants are not standing in Italy, but in front of black-and-white painted panels depicting their country of origin. Four large colour photos thus address in humorous fashion not only the empty spaces on both sides, but also the illusion of the authentic both here and there. The work by the group Skart, which asked needlework groups to embroider doilies, also seems traditionalistic. Migrant women were encouraged to express their experiences in "threaded" words instead of producing epigrams for the kitchen. "There, far away, someone else found his way" is an example of one of these contemporary mottos, which contrasts with the traditional form in a comic fashion.

Martin Krenn works largely without the chronological opposition then/today, which naturally also implies a connection of tradition and modernity ascribed solely to migrants in Europe. In Krenn's work, the personal contact that Paci created to those he portrays is extended. The city residents with a migrant background that Krenn portrays in his large study *City Views* themselves decided on the selection of texts that represents them. Krenn's works are only portraits inasmuch as they condense situations in which sensibilities become evident. Grouping them into thematic areas like "Appropriated Places", "Education", "Work", "Migration Politics", Krenn makes accessible spaces that

[6] "The New Europe. Culture of Mixing and Politics of Representation", curated by Marius Babias and Dan Perjovschi, Generali Foundation, Vienna, 20 January to 24 April 2005; see the review by Christian Egger in springerin, 1/2005, p. 69.

[7] Balibar, op. cit.

[8] In their typology and chronology of borders, Joachim Becker and Andrea Komlosy nonetheless rightly assign national borders a special role. The state created both the prerequisite conditions for the spread of paid labour and the release of workers, and a standardisation of spaces brought about by legal and cultural uniformity. The pervasion of spaces and (living) conditions by the state and capital went hand in hand. In my opinion, it is necessary, particularly in connection with the so-called "European unification process", to insist upon this ongoing effect of statehood, even if it presents itself differently than in the 19th century. See Joachim Becker/Andrea Komlosy, "Grenzen und Räume – Formen und Wandel. Grenztypen von der Stadtmauer bis zum >Eisernen Vorhang<„ in Joachim Becker/Andrea Komlosy (ed.), Grenzen weltweit. Zonen, Linien, Mauern im historischen Vergleich, Vienna 2004, p. 21–54.

surround the everyday life of the people he is talking with, spaces that were presented, described and thus created by them. The result is pictures of European cities consisting solely of the statements of people who are otherwise underrepresented in the public sphere. In addition, the combination of photography and text follows in the tradition of the social study, without however handing on any unquestioned claims of truth or morality. In the end, artistic ambitions are still important precisely when borders are no longer drawn or read at barriers, but have long been taking place on economic, social and cultural terrain.

All these works are positionings that draw attention to empty spaces and ruptures, but also to exclusion and violence, and thus in the end give an ironic slant to the exhibition title. Martin Krenn's study points among other things to an "other" Europe, one that is not represented. Is it perhaps the new Europe?

New citizenship

The path from a diagnosis of our time to political proposals is paradoxical. Balibar calls the border the "absolutely undemocratic and >arbitrary< condition of the democratic institutions"[9] Borders divide people into citizens and others. In this way, they also produce individuals without rights, who, according to the principles of humanism, should not occur at all.[10] The individual without rights, a theoretical contradiction in itself yet a reality on a huge scale at the same time, is thus also the point of departure for Balibar's reflections on a new form of citizenship, which is just beginning to form with the fight for the "right to rights".[11] The motto of the Brazilian landless movement "Justice for Those without Rights", the Zapatist efforts on behalf of "indigenous rights and culture", and the campaigns by asylum-seekers in Europe for the right to residence can serve as examples of these fights. In view of European asylum policies and the right to citizenship enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty, Balibar even speaks of "European apartheid".[12] To counter it, he advocates the model of a "citizenship without community".[13] This is only imaginable when state citizenship is not seen as a one-sided act of conferment of a status. Balibar sees it rather as a dialectic process that includes the constituted and the constituting, or as "an ensemble of practices".[14] His theoretical, political proposal is that citizenship, as the active participation of everyone in political life, should form independently of an affiliation based on a community of values or any other kind of affiliation.

Balibar does rather a balancing act between social conditions and the redefinition of terms. This is an exercise also attempted by exhibitions that are called *Exciting Europe* or *The New Europe*. For, what is exciting about Europe, and what is new? Both projects set out from the fact that "Europe" is a construction based on situationally dependent differentiations – from "US imperialism", "Turkish Islamism" or "Balkan disorder", for example. However, the fact that such constructs produce long-lived political concepts and relatively stable material effects makes them a problem: for attempts at redefinition can always fail and conceal precisely the context that caused them. Artistic strategies are just as prone to this as the interventions by Bourdieu and Balibar.

At any rate, on the way from a diagnosis of our time to political advice, from the present to the future Europe, structural obstacles like exclusions and the violent nature of identity processes should by no means fall by the wayside. After all, it was Balibar who, as a critic of the "nation form",[15] emphasized violent economic and ideological structuring. In this account, the unity that organises the social aspect according to the needs of the state is created in the cultural field. They are embedded in the feeling of belonging. What Balibar formulated here for the classical nation-state also applies, in modified form, to the European Union: in the course of the Europisation of capital, work is also being done on calling the individual a "European" in the name of a collective. The fact that all kinds of

[9] Balibar, op. cit.

[10] Giorgio Agamben has also stressed this paradox of humanism and described those without rights as the mirror image of the sovereign; they are addressed by politics as nothing more than "bare life" and thus created as such. For Agamben, refugees are also prototypes of those who embody bare life. See Giorgio Agamben, Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998.

[11] Balibar, op. cit.

[12] Balibar, op. cit.

[13] Balibar, op. cit.

[14] Balibar, op. cit.

[15] In Balibar's account, the nation form is the form that has been most successful in the permanent struggle for the control of capital accumulation. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the nation form subordinated the existence of people of all classes (and gender) to their status as citizens. In the course of this process, exclusive ethnicities were and are created. Étienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology", in Étienne Balibar/Immanuel Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities. NY, Verso, 1991.

cultural institutions have been roped into this work on the European identity threatens to go unnoticed even in Balibar's remarks on Europe. He no longer names the institutions – or, to use Althusser's words, the ideological state apparatuses – such as school and family as the breeding grounds for structural violence. Instead, very much in the style of the modernisation theory, violence is only perceived in outbreaks and excesses. It flares up when the connection – until then supposedly stable – between state, territory and population breaks, something which is generally seen, in the wake of globalisation, as the crisis of the nation-state.

With this focus, Europe as a supranational project that strives for power and forms a new type of state tends to be lost from sight. It is however important to keep this fact in view, not least in order to be able to defend the autonomy of the cultural field against its subordination to or integration into the economic field. However, even the examples given here of successful artistic strategies are threatening to lose their function. And this is because they are taken for, or are meant to represent, the thing they are addressing. This idea is not as far-fetched as it perhaps seems at first. For, as well as the critical positioning that has been mentioned, exhibitions of this kind also represent a conscious attitude to migration and all sorts of other globalisation issues, as well as a young, multi-cultural, activistic generation of artists who, as people as well as in their works, make an enthusiastic response seem right: so, here it is, the new Europe, and it really is exciting! However, because in fact only a tiny part of an already small social field (because of its elitism) makes up this reality, it is necessary to insist on the theory that the balancing act between social conditions and the redefinition of concepts is contraproductive when it is no longer perceived as a difficult mediation between two different layers – if it is assumed that Europe is really "exciting" or "new", just because it is called so.

Translation: Timothy Jones

THE EX-EASTERN BLOC'S POSITION IN THE NEW CRITICAL THEORIES AND IN THE RECENT CURATORIAL PRACTICE

Ostalgia, New Museum, New York, 6 July – 2 October 2011

Sanja Ivekovic, *Sweet Violence,* The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 18 December 2011 – 26 March 2012

EDIT ANDRÁS

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When the East Was Out

The ex-Eastern bloc's (and definitely Hungary's) desire to integrate in the international art scene reminds of those military troops which were not told that the war was over. In the artistic context this means that the domination of the centre, in which any smaller or marginal scene could integrate, and to which it once had to adjust if it wanted to join the modern world which counted (i.e. the Western civilization) simply ceased to exist. For now it is common knowledge that after the phenomenon called the postcolonial turn, the disintegration of the centre gave rise to many smaller local nuclei. With it the grand narrative, that is, the canon by which one could gain access, if not to prominent places, then at least to the advantaged and well defended temple of art, has disappeared, too. This compass which guaranteed a scale of values, together with a number of related privileges, began to break in its fundaments around 1989, and in the geopolitical constellation that came after September 11, 2001 it lost all its functions. The place of the grand narrative was taken by a set of micro-narratives which, unlike the precedent construction, which was vertical and hierarchical, began to organize itself as a regional, cross-regional, transnational and awry network, with no formal regularities. Therefore, even the special nature of the West-East axis has lost its raison d'être. The "privileged" and undoubtedly attention generating situation resulting from being the "less developed" counterparty to the Western self, as a kind of projection field, does not bother anyone anymore, because marginality – as a position of discourse – has multiplied as well. In other words, all sorts of marginal positions compete for attention on the art scene thus enlarged.

The belief that we must wait patiently or facilitate by PR actions for the world to discover us as a kind of unpolished diamond is a widespread delusion. The truth is that in order to get attention one should work for it. It is almost a commonplace that the product must be specific, local, because today nobody is interested in a mainstream product, which has only been added some local colour. However, the content, the issue, the message to be communicated, must still participate in the global public discourse and even if it has to do it from local positions, the language must also be comprehensible for outsiders. But the mediating action of cultural translation, the exploration of the local cultural context, cannot be avoided. That is, of course, if we want to be seen and heard.

The East Could Be In

The new critical theories seem to be in our favour. We are in the midst of an intensive international discourse, a public discourse consisting of debates, a discourse that is open and in which, at least in principle, anyone can participate. If there is a right time for it, now is the moment to get out of the peripheral situation that characterizes the ex-Eastern bloc, for the world is just waiting for the experience and the accumulated knowledge for which this region has a great potential. In fact, the core of this international discourse is precisely the very desire to find new points of reference in interpreting the world and to weight our survival chances in a world full of tensions, disruptions and violence both at a macro and a micro level. Participation is possible, of course, but not by means of a second hand, low tech imitation of today's tendencies or trends of an imagined centre. If this strategy could still work in the modernist paradigm, nowadays it no longer has a chance. Artificially keeping alive or reviving any historical attitude is also not a viable option, and even less in the name of pluralist neutrality, which had always been a market imperative, an imperative which is simply a fake. Nowadays it is inevitable to pick sides and to neatly define the local and the particular position from which one speaks. (It is for this reason that the word *agency,* meaning "authorization", "representation", is used so often in the international discourse.) But the artificial breathing of a *passé* phenomenon does not work either, because, as it happens with age, we can imagine ourselves young and fit, we can even give this impression to others, but the younger generations know precisely that we are not part of them. However, that does not mean that we should leave the past aside. On the contrary: by modifying and moving to the fore the concept of temporality, that is, the acceptance of the simultaneity of different temporalities, the understanding of the past and its analysis gain an extraordinary importance, but in terms of interpreting the present and its dilemmas, and by no means from the nostalgic desire to relive the past. For modernity and for modernism (in which postmodernism counts as a final act), the present only existed in relation to the future, being treated as something secondary, worthless, while the past was necessarily carved in stone and canonized.[1]

A changed relationship with time is one of the main arguments for the fact that, as a concept, contemporary art is used by various theorists in a narrower and more specific sense than that of art made by our contemporaries[2]: this term designates rather a new period, a new attitude, one that comes after modernity and is fundamentally different from it, and what reaches the centre, in the absence of a clear picture about the future, is, in the shadow of the haunting past, the intense living of the present, its exploration. Therefore, the apolitical character of the preceding epoch, its non-historical vision, came to be substantially eroded after 1989, and after 9/11 it became completely untenable and anachronistic. Its place was taken by the state of permanent intellectual alertness, by self-reflection and critical thinking.

All in all, in this new landscape of discourse, the withdrawal of the modernist canon unfavourable to all kinds of margins and the very large, unprecedented circle of new possible alliances have created a favourable situation: they gave the former Eastern bloc the opportunity to get out of the imaginary shadow of the Iron Curtain. I'm most certainly not speaking about the ephemeral globalism of the nineties, which tricked us with the abolition of state boundaries and wanted to knead the world into a homogeneous dough. This illusion has crumbled along with the collapse of the Twin Towers, when the construction of new walls and the establishment of new borders has begun, along with hunting an illusory enemy in places he has left a long time ago and the suspension, on behalf of this hunt, of democracies, together with the legitimization of this "state of exception"[3] and the nationalist and fundamentalist political forces gaining ground.

Most of the contemporary art went against this process meant to establish a new hierarchy and developed horizontal networks covering each other. In this regard,

[1] Boris Groys, "Beyond Diversity Cultural Studies and Its Post-Communist Other," in Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Chicago, MIT Press, 2008, pp. 149–163.

[2] Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, Chicago–London, University of Chicago Press, 2009; see also *e-flux journal*, no. 11, December 2010 and no. 12, January 2011, especially the texts on the interpretability of contemporary art.

[3] Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Documenta 11 curated by Okwui Enwezor is a kind of absolute crossroad. It made clear the irrepressible need for space of the margins and the dissolution of the centre, which never recovered after this loss of position and increasingly wanders in the land of spectacle, in the dubious meanders of the cultural industry, in the need for providing entertainment for the masses, that is, in an industry which does not need too many professional references. Many museums are trying to preserve the myth according to which they call the tune by all kinds of blockbuster exhibitions, even if the museum remained only one of the possible venues among the many biennials, alternative exhibition spaces, public space, and community projects. In theory, the regaining of consciousness may be stated in direction shifts such as "provincializing Europe"[4] (the euro-centrism may even be forgotten – it became unacceptable long time ago), if we look from the former third and fourth worlds, respectively that of "provincializing Western Europe", if we look from the Eastern and Central Europe. In other words, instead of chasing mirages, the formulation and articulation of relevant positions both in the production of art and in its interpretation became topical.

[4] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

East-East Competition

The bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia through civil war has certainly participated in the differentiation of the Balkans from the Eastern bloc and in its differentiation as a sub-region on the European scene, a sub-region which gave rise to powerful works that reflect upon war and changing identities. No doubt that the dominant feature of the nineties was the standing out of the Balkans, due to the former Yugoslavia's relative separation from the socialist camp and to the possibility to quickly mobilize of its communication network which, because of this very separation, was wider than that of other nations. In addition, there came the momentum of the theoretical work focussing on this sub-region, as well as the market's hunger for exoticism. Last but not least, the guilty conscience of the West also contributed to the boom of the Balkans as a topic.

Because of its location, the periphery of the former socialist camp, for example, the Baltic States or Romania, has kept its lucidity and the various types of critical monitoring that it has developed, respectively, the enormous advantage of the margin, which acts against getting too comfortable, as opposed to the paralysing nature of centrality, with its risk of illusory benefits – the case of Hungary. The obtuse sense of a cultural supremacy based on such a centrality has no credibility in a fundamentally multinational and multicultural region: politically, such a concept has already and repeatedly proven damaging, while artistically it is simply untenable. Definitely, it's more than unfortunate to refer to theories of special ticket travellers, to any essential Hungarian-ness, when the era of timeless and essential identities has ended. In fact, even the existence of such an identity is called into question today by the critical discourse. In addition, there is no demand for fixed identities. And, of course, we can obstinately go against the present and the world, but this can only mean that we are simply stuck in a dead end of history.

However, there is receptivity for the mapping of the post-socialist condition, to the analysis of the alloys of socialist remains, populist nationalism and racism, as well as for the capturing of the general life sentiment resulting from these alloys. Last but not least, there is receptivity to the confrontation of these experiences with other similar ones, be they post-totalitarian, post-apartheid or post-colonial. (This is exemplified by the work of WHW and the Istanbul Biennial they organized.) Anyone in the region can participate in these debates. There is enough ammunition for it. Dealing with one's own past, traumas and tragedies experienced is a preparation for approaching the dilemmas and the serious issues of the present. As for art, the exodus from society and the reclusion in the solitude of the studio in order to explore formal issues make us less suitable for such a

preparation; this requires rather communication, responsiveness to social issues, collective responsibility and collaboration. (In the new millennium, Slovak, Romanian, Estonian, Lithuanian artists, the Croatian curatorial collective WHW and the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrovski, an important actor of the region's art and art theory,[5] started off and came to the fore from this platform of debates.)

Public discourse is not achieved easily. Artists, curators, theorists and critics have to work for it, not to mention the institutions. Public discourse is not something easy to grasp since it is in constant motion, even in its terms and way of speaking: more and more topics and attitudes keep on coming one after another in order of relevance and "urgency". In order to jump on this train in motion, one must travel with the same speed. This is equally true for both art and theory. One cannot ignore the movement of the interpretation framework, if one wants to intervene at a certain point.

East–West Return Match

The terminology referring to Eastern Europe has kind of aged lately, in part because, with the collapse of the Iron Curtain, that homogenizing name has lost its validity, in part because the roads took by the former Soviet Union and its former satellites have also split formally. Speaking about regional relations, the new term "East-Central Europe" is meant to define a special position in Europe and, more importantly, the fact that Russia does not belong to this category. Local scientific discourse prefers terms like post-socialist or post-Soviet, which delimit in time the collective experience and also determine a scale of intensity, while the scientific discourse overseas chooses the word "post-communism", which sounds better and louder. The theory that calls the tune nowadays speaks not only of the former East, but also of the former West.[6] According to this theory, the East–West/centre-periphery opposition has lost its reason. The East is just one of the many parallel local scenes. Although this leads to a fragmentation of the attention in comparison to the prominent role of a Cold War opponent, there are also beneficial aspects of this restructuring: for instance, an increase in the value of the peripheral position and of the accumulated historical experience. At least in theory.

The proof of the pudding is provided by the exhibition *Ostalgia*[7] held in the summer of 2011 in New York, which remains a powerful and trend-setting scene. Coined from expressions suggesting East and nostalgia, and used especially in an East German context, even the title seems to imply something negative. But the subtitle (Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics) does it unequivocally, especially as the exhibition itself is a gigantic Russian-Soviet performance (populating all floors, hallways and nooks of the New Museum), spiced with a little "totalitarianism" and bringing "delegates" from all countries. There are, of course, great names (Bulatov, Ivekovic', Stilinovic', Toomik, Sala, Ondák), among which iconic figures (Brătescu, Grigorescu, Koller, Kovanda, Hajas) and great works, but the main issue is not that, but the way these works are used, to whom and to what context they relate, which is the big picture suggested and the message they bear.

The exhibition offers a casual, easily digestible entertainment, for the locals eager to escape by means of ideological shivers the flood of tourists and the hot weather in Manhattan. Perhaps the target audience is the Coney Island Russian emigration, aristocratic, white and on the verge of extinction. Perhaps this explains the frequent references to Nabokov, although the latter's nostalgia, if it existed at all, referred to another period. Anyway, curator Gioni Massimiliano follows Nabokov in taking the position of a curator-artist, interprets his exhibition as a "philological reconstruction of the past and in creating of a new fiction". The ghost of Coney Island is haunting Diana Arbus' perspective, with all its accessories: the oppressive, grotesque, poor atmosphere of the

[5] He proposed the Clark's Research and Academic Program's East-Central Europe initiative: a seminar series entitled *Unfolding Narratives: Art Histories in East-Central Europe after 1989*, which was held in different cities with different focuses ("Thinking Art History in East-Central Europe", Tallinn, 14–15 May 2010; "Art History on the Disciplinary Map in East-Central Europe", Brno, 18–19 November 2010; "Art History Meets Art Theory/Historiography and Theory in East-Central Europe", Bucharest, 20–21 May 2011).

[6] http://www.formerwest.org/

[7] Ostalgia, New Museum, New York, 2011. See a lengthier review entitled "Whose Nostalgia is Ostalgia", *Springerin*, 2011/4 [http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft.php?id=74&pos=0&textid=0&lang=en].

fifties. According to this scenario, Schütte's skeletons, grey-faced, with empty orbits and prematurely aged, and the bishop figure signed Balka, hidden in a dark corner and inspiring fear rather than awe, seem to play the part of the bogeyman. The kin of folklore fairy-tale characters, forced to tinker in socialist conditions, is represented by Vladimir Arkhipov's huge collection of objects found on Soviet territory and the tools made from them, as well as by Anri Sala's hero, Edi Rama, the artist-mayor who coloured Tirana, while the myth of the nomadic, primitive, backward world is brought to life through the shamanic objects created by Evgeny Antufiev, a Siberian under 25, who uses wolf and dog teeth, his mother's hair and rags. The Cossack Said Atabekov promises a little savageness with a video in which "a children's swing reminds of a Kalashnikov" – says the explanation on the wall. The obnoxious "socialist" soft porn photos signed by Boris Mikhailov, a genuine mascot of the art market, remind of some low-tech home videos and occupy a display case the size of an entire hall, taking off the edge or, more precisely, adding strong melodramatic tones to the powerful conceptual work of Stilinović exhibited in the same space. The latter deleted all the definitions in a dictionary and replaced them with the word "pain". Tibor Hajas's *Self-Fashion Show* had also suffered from being put in a context meant to make it more exotic than it is: what transpires through the work is no longer a boundless desire for freedom or an intention to make the public taste a life unwatched by any higher instance; because of the medium, a 13mm film, the costumes seem out-dated, everything is of a dull grey, evoking rather the life sentiment of the spiritually maimed, of the disappointed, a sentiment that twenty years later, in "the goulash communism", was no longer a major attitude.

If within the category called "Eastern Europe" the selection of artists has been mostly acceptable, this is no longer true, despite their numerical advantage, for the Soviets/Russian artists. Mikhailov's slippery pornographies, as well as the collages and prints verging on kitsch signed by Brusilovski and Lobanov, evoking the atmosphere of Soviet souvenirs shops, are hardly representative for the Russian scene. Zarva's distorted portraits on the front cover of the magazine *Ogonyok* (in 2001!) also do not disclose past reality, a reality that – according to the explanation accompanying the work – the false realist-socialist joy of life had hidden. The only thing that these portraits allow us to see is the desire that the existence behind the Iron Curtain is to be seen again – through an "up to date" simplification – as something grotesque.

However, great names of the broader regional scene have been omitted, names whose absence not only makes the story incomplete, offering a much more meagre image of history than it actually was, but also further complicates the reading of works on display, even if the curatorial concept used wanted to avoid a regional-geographical review. The omission of representative names for one period or another is motivated by the curator of the exhibition through the desire to introduce new names for the New York public, other than those who exhibit regularly in the City and are almost considered American artists, whatever their origin (two examples: Kabakov and Abramović), or those who have already had the opportunity of making themselves known (such as Kozyra or Żmijewski), a point of view resembling rather that of a commercial head hunter in search of "fresh meat," and not that of an art-historical argument.

The magic phrase which always claims a sort of immunity from criticism is "personal position." which is supposed to mean the conscience of a life path, of a socialization, of a particular position assumed and determined by a commitment, a conscience that, as such, is inevitably subjective and does not deludes itself with the intent of revealing the only "objective" narrative possible, but definitely does not legitimate, from this only, any whim, and much less excuses someone, in the name of a curator-artist's position, from the exigency of historical research and accuracy.

In the nineties, the New Museum was one of the most radical alternative institutions, the first that rasped all kinds of taboos and assumed sensibility for social issues in the immediate proximity of the SoHo's commercial galleries. Today, its heir on Bowery, in the Lower East Side once populated by Eastern European immigrants and today by more than conveniently remunerated yuppies, retains its old attitudes only through fashionable slogans – even up to date ones – present in its rhetoric. Behind the mask provided by buzzwords and topoi stringing in the exhibition's catalogue, the same dusty clichés whose encouraging disappearance is announced by the new critical discourse are smuggled in. If at a theoretic and rhetorical level one cannot establish blunt hierarchies and subordinations, since the colonial viewpoint become simply tasteless, it seems that there are still plenty of curatorial means by which the old power relations may be restored.

[8] Roxana Marcoci (ed.), Sanja Ivekovic': *Sweet Violence*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2011.

West–West Match

If the New Museum was an old fairy who put a curse on the ex-Eastern bloc with its *Ostalgia* exhibition then it is MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) that made an attempt to shield the region from the curse's damaging effect by launching its *C-MAP* (Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives) project, and by its Sanja Iveković exhibition entitled *Sweet Violence*.[8]

If there is a loser in the changed discursive landscape – the crisis of modernism, expansion of the new critical theories, and broadening of the scene – it is definitely MoMA, once the sacred temple of modernism. Nowadays, it has to tolerate such atrocities which would have been unimaginable earlier; MoMA and its opinion and value system is not so important anymore, as was declared by Ruth Noah, one of the curators of the latest Kassel documenta on the conference on Iveković. When a local compatriot questioned what an "unknown" Eastern European woman is doing in MoMA, the answer came from the audience again, declaring that the artist is part of the canon (written elsewhere) and that MoMA is the one who is catching up.

The main feature of the New York art scene is its aggressive competitiveness. If it gets knocked down, which rarely happens, but is the case nowadays as a consequence of globalization, it pulls around, and reorients itself. It does not stick to dogmas or specific positions, but is very flexible indeed. The point is to survive and stay in competition. Concerning MoMA, its other virtue is its self-reflective attitude, that it is able to acknowledge the change in orientation, even if it is not favourable to it; so it is ready to reposition itself. We are in the midst of the dynamic restructuring of the scene in New York City, part of which is an exchange of roles.

In the nineties one of the ex-rivals of MoMA, and even a very critical one, was the New Museum, which for now has lost some of its professional prestige, offering light, easily digestible exhibitions that provide posh small-talk topics. MoMA, on the other hand, stood back from the spectacle and glamour of showbiz and made its audience work intellectually; in the same way as the institution itself works hard for its repositioning. Its ongoing *C-map* project is a kind of face-lift, based on research (a key word of today's discourse), which in this case means acceptance of its own limited spectrum and arbitrariness. Thus, it is doing its best to correct the "handicap" of being for quite a while the canonizing center of modernism through learning, travelling, and networking. Our geopolitical region is in the forefront in this process of broadening the fields of interests of MoMA due to its accumulated experiences that have become once again relevant. In the core of this interest lies the region's politically loaded, critical, and highly innovative art of the sixties and seventies, for which the umbrella term "Fluxus" is applied, covering a broader field than just one specific trend of the period.

The exhibition of the Croatian woman artist Sanja Iveković, curated by Roxana Marcoci, has already been the product of this new attitude of MoMA. As it became clear at the press conference, the main reason for exhibiting her was not her geographical origin, but her connection to feminism. The museum wanted to start to correct its narrow canon with an artist with a double "handicap." By the same means, as the sixties is currently the most fashionable period due to its oppositional and political character, feminism is also in a front position on the basis of its criticism of the exclusive and patriarchal canon and its institutional critique; both aspects are highly relevant nowadays worldwide, even if the motivations are diverse in different geopolitical regions. In New York City, it is the rapid commercialization, institutionalization, and "the state of exception" in democracies that radicalizes the art making practices and interpretations. In our region, the overwhelming power, control, and arbitrariness of the state and institutions are the engine behind this drive.

The exhibition of Iveković was very touching and thought provoking, despite the fact that its presentation was very modest, even puritanical; there was no fuss around it. The local interpretations were based by and large on gender reading – which is not some curiosity anymore, but part of the professional discourse – mostly because the feminist context was given (although the text of the catalogue tries to broaden it) and because the institution was cautious about playing the Cold War card. The very political nature of her art still comes through, as it is nurtured by any kind of suppression, whether it is political or gender based.

The third heavy-weight player in the game was the Guggenheim with its big-shot, Marina Abramovic', who greatly utilized her capital of radical oppositionality still after she left Yugoslavia in 1976, but which became less and less sustainable. Her performance and installation entitled *Balkan Baroque* in 1999 at the Venice Biennial was so overwhelmingly stirring that it received the Golden Lion Award, and rightly so. However, at the Whitney Biennial in 2004 the representation of the fratricide and its violent bloodshed was narrowed into the conflict of the lapse of Serbia from the European Union. The sort of appropriation of the conflict and its molding into "Serbian martyrdom" generated harsh criticism from the ex-fellow citizens in ex-Yugoslavia. Her video-installation named *Balkan Erotic Epic* in 2005 in Chelsea launched her overseas career, rather than showing commitment to her ex-socialist experiences. In her quite controversial performance reenactments, *Seven Easy Pieces,* one already could hardly find even traces of that cultural heritage anymore.

Instead of a compulsive justification of an illusory mainstream, the artistic strategy of Iveković, who remained in her native country, seems beneficial and rewarding. She takes a firm and persistent stand and from that angle shows the invisible traits of the issue, the canon's blind spots and its incompatibility with other parts of the world outside of the imagined centers. The worn-out slogan of Western feminism, "the personal is political," for example, is of absolutely no use when applied to its East-Center European version; better yet, the very opposite is relevant, that is: "the political is personal." which means that the politics saturate even under your skin. The reversed position is greatly revealed by Iveković's work *Triangle* (1979) in which she makes obvious the strictly monitored borders between private and public life. She is sipping whisky, reading a book, and pretending to masturbate at her balcony at the same time as Tito is visiting Zagreb and passing by with his procession. The celebrating masses and all the public spheres are under constant surveillance from the roof by armed representatives of power, and not even the artist's "private" deviance can be avoided. The small photos speak relevantly about the constant control and patrolling the borders and the need of crossing them, at least symbolically by artists. The personal elements were present in her works from the very beginning of her activity, however, never for their own sake, but rather to shed light

on the social treatment of women (*Tragedy of Venus,* 1975). She confronted the anonymous models of ads with the story of anti-fascist partisans, thus commemorating them through her intervention (*Gen XX,* 1997–2001). In another project, she wrote the account of victims of domestic abuse onto billboards in public spaces (*House of Women. Sunglasses,* 2002). In her high profile anti-monument, a golden plated statue of a pregnant woman in Luxembourg (*Lady Rosa of Luxembourg,* 2001) placed next to the official heroic patriarchal monument, an idealized allegorical female figure, she directs the attention of the public to the everyday violence against women. After the gender critique became accepted she did not intend to be its beneficiary, but rather shifted her focus to other minorities. With the *Living Rohrbach Monument* (2005) she commemorated the victims of the Roma Holocaust of the city by reconstructing a group photo with the help of today's residents. This makes us aware also that feminism is not about replacing patriarchy with matriarchy, and not about narcissism either but rather proposes a reflective attitude towards any kind of exclusion and suppression and gives voice to the voiceless.

Undoubtedly, her modest show at the MoMA did not stir such a fuss as New Museum's *Ostalgia,* as it was more an elaborated, well-researched, and professional exhibition with no fancy showbiz, and it was not supported by good old Cold War stereotypes immediately clicking in. Charles Esche, one of the participants of the conference, proposed that instead of isolated solo-shows, agonistic parallel narratives should have been confronted. Ruth Noah put forward that, for now, an exhibition with a much wider spectrum would be timely, most probably *Gender Check,* as opposed to the policy of making small steps at a time.

MoMA certainly made a huge step forward, especially in comparison to itself, even if quite late, quite slow and quite vague. However, to make its compromised, exclusive, and Francophile past forgettable, it should pick up the pace to be able to outweigh the superficial attitude represented by *Ostalgia* that enforced the old status quo instead of challenging it. One can only hope that the *C-map* project will turn the ex-flagship of the art world into a challenger in parity with the new critical theories regarding its own curatorial practice. As for us, ex-Eastern bloc-ers being aware of the limited power of "fairy godmothers." our anticipation is, if not the altering of a wicked heart, at least assistance in breaking the spell or in the alleviation of its ill effect.

Translated by Alex Moldovan

CRITICAL EXHIBITIONS AS NEO-COLONIAL STRATEGIES: GENDER CHECK AND THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION

Analysis of the exhibition *Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, Museum of Modern Art (MUMOK), Vienna, November 2009 - February 2010

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The interest to make the analysis of this exhibition is threefold. It allows, it is my point of departure, to talk about the New Europe, the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in Europe and the new relation in between capital and power. The show was curated by Bojana Pejić, art historian who for the last two decades or so lives in Berlin and was an important Belgrade figure back in the 1970s and 1980s when she was active in the Student Culture Center in Belgrade and worked with prominent figures of the neo-avantgarde art movements in Serbia associated with body art, alternative culture, feminism (as Dunja Blažević, Biljana Tomić, Marina Abramović, Ješa Denegri, etc.).

The exhibition in MUMOK was produced, that means initiated and, what is even more important, financially made possible by ERSTE Foundation. ERSTE Foundation is a foundation that manages, as it was exposed several times at the opening of the exhibition and as well at its post opening symposium, the ERSTE bank, and not vice versa, as we thought until then. This makes an important difference as until now the analysis of projects produced by ERSTE Foundation, and these are numerous (bearing the brand of ERSTE), were always defined at least by us theoreticians as "art and cultural interventions in the field of art and culture" made by the Vienna-based multinational bank corporation ERSTE to "save" its face for an invasive allocation of capital throughout Europe. This time we got the lesson that a number of groups of interest established the ERSTE Foundation that besides banking as well produces cultural politics. But contrary to being hilarious over the presented "change" of the bank position that was until now understood in an opposite way, the new situation just reconfirms what was recently stated by Santiago López Petit in his book Global Mobilization. Brief Treatise for Attacking Reality (La movilización global. Breve tratado para atacar la realidad)[1], namely that today global capitalism shows two major characteristics. One is that capitalism is not an irreversible process but, as stated by Petit, a reversible and conflictual event. Moreover, everything that is going on in the world today is brought back to one single event, and this is neither the crisis nor Obama, but what Petit calls the unrestrainment of capital. Neoliberal globalization, which is the synonym of the global era, is nothing more than the repetition of this event only, the unrestrainment of capital. The second is that, because the only limit of capital is capital itself, the unrestrainment of capital is not about something outside of it (as is said about the crisis, being something "abnormal," and also something that will bring capitalism to its end); the unrestrainment of capital simply means something more than capital.

Petit links capital and power in the following ways: 1. Capital is more (than) capital 2. Capital that is more than capital is power. Such a relation presents a new situation between capital and power, which is named by Petit as co-propriety capital/power. Such co-propriety capital/power needs a medium in order to take place. We have three

[1] Santiago López Petit, *La movilización global. Breve tratado para atacar la realidad* [Global Mobilization. Brief Treatise for Attacking Reality], published in Spanish by Editorial Traficantes de Sueños, Barcelona in June 2009.

fundamental media today where capital and power own each other: innovation, public space, and war.

Co-propriety of capital/power means owning (does not matter if only temporary) as well as all possible other institutions from art, culture, health, education, and etc. MUMOK is part of this relation, giving "freely," so to say, all proper capacities to the project in order to get money in return.

Before I proceed into the analysis, it is mandatory to explain my own, as Goldie Osuri argues,[2] double complicity in the project (as artist and panelist). I took part in the exhibition with videos that I made in collaboration with Aina Šmid (with whom I have been working together for the last 30 years as video and media artist) and as a theoretician (writing and lecturing on the topic of art, theory, politics), to talk at the Gender check post opening symposium at MUMOK. Following the opening of the exhibition a symposium "READING GENDER. Art, Power and Politics of Representation in Eastern Europe" was organized in MUMOK. Prominent names from West and East of Europe were invited to speak.

I can state that the analysis of past exhibition projects curated by Bojana Pejić clearly revealed that serious problems are to be expected. The most important reference for being preoccupied was Pejić's international co-curatorial project, she prepared on an analogous topic of Eastern Europe and arts, produced by a Western institution of contemporary art. The show was *After the Wall: Art and culture in post-Communist Europe*, (1999/2000), being held at the Moderna Museet / Museum of Modern art in Stockholm, Sweden, co-curated by Bojana Pejić and the British curator and art historian David Elliot (in collaboration with Iris Müller-Westermann, as project-leader); Elliot was the director of the Museum at the time of the show. The show was among the first from the series of shows on the topic of art, The Balkan and Eastern Europe that were organized in Germany, Austria, and etc., in the course of the new millennium.

In our case, Gržinić / Šmid, *After the Wall* turned out to be a disaster as we were invited to take part in it but had no place secured by the curator(s) to show our work, and even more, what has become a symptom that repeats itself brutally whenever Pejić is involved as curator, as it was the case with *Gender Check,* a catalogue/reader has been published with a ferocious policy imposed by the curator(s) in terms of selection who will (re-)publish a text. In general, it is possible to be stated that one of the most obvious way of working by Bojana Pejić that is repeated throughout her different engagements in curatorial projects over the last decade is a brutal evacuation and filtering of positions from the former ex-Yugoslav space. In the case of *Gender Check* it was again a lost opportunity to publish seminal works in the published catalogue of the show that omits seminal texts by seminal writers from ex-Yugoslavia such as Žarana Papić, Biljana Kašić, Nataša Govedić, Ana Vujanović, Zoe Gudović, etc., not to mention all those from the old and new generations of feminists and queer from Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and etc.

Therefore learning from *After the Wall* exhibition, we (Gržinić / Šmid) first decided not to take part in the exhibition *Gender Check* but were really pressured by Pejić herself and others to take part in it. The decision was taken finally to take part when the possibility to talk at the panel was put forward. As I was working for my own sake on the analysis of the exhibition *Gender Check*, reflecting on the show from the title on, the chance to have a possibility to intervene in public (to talk at the panel) was something that was not possible to reject. Specifically: feminism is politics that can be exercised today first and foremost as a political queer position in a public space.

So what was said there (at the panel) in nuce is presented here as the core of two theses with which I put forward the analysis of the show that fits perfectly in the change situation of global capitalism and the disappearance of the Berlin Wall and East and West Europe.

[2] Cf. Goldie Osuri, "Identity and Complicity in Necropolitical Engagements: The Case of Iraq," *Reartikulacija*, no. 8., forthcoming, December 2009.

FIRST: The invitation for the exhibition did not mention one single name of the included artists. Something that is not possible to be a case when it is Western artists taking part in the show. One of the reasons was that more than 200 artists were invited. As the producer of the show is ERSTE Foundation it is not possible to think that an extra sheet of paper for the invitation could not be provided with the names! Money was never a question in this show, only when it was about artists to be paid as taking part in the show and obviously when it was necessary to publish the names of the artists on the invitation card. The artists in the show were not paid, we the panelists, were. But what was even more disturbing was the fact that the press material listed a selection of names, in the way, as noted by Austrian artist Ralo Mayer, artists make their CV's saying "solo shows, selection." Therefore, for ERSTE, MUMOK and the curator, the selected artists' names from the former Eastern European space were (are to be in the future) taken / included / excluded as depending of the contexts for which the different institutions need their CV's.

What is described here is not a joke, unfortunately, but can be theoretically envisioned in the following way. One of the most challenging presentation at the symposium part of the exhibition *Gender Check* was by Vjollca Krasniqi (theoretician from Prishtina, Kosovo). Krasniqi in her talk with the title "Returning the Gaze: Gender and Power in Kosovo" presented a reading of the neocolonial capture of Kosovo by the European Union. Her analysis showed that the processes of discrimination, racialization and etc. that are presently implemented by the EU in/on Kosovo are all because of "emancipation." Krasniqi argued that discrimination imposed on Kosovo by the EU is seen as necessary by the EU in order for Kosovars, as analysed by Krasniqi, to become "mature political subjects" ready for being integrated in the future in the EU. She presented clearly that becoming mature for the EU is possible only through changing Kosovo into a neoliberal capitalist protectorate. Similarly, I can state that the only few selected mentioned names of Eastern European artists taking part in the exhibition *Gender Check* were done on the presupposition that they were enough mature ("mature EU artists") to be listed as part of different CV's of different institutions (Erste, MUMOK, the curator), depending on different purposes of these CV's. Therefore we could see our names depending on the fact whether we were enough gender(?), politically(?) and historically(?) mature subjects (ops!) artists for them.

More poignantly, I can state that the exhibition *Gender Check*, referring to Arjun Appadurai,[3] (quoted in Goldie Osuri), presents a juncture of a certain epistemology of constructing a certain space of visibility for the unnamed lets say 180 artists (20 was named depending of the context) in the show (let be at least for a moment sympathetic to the show) with a colonial governmentality at its purest (if we think about how the exhibition is constructed). Appadurai talks already in 1993 of a specific way of constituting the colony with what he names enumerative community. What I want to say? As it was repeated over and over from the opening speeches on, *Gender Check* is not about East and West of Europe (and therefore the word in the title of the exhibition is a mistake) but is about an exhibition project that pushes forward a colonial logic of producing an enumerative community (200 and more artists that present 400 and more works, while the curator argued it could be even more, but MUMOK is too small!) that takes statistics as its politics of representation. In this show some bodies, and let be precise nameless bodies (the invitation that was sent to "everybody," so to say, did not list one single artist's name, beside the author of the invitation cover picture) are taken to stand for other bodies because of the enumerative principle of metonymy. By the way, metaphor and metonymy were used as the logic to produce meaning through the show, bypassing the social and political.[4] Just to make a clear comment, the leaflet for the invitation to the symposium that was constituted by positions coming from the East and the West was with names; they were listed fully and accurately. It would not be possible to invite speakers from Austria or (former) West Europe and not have them listed! The enumerative logic

[3] Cf. Arjun Appadurai, "Number in the Colonial Imagination," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, eds. C. A. Breckenridge and P. V. D. Veer, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, pp. 314–339.

[4] Cf. *Ibid.*

implemented in the construction of the show is as well coming near to a logic of constituting protectorates and zones of control. It is a process that I will term, in regard to Suvendrini Perera[5] as a form of neoliberal governmentality that can be named as genderization. This technical and political term resembling at once precarization and proletarization presents not a simple "gendering" process (as becoming) but a brutal colonial logic of forced subjugation of whole territories and art and social practices to a gender administrative logic of counting nameless bodies in order to be governed in the future properly.

SECOND: It was repeated over and over that the exhibition is not about East and West of Europe as that they are not existent any more. Though it must be clear that it is a paradoxical statement by the curator and those who gave the money and as well many speakers in the panel, as the title of the show is *Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*. But still, what is the logic that organizes such statement and also what means to declare that the borders are gone?

I propose here a thesis that today the so-called misbalance between East and West of Europe is not any more a question of opposition as it was in the past but East of Europe and West of Europe are today in a relation of repetition. The same repetition I put forward when talking about global capitalism that is, according to Petit, nothing more than the repetition of one and only event, and this is the unrestrainment of capital. However, this repetition is not going on as a process of mirroring, but presents a repetition of one part within the other. Today there is a lot of talk going on between the so called nationalistic Eastern Europe and the neoliberal Western Europe. But we witness a repetition of the neoliberal capitalist West (with all the prerogatives of consumerism and humanism) amidst the nationalistic East without the West consumerism/capitalist expropriation being really jeopardized. Or another excellent case of such a repetition is the project *Former West* started in The Netherlands as International Research, Publishing and Exhibition Project 2009–2012, curated by Charles Esche, Maria Hlavajova and Kathrin Rhomberg (http://www.formerwest.org), that is not at all a joke although it could be seen as such, but is a perfect logic of repetition as the key logic of global capitalism today.

Based on Ugo Vlaisavljević's text with the title *From Berlin to Sarajevo*,[6] I can state that the proclamation of the fall of the Berlin Wall, therefore of the border of division in between East and West that is gone (what is true), and can be so cheerfully celebrated, has to do with the wrong (old) conceptualization of the border itself.

Maybe it is necessary to rethink the concept of the border anew and see what the present celebration means? Ugo Vlaisaljević refers to Étienne Balibar in order to point the finger to a process in Europe that states that the way of how we perceive borders changes and with this change we can conceptualize as well Europe differently. Vlaisavljević states that the best way to understand the position within the EU is actually to look towards the borders that are established by the EU with those states that are not (yet?) reintegrated in the EU. Balibar already in the 1990s (as redeveloped in Vlaisavljević) in his major works about Europe identifies a process that at once notes a fragmentation of borders resulting in their multiplication on one side and on the other in the disappearance of certain borders. In 1997, Balibar writes the following, my translation: "The borders are shivering, but this does not mean that they are disappearing. On the contrary they are multiplied and diminished in their localization, in their function, stretching or doubled, becoming zones, regions, border territories in which we dwell and live. Precisely the relation in between 'borders' and 'territories' is reversed. That means that they started to be the object of requirements and contestation, insisting on their fortification and especially on their security measures."[7]

What is at stake in this process is what Balibar terms as the transformation of the border into zone. The consequences are more than just a monopoly play; this means that with

[5] Cf. Suvendrini Perera, "Race, Terror, Sydney, December 2005." *borderlands* ejournal 5, no. 1. 2006. Quoted in Goldie Osuri.

[6] Ugo Vlaisavljević, "From Berlin to Sarajevo," *Zarez*, year XI, number 267, Zagreb, 15.10.2009, pp. 23–25.

[7] Cf. E. Balibar, *La crainte des masses: politique et philosophie avant et après Marx*, Collection La Philosophie en effet, Galilée, Paris, 1997, pp. 386–387.

this act of constituting zones or territories instead of fixed borders the question of borders disappears in order that the physiognomy of borders changes radically. We do not talk about East and West of Europe any more but about the transformation of a whole territory into a zone that functions in such a way as a (new) border. The West Balkan is such a border zone.

If we take this point that was almost prematurely developed in the 1990s while today it is coming to its full power, then it is, in relation to the exhibition *Gender Check*, not only insulting to talk about Eastern and Western Europe, especially about former Eastern Europe as we have its distorted image anyway today in the format of its repetition as the Former West, but it is necessary to imply that *Gender Check* presents a process of genderization as a zoning. It constitutes Former Eastern Europe as a border zone, transforming it in a polygon for testing the level of genderization of the whole territory. Especially we can state this as we know that gender got its perverse condition of reality through its neoliberal managerial appropriation in the way of gender mainstreaming in the West. Therefore the anniversary is commemorating a wall that is from paper as other walls made of still and concrete are built not at the border but inside the very territory.

Therefore when it was rhetorically asked in one of the panel at the symposium, part of the exhibition *Gender Check*, "Can Gender Speak East?," those who will respond affirmatively are those who do not understand the changes that affected former Eastern Europe, or Europe as such. As the shifting of the border into zone implies that the border is not a line, not even a wall (and therefore the fall of the Berlin Wall can be cherished so enthusiastically), but the border presents today a whole zone, gender is such a zone! Therefore when the exhibition *Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* commemorates the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is not about East and West, but it is about the transformation of the whole territory of former Eastern Europe into a polygon for checking gender. This is why the other panel at the same symposium organized by the western participants used the title "Fuck your Gender" as for the radicalized queer position gender mainstreaming means the complicity of gender that was a political category with neoliberal global capitalism. The former Eastern Europe is still to be emancipated through the implementation of gender, checking means precisely that capitalist governmentality is to manage the whole space through a gender border-zone. In her text *Where is the Feminist Critical Subject?* Biljana Kašić[8] states that in order to formulate this new situation from her own context that is "political, transitional, post-Yugoslav, 'European-promising,' gender mainstreaming, vulgar capitalist-oriented," it is necessary to emphasize "three ordering systems that are at play today in feminism and Europe: gender mainstreaming, capital order and the market-consumer dictate, including control over representation." I presented them already, showing that the exhibition *Gender Check* tries to blur them, making all of them not possible to be identified. However, my point is that gender check is gender mainstreaming, that capital order is the shift from borders to zones as well as the co-propriety of capital and power (Erste / MUMOK / the institution of the curator), and that the control over representation is done through an enumerative logic as a new juncture in-between neoliberal capitalist epistemology and neoliberal capitalist governmentality.

Therefore, precisely through this process of reversal of borders into territories or zones, we can claim that the borders are disappearing for the need of imperialism of circulation, allowing us to cheerfully greet the fall of the Berlin Wall, as this wall is a paper wall, transformed into a zone that will be repeated as border elsewhere. Balibar stated that the Berlin Wall is gone, while instead we got a bureaucratic process of visa acquiring, and the border police is not any more at the border but in the very heart of the city that is not yet part of the EU, where in fortified offices, as reported by Vlaisavljević, policemen instead of once embassy and consular bureaucrats keep the wall standing firmly. Today the former

[8] Cf. Biljana Kašić, "Where is the Feminist Critical Subject?," in *NEW FEMINISM: Worlds of Feminism, Queer and Networking Conditions*, Eds. Marina Gržinić, Rosa Reitsamer, Löcker Verlag, Vienna, 2008, p. 457.

[8] Cf. Biljana Kašić, "Where is the Feminist Critical Subject?," in *NEW FEMINISM: Worlds of Feminism, Queer and Networking Conditions*, Eds. Marina Gržinić, Rosa Reitsamer, Löcker Verlag, Vienna, 2008, p. 457.

Western European states' embassies personnel, as noted by Vlaisavljević, are more and more professional bureaucratic police. Vlaisavljević also stated that the integration into EU starts before the future EU member state is integrated. In short, as lucidly pointed out by Vlaisavljević, Europe does not need the Berlin Wall as it established invisible internal judicial, police, managerial borders that function as outside walls.

Yes, as it is said in the 2009 slogan of the unified Germany: "Come, come to the country without borders," but only as long as you are not in one of the many detention prisons or camps in Germany or Former West Europe or waiting somewhere in the line to get the visa or the asylum paper.

WHAT'S NEW ON THE EASTERN FRONT? PERFORMANCE ART AND THE NOSTALGIA FOR CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Performing the East, Salzburger Kunstverein, 4.23.2009 – 7.5.2009, curator: Hemma Schmutz

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Performance's only life is in the present . . . The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present.[1]

In the Shadow of Post-History – the East after the Dissolution of the Fronts?

It is often suggested that, in post-communism and post-socialism, we are in an eternal post-historical state, whose symptom is the globalization of neo-capitalism and the integrating extension of the neoliberalism. Even if this reminds of the thesis on the end of the history prophetically announced by Fukuyama,[2] it surely doesn't display (anymore) an emphatic and progressive voice. On the contrary, an alarming sign of dissolution of any historical dialectics is just the impotence or the ineffectiveness of the controlled and internalized critique, which only reaches the forms, not the spirit of capitalism.[3]

One of the cultural symptoms is the nostalgia of revisiting the repressed past, especially that part of art history left out for a long time and falsified repeatedly by both sides of the former barricade for obvious ideological purposes. The urgent task of rewriting the art history canon from a counter-imperialist position as well as the necessity of suppressing the center–periphery dialectic still display the persistence of a certain tendency to romance "the East". In the '90s, the East was already turned into a "virgin" cultural area, still open to the exploration by the Western cultural history. Thus, the East was given a voice in the Western discourse, on the condition that whatever this voice has to say it should be something intelligible within the preset discursive order. Today, the East seems to keep alive the promise to regain the authenticity of the critical act or of a "natural state" as regards the political existence, given the fact that the Western critical art discourse has already committed itself to the exhaustion of the agonistic forms, the subsidizing of subversiveness[4] and cynicism as a compromise solution.

Even strictly geographically, the East (of Europe) remains an unassimilated and oscillating part which in the first place has to be represented and tamed, brought to a common denominator. Art's homogeneity of identity in this region is characterized by the radically critical and implicitly political attitude of this art, opposing either the socialist or the neoliberal political system (an attitude derived as well quasi-materialistically from its social conditions of production) as well as by its constitutively non-commercial attitude.[5] The other paradoxical aspect of Eastern Europe art, when trying to position it historically in relation to the Western neo-avant-gardes of the '70s, is the synchronicity of these practices as forms of artistic language, although their significance in the two spaces differs significantly.[6] This is because they are inter-translatable and equivalent as to the artistic significant only at the risk of abstracting or vulgarizing the social-cultural and

[1] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: Politics of Performance*, London – New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 146.

[2] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, NY, Penguin, 1993.

[3] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London – New York, Verso, 2007.

[4] The phrase is used as meant by Marius Babias in his analysis, in *Subiectivitatea-marfă: O povestire teoretică*, translated into Romanian by Aurel Codoban, Cluj, Idea Design & Print, 2004, pp. 32–37, to designate the moment when "cultural activism is being established on the cultural market as a style" (ibid., p. 32).

[5] Zdenka Badovinac offers a much more nuanced position on this issue, while maintaining these two aspects as fundamental presuppositions, in "The Body and the East", in *Body and the East: From the 1960's to the Present*, exhibition catalogue, Moderna Galerija Ljubljana/Museum of Modern Art, 1998.

[6] Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe 1945–1989*, London, Reacktion Books, 2009.

political reasons of these artistic languages. Abstracting them annihilates in fact the very effectiveness or capacity for social action. And, paradoxically, today they are expected to offer a genuine critical opposition, seemingly lost with the aesthetisation of the American and Western European avant-gardes – and, at the same time, the possibility of a new radical beginning.

The Performance and the Critique of Power

The issue of revisiting the common artistic past, which started in the '90s by making the Balkans exotic (and exorcizing barbarism)[7], must be repositioned today in the context of a broader and more subtle power discourse. It indicates, as said before, a certain nostalgia of a direct and frontal resistance through art in front of a still individualized power such as the dictatorial one, as well as of a critical authenticity of the artistic act, which the glocalized West hopes to recover from the East, like an infusion of fresh blood, in the context of a perpetual déjà-vu of the culture industry.

With such implicit suppositions and assuming the position of a cultural mediator between the West and the East (a trait of the Austrian cultural policy for more than twenty years), in 2009, about a decade after *The Body and the East*, Salzburger Kunstverein set itself to an ambitious retrospective exhibition of the Eastern European performance. The opportunity of such a comprehensive gesture is praiseworthy, and such is the pertinence of the curatorial selection which took no risks, by choosing works already historically "validated" (of which a large part already in the Erste Bank Kontakt collection) and established names. The title, *Performing the East*, is no less ambitious and has a double meaning: an active one, suggesting at least the display of a certain representation of the "East" for the Western public; a passive one and with lesser goals, where it aims to display a selection of the Eastern European performance, defined mostly in a direct manner, through the artists' origin or the spot where it takes place.

But it is the span of the project which allows us to question the role of the performance in the Eastern European art after the '60s, as well as of the present persistence of the Western interest for this art. Its performative nature suggests a historical-political position in relation to the power: because "what is essential with every power is that, in the last instance, it always applies to the body."[8] Thus, the Eastern European performance may be regarded as an action related to the ways of exercising the power – the control, the surveillance, the discipline of the bodies, the individuation of the political subject; and the artistic act may be defined by a specific political technology and a practice of resistance and subjectivation.

This hypothesis raises a series of questions which the curator of the exhibition seems to have faced inevitably: how it is possible to reproduce an artistic act which is uncontrollable on purpose (because the performance avoids the very ideology of the visible, it short-circuits the distribution and the circulation of the representation, making impossible the accumulation of artistic capital)?[9] In what interpretative plot may they be captured, re-produced and on what purpose? To which types of power do they respond?

The Archive of Subjectivation Technologies

As for the display method used, Performing the East was compelled to choose the archive. Within the exhibition space, the public usually found the photographic and video documentation of certain memorable performances carried out, geographically, in the Central and Eastern Europe, but which related or may relate more or less to the Austrian space or culture.[10] Chronologically speaking, the curatorial selection has also hosted

[7] Among the remarkable exhibitions in the Western European area which referred to the Balkans there are *In the Gorges of Balkans and Blood and Honey: The Future Lies in the Balkans.* For the exotization and the barbarization of the Balkans, see Vesna Goldsworthy, "Invention and In(ter)vention: The Rhetoric of Balkanization", in Dušan I. Bjelic' & Obrad Savic' (eds.), *Balkan As Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, Cambridge, MA – London, The MIT Press, 2002.

[8] Michel Foucault, *Puterea psihiatrică*, translated into Romanian by Irina-Andreea Szekelyt and Iuliu-Silviu Szekely, Cluj, Idea Design & Print, 2006, p. 23.

[9] Peggy Phelan, pp. 148–49.

[10] The parallelism between Petr Stembera and the Viennese Actionism could be of help in this respect.

performances carried out after the '90s, including artists of the younger generation affirmed during this period, such as Tanja Ostojic', Dan Perjovschi, Pawel Althamer, Ivan Moudov, Avdey Ter-Oganian, Katarzyna Kozyra, Matei Bejenaru, Roman Ondák or Maja Bajevic'.

From a strictly formalistic perspective, one could say that the curatorial selection of the works before 1989 included the founders of the Eastern and Central European body art and conceptualism. Another common denominator of the performative works exhibited could be the irony and their anti-utopian character. But beyond the issue of Eastern neo-avant-gardes poetics, the archive maps the political differences specific to this area's cultural history. As opposed to the cultural permissiveness found in the ex-Yugoslavian space under Tito, the communist censorship operated much more acutely in Romania and Bulgaria by forbidding performance as a genre and giving it a special significance. The performances carried out by Ion Grigorescu in front of his camera, mostly in the intimacy of his apartment, and which became public after 1990 bear witness to this. The latter remain primarily private acts, whose main function is therapeutic. In this respect they can be seen rather as practices of self-construction similar to the antique spiritual exercises aiming for the truth or, in Foucault words, as "subjectivation techniques"[11] in relationship to the alienating power of totalitarianism and the "state apparatus"[12]; and they may originate in the "contingency and necessity of survival".[13]

I think that by extending this reading key we may construe coherently most of the artistic actions presented at the Salzburger Kunstverein. Thus, the issue of the surveillance and the power applied to the body is approached in Tomislav Gotovac's 1972 action *Streaking* (which was repeated subsequently), a simple gesture expressing both the courage of freedom and the anarchic gratuity: the explosion of pure and unintelligible joy of the naked individual in the public space undermines the routine of its social-political order. The panoptic surveillance and the discipline of the body are reflected in Sanja Iveković's photography series *Triangle*, who reveals the capillary mechanisms of restricting the private life: masturbation becomes an anarchic gesture and intimacy is wholly confiscated within the public sphere, normalized and politicized. The actions of Jiří Kovanda may be regarded as private gestures of a therapeutic nature, as well. His romantic poetics and the minimal intervention on the quotidian, specific to Fluxus,often emphasize the affective alienation and the lack of human communication, marking the indefinite awaiting of something to come up (like, for instance, in *Waiting for Someone to Call Me*). Taking on the absurd character of existence as a therapeutic strategy, as practiced by Julius Koller through his constant digressions in his long term project UFO or by Mladen Stilinović, through the programmed dissimulation and the detour of the slogans of his time, covers the institutional critique seen in relation to devices used to normalize art ideologically. Stilinović is present with *Artist at Work*, his well-known photographic series relating ironically the Marxist-vulgarizing glorification of work and "laziness" as an oppositional mechanism specific to art in that context. At the opposite end of this attitude there are the exacerbated (and pathetic) unanswered questions in the challenging frame-ups initiated by Raša Dragoljub Todosijević in the series *Was ist Kunst?* (1976–78), expressing with lucidity the cultural marginalization and isolation as well as the resisting potential when facing its reduction to the discourse of any definitive ideology. Finally, the body as a space for inscribing and materializing an ideology comes to attention through a memorable performance: *Lips of Thomas* of Marina Abramović, where the artist's nude body is ritually used as a witness to the truth (and the incapacity) of the nationalist believe.

A particular category in the historical trajectory described in *Performing the East* is the feminist theme of the body as an object of masculine desire and domination, which offers implicitly a particular identity to the political power. It contained, as a common attitude,

[11] By spiritual exercises Foucault understands the assembly of experiences and practices regarding the self-transformation of the subject, which oppose themselves to the modern self-knowledge by being subdued to the principle of "self-care" (*cura sui*) (Michel Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, Paris, Gallimard – Seuil, 2001, pp. 18–20).

[12] Louis Althusser, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'Etat: Notes pour une recherche", in *Positions* (1964–1975), Paris, Editions Sociales, 1976, pp. 65–125.

[13] Kristine Stiles, "Inside/Outside: Balancing between a Dusthole and Eternity", in *Body and the East: From the 1960's to the Present*, pp. 19–30.

the conceptual poetics of Ewa Partum (*Metapoetry*), the photographic performance specific to Sanja Iveković and the poetic explorations proper to Lia Perjovschi's actions in the '80s, but becomes remarkable especially in the recent political highlights of the performances belonging to Tanja Ostojić, Katarzyna Kozyra, Ana Hoffner or even to the collective enactments of Maja Bajević, resembling strongly some historical allegories.

[14] Jan Verwoert, "Towards a Different Economy of Time", in Roman Ondák: *The Day after Yesterday*, exhibition catalogue, Utrecht & Innsbruck, BAK & Galerie im Taxispalais, 2007.

Post-communist, East-European, Glocal

The context change after 1990 brings to discussion especially the issue of Eastern marginalization and its desire to be acknowledged by the West, as well as the positioning of the artist in relation to the Western systems of value. The critical strategies adopted now most often use the self-irony brought to the absurd and the perpetual game of dissimulation, exaggeration, reenactment (Barbora Klimová, Ana Hoffner) and critical imitation. Most of the time, the body is being used to pluralize identity rather than singularize it. For instance, the cynical revolt is expressed in the role play assumed by Tanja Ostojić in *Strategies of Success/Curator Series*, approaching the critique of the art hierarchic power system and the issue of accessing it, and especially in *Looking for a Husband* with EU Passport. Private life and art intermingle here as a subversive project in exposing an economical-political self-instrumentalization of the feminine body and the Eastern European identity. This attitude associates with the strategies meant to temporarily short-circuit the everyday order as practiced by Ivan Moudov. By means of the same artists, the institutional critique, in its turn, borrows the humoristic touch coming from the imitation of the normalizing mechanism specific to the neo-capitalist institutional system. It's the case of his personal museum (*Fragments*) built after Duchamp's model of boîte-en-valise and containing fragments (mostly in excess or contiguous) of artworks appropriated by the artist in various exhibition contexts; he jokes about the fetishization of the Western art history especially in the absence of a contemporary art museum in Bulgaria (a situation turned into a delicious media hum in the work MUSIZ).

Along this post-communist touch focused rather on the absence (and the desire of) the West, which allows for the analysis of these social and cultural anomalies caused by this undetermined positioning, the series of invited performances resuscitated the discussions on the present actuality and significance of the "East": whose motivations, whose strategies of identification and differentiation does this term answers to now? To which power may we oppose the body now, what networks are available now for the redistribution of this capillary power and what breaches in the public sphere may the performative action find now when it explicitly relates to a neo-capitalist system which redefines locally each time?

This is the place where the "Eastern" specific, built until now on the reactive-agonistic axis in face of the oppressive power and marginalization, seems to fade. The performances produced for Performing the East differ both in the policies adopted and in the topics and the attitude. They reveal, in my opinion, the very exhaustion of the "Eastern" oppositional radicalism, attached itself as a critical strategy to the self-ironical complicity and the meta-reflection. For example, if Matei Bejenaru enacted a sophisticated site-specific collective performance, questioning the prejudices and the relation of the Austrians to their own history, he hasn't found the direct oppositional character which once seduced through simplicity in his verbal endurance performances. Roman Ondák created a collective performance which continues, through minimal diversions of the quotidian space, his series of analyses regarding the "time economies"[14], on the background of the exhibition itself. His performance called *This Way Please* relates metaphorically to the time spent visiting the exhibition seen as a controlled form of leisure as well as a personal

formative aesthetical experience. Finally, the subtle repositioning of feminism in the context of the spectacular surveillance and of the abstraction of the body carried out in Ana Hoffner's reenactment deconstructed from an assumed queer position the dialectic of the man's gaze and the reification of the woman's body.

The Cultural Industry and the Nostalgia of the Critical Resistance

I'd like to end my account of the Salzburger Kunstverein exhibition by saying that if we accept the discursive meta-fiction of the "Eastern" identity, which is necessary for the cultural situation of certain artworks in the monolithic institution of art history, this label seems to have worked with inevitable gaps throughout the exhibition. And exactly these breaches in the cultural representation contain what is yet to be said about the East. I think that as for the consequences of the exhibition in itself, the double meaning of "performing the East" in the title may be rather understood as it follows: a representation of the performance as an artistic language, but an impossibility of its representation and reproduction as a specific cultural identity; the production of this identity exactly in and by the absence of its representation.

There is one more observation to be made on this occasion: the (rather naïve) idea of the possibility of recovering the uncorrupted political activism, by which the performative gesture would differentiate itself at least in the Eastern Europe by forming a sort of genuine, unccomodified Dada tradition, is troublesome because today it poses a double risk. It risks either to historicize (and annihilate) it inevitably or to reduce it, not at all naively, to a poetic of aesthetical gratuity as related to the social sphere. If the East carries the nostalgia and the promise of a direct political resistance, as well as the aura of its existentially assumed authenticity, these very features risk perpetuating another illusion meant to feed the phantasms of the actual "post-historical" discourse. The poetical gratuity of the performative act – unrepeatable, anarchical, private – becomes only apparently a form of the power critique when the latter manifests itself through the symbolical globalization of capital – because it contains the very symbolical capital necessary for the cultural (and in the last instance, financial) assimilation of the oppositional character. A new radical chic?

REARVIEW MIRROR: NEW ART FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Rearview Mirror: New Art from Central and Eastern Europe, The Power Plant, Toronto, July 1, 2011-September 5, 2011; The Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, January 28, 2012-April 29, 2012

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Identificatory scenarios abound in *Rearview Mirror: New Art from Central and Eastern Europe*, which is co-produced by The Power Plant Art Gallery in Toronto and the Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton. As the site of a subject's first encounter with their own image as Other, the mirror appears in both literal and figurative guise in a number of the works on display here. And yet the subjectivities invoked in *Rearview Mirror* resist familiar calls to identification. While the two Canadian venues will undoubtedly introduce well-established artists from the region to new audiences, visitors may not realize to what extent such work comes preloaded with ideological baggage. Historically, neo-avant-garde gestures under socialism were more resistant to being absorbed by market forces than those in the West for the simple reason that an art market did not exist there in the first place. The very different support structures available to artists meant that outwardly similar actions were potentially met with different political consequences and were thus dislocated from their more universalizing counterparts. In an analogous way, every artistic gesture was already politicized because of the context it appeared in.

Canadian-born and US-based curator Christopher Eamon brings together works by 23 younger artists in way that simultaneously utilizes and underplays the legacies of political repression and the realities of economic transition and the attendant problems of exclusion. *Rearview Mirror* is not about Eastern European art *per se,* but a vaguely triumphal "new" art whose practitioners have largely overcome the marginality that plagued their predecessors. Thematically dispersed, this fascinating exhibition has no completist ambitions: Eamon makes it clear in the wall text that only some of the relevant countries are being represented. The catalogue contains two excellent specially commissioned essays by Zoran Erić and Andrzej Szczerski that provide much needed contextualization. Of the five framing categories, the most broadly conceived is "stealing, appropriating or claiming space,"[1] which is here done literally or semiotically, often at the same time. Upstairs, Dušica Dražić (with Sam Hopkins) makes use of an overlooked tract of highway to stage an impromptu dance while also laying claim to David Bowie's song *Young Americans* for her video *Young Serbians* (2006). Downstairs, Igor Eškinja's geometrical mapping of a gallery wall with adhesive tape in *Liberare le Menti Occupare Gli Spazi* [Liberate the Mind, Occupy the Spaces] (2008) is cleverly paired with Roman Ondák's *Shared Floor* (1996), an installation that transports and reassembles the parquet floor, complete with electrical sockets, from the artist's Bratislava apartment. Nearby is Ondák's *Freed Doorway* (1998), which, together with *Shared Floor*, poetically recalls the forced togetherness so emblematic of private life under socialism. Other artists steal more overtly: in the tripartite *Fragments* (2002-07), Ivan Moudov fills boxes with stolen art in an idiom that calls to mind Duchamp's famous figure of exile, the *Boîte-en-valise*.[2]

[1] Christopher Eamon, „Rearview Mirror," in *Rearview Mirror: New Art from Central & Eastern Europe*, ed. Christopher Eamon (Toronto: Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery and Edmonton: Art Gallery of Alberta, 2011), p.11.[back]

[2] See T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007). Coincidentally, a more modest figure of exile can be found in Anna Kołodziejska's sculpture *Untitled (Suitcase with Undershirt)* (2008).[back]

Whereas Moudov steals art, Anetta Mona Chişa and Lucia Tkáčová appropriate functional objects from galleries around the world and then archive them under glass in *Private Collection* (2005).

Eamon's second tendency is "an attraction to popular culture as expressed in some of the globally dominant entertainment industries."[3] For example, Ciprian Mureşan's *Un Chien Andalou* (2004) has characters from *Shrek* appropriate the eye-cutting scene from the Surrealist film, swapping grainy live action for slick 3D animation. Again in single-channel video, Alex Mirutziu's *Pop* (2006-2007) re-imagines historical body art through the comparatively sedate act of a hand flipping through a fashion magazine. Both works create a sense of distance from the source material in ways that allow for extended contemplation not of typical Central and Eastern European concerns, but of the wider neoliberal context to which all such images belong. More productively perhaps, Eamon's third category fixes on the legacies of modernity and modernism. In *Work by an Artist Inspired by a Theory about Modernity* (2007), Anna Ostoya places an ordinary plastic bag, blown constantly by a small fan, on a sculptural pedestal, creating an obvious anti-monument. In *Saturday Afternoon, 1st of December, Leeds* (2007-8), she props up a triangular (constructivist?) table top with antique columns, and paints it all a dull beige, including the battered-looking CD player that plays a recording of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman reading from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. Just as they layer media and distinct temporal moments, the artists here memorialize everything and anything while treating actual monuments without the reverence usually reserved for them. The third and fourth categories move into the realm of "pranksters" and "mythologists" as well as artists who return to conceptualism and "[take] it to street-to other imagined publics."[4] On the one hand, a work like Roman Ondák's *The Stray Man* (2006) seemingly belongs to a genealogy of historical street "actions," some of which had very real consequences for the artists involved. On the other, Ondák's street action, exhibited as both an occasional performance and as video documentation of past performances, has more affinity with the legacy of nominally dematerialized conceptual art in the international vein.

Here two different myths of origin, both equally possible, are productively mixed. The apparent exclusion of an individual peering through the window of a gallery calls to mind the historical exclusion of the "Eastern" artist who subsists by default outside of the dominant art historical narratives. However, to read the action in this way would be to misunderstand its matter-of-factness. Along with *Freed Doorway* and *Shared Floor*, *The Stray Man* alludes in a subtle way to the totalitarian backdrop against which historical body art from Eastern and Central Europe took place. However, the work also appears to be dismissing any such reading as overwrought and over-determined. Citing the need among curators in the 1990s to achieve a balance between aspirations to universality on the one hand and the reality of marginality on the other, Eamon eschews the anxiety of this apparent contradiction by choosing a third path: he charts a number of trajectories that resist being determined by any one political or art world narrative. More specifically, the exhibition answers the perceived local "need for both marginalizing and universalizing discourses"[5] with a series of investigations that allude to a rich range of historical precedents despite being ambivalent about these precedents at times. Just as the rearview mirror is a figure of simultaneous vision - looking back while looking forward - so the young artist from this heterogeneous region never occupies a singular vantage point. The past is close, closer than it may appear, but it is sometimes inscrutable, much like the face of Evgeny Terentiev, the former Russian officer who enacts the procedures of an imagined launch and detonation of an intercontinental ballistic missile in Deimantas Narkevičius's mesmerizing video *The Dud Effect* (2008).

In fact, artists are arguing constantly against obsolescence, whether the discarded thing is a medium (painting, 16 mm film) or an idea (modernity with all its ideological

[3] Eamon, p. 11. [back]

[4] Eamon, p. 11. [back]

[5] Eamon, p. 11. [back]

wreckage). David Maljković's *Out of Projection* (2009) memorializes Peugeot's „cars of the future" in a two-channel video installation composed of footage filmed at the company's headquarters in France. On the bigger screen, the now-elderly designers and company workers move and dance melancholically around the test track and prototypes; the smaller screen features interviews with these individuals, only with muted sound. This is a past whose vestiges may still yield something of use, Maljković seems to be claiming; aided by the eerie soundtrack, the content of these interviews is further subsumed under a sense of oncoming oblivion, but it is also minable, not yet lost. Two other works that pick up the same thread vis-à-vis medium are Wilhelm Sasnal's *Untitled (Elvis)* (2007) and Taras Polataiko's four paintings of Malevich reproductions (1993-2002). Filmed in grainy 16mm, complete with a whirring projector, the opening sequence of *Untitled (Elvis)* shows a laptop spinning around a microphone while a YouTube video of an early performance by Elvis plays on it (the scene looks a lot like one of Sasnal's paintings). Unlike Sasnal, Polataiko foregrounds a specifically "Eastern" legacy by doubly distorting Malevich's suprematist compositions. In *Kazimir Malevich, Cross* (2002), the medium is once again proclaiming its own obsolescence while simultaneously overcoming it. Marring the photograph but making the painting, the camera's flash cannot help but catch on folded pages that might have been ripped from a book.

Errors in reproduction, translation and transmission, which Polataiko's paintings render ironic, are crucial elsewhere too: installed outside of the gallery and visible through a window, *Promises/Average Salary* (2006) by Johnson & Johnson (Indrek Köster and Taavi Talve) may look like a minimalist sculpture at first, but closer inspection reveals the economic discrepancy it is actually mapping. Katarina Zdjelar's video work *The Perfect Sound* (2009), in which a young student practices forming "English" sounds with a speech therapist from Birmingham, stages mishearing and misspeaking: the arduous process of de-accenting speech becomes a mimetic exercise whose outcome is here an open question. Will the student purge his speech of its native inflections in order to, presumably, better assimilate? Or will the exercise fail as perfect copying proves impossible? On occasion, Zdjelar's screen flashes to black, leading us to imagine the exercise as a modernist piece of music or an atonal duet-a misreading that is implicitly encouraged. These built-in intervals create a sense of distance from linguistic regimes, as if the student and speech therapist were seeking to return to something pre-verbal, something in excess of what is being said in everyday language.

In a similar way, Chişa and Tkáčová, whose stolen gallery objects are exhibited elsewhere in the show, eschew overt political content in their video *Manifesto of the Futurist Woman (Let's Conclude)* (2008), depicting brightly dressed majorettes whose routine on an urban bridge actually transmits a message in Semaphore: the concluding fragment of a Futurist text calling for the destruction of "woman." Like Zdjelar, Chişa and Tkáčová draw attention to the problematic patterns of identification running across multiple overlapping contexts, pointing out just how easily modernist discourse slips into its totalitarian counterpart and how readily "woman" is re-appropriated by masculinist discourse. This is *Rearview Mirror* at its best and least mythologizing.

In fact, the curator's position as an outsider looking in occasionally makes the show feel a bit disconnected from the politically charged character of other dominant art narratives being generated in the region. For example, one tendency that seems to be missing is the video idiom that plays with documentary conventions and charts concrete political plights in transitional communities. Compared to, for example, Richard Appignanesi's more internationally minded *Raising Dust: Encounters in Relational Geography* - a recent show at Calvert22, London's only not-for-profit space for Eastern European art, also curated by an "outsider" - *Rearview Mirror* might have benefitted from more concrete attention to life in transitional Europe in the context of larger global shifts. His pranks aside, Eamon

generally avoids casting the "Eastern" artist as marginal to dominant narratives, markets, and centers. And yet there is another trope here that disturbs the show's occasional gloss. With classic works of literature such as Mikhail Bulgakov's *A Dog's Heart* supplying the precedent, the idea of the artist or political subject as dog-like connects works as disparate as Mureşan's *Dog Luv* (2009) – where a troupe of black plush dog puppets re-enact torture's greatest hits – and Ondák's cooly conceptual *The Stray Man.* The motif of dog life also extends to Paweł Althamer's *Guma* (2009), a sculpture that memorializes a disappeared local shifter in rubber, or *guma* in Polish, which was also the individual's nickname. To identify oneself or others in this manner calls to mind the sometimes extreme and always politically risky body art of the 1970s and its replay in the 1990s: Oleg Kulik's biting attacks on exhibition visitors is a famous example of the latter trend. The memory of such work persists here, even if many of the younger artists no longer identify with the underdog.

ALTERNATIVE TIME TRAVELERS – POST-COMMUNISM, FIGURATIVENESS AND DECOLONIZATION

European Travelers – Art from Cluj Today, Műcsarnok, Budapest,
19 April – 1 July 2012

SÁNDOR HORNYIK

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Spatial coordinates as well as the place where we travel seem to be important when traveling is examined according to the current state of science. Of course, it is not insignificant who travels or where that person is coming from, since traveling conditions are determined mainly by the starting point. The exhibition of the curator Judith Angel (and the director Gabor Gulyas), entitled *European Travelers* – a name too reminiscent of the *European Traveler*[1] – specifies as precisely as possible this starting point, the city of Kolozsvár, which for a long time could be found on the European maps as Cluj. The destination is quite foggy, more precisely it remains obscure, because we only know we are dealing with "European" travelers.This probably refers to the fact that the authors of the Cluj story, helped by a strong marketing, have a European identity and cross the old continent; it's also about genuine global cosmopolitans, as the examples of Nicodim Gallery[2] in Los Angeles and of Mircea Cantor (who, according to his biography, "lives and works on Earth") show. Next, I will try to put as little emphasis as possible on the marketing and, respectively, PR, on the one hand, because the "success story" is represented quite well in the Hungarian cultural life and, on the other hand, because the analysis of the phenomenon seems more important than its recycled presentation.

This text will not be about who has an accomplished career, or when and how, although self-management is an important aspect which also leads one to consider items in terms of theory. This will also not be about which museums, galleries, collectors and curators used their influence to help the careers of the artists, but especially about whether, beyond the attractiveness of foreign countries and the Other written in capital letters, beyond the market laws, the works themselves have contributed, in turn, to the European and American recognition of the Cluj graphic art. This inquiry has two theoretical starting points, which are, in turn, areas quite pleasing to the eye, even if muddy. On the one hand, there is the beginning of the millennium discourse about the collapse of communism, and, on the other hand, about the one about the strengthening of the figurative. There is an obvious link between the two, namely the need (both internal and external) to interpret the explicitly figurative socialist culture (both in the rhetorical and the imagistic sense of the term).

If, in accordance with the Eastern European narrative of contemporary art history, the nineties brought works inspired by a diversely conceptual field, under the sign of the means of expression and mediality, then the next decade was commonly characterized by the emergence of critical (or political) art and figurative painting. These are certainly slightly ambiguous categories, but, in order to get more factual and to evoke a parallel story, I would say that the Polish example, by emphasizing Artur Żmijewski and Wilhelm Sasnal, show a similar mechanism, at least from a distance, namely from the height of illustrated magazines.

[1] www.europaiutas.hu/

[2] http://nicodimgallery.com/

It is a most vulgar commonplace – at least since postmodernism or rather the Renaissance, respectively the Renaissances – that images reflect not so much on reality as on themselves. Also, it is a commonplace slogan that, from the point of view of the visual culture studies, the image production within a period is determined by its political thinking and its technical apparatus. And if we add up to it the theoretical points of view which are most popular in the contemporary historiography (trauma, memory, micro-narratives), it becomes really interesting to see from where the exhibition *European Travelers* decides exactly to start unfolding the work of the artists in "the Cluj school" (or "the Cluj phenomenon", an expression which reminds very much the Leipzig story and its discovery). What comes to the fore and how? At the exhibition in Műcsarnok the viewer is met by a "mausoleum" built of brick and by a boy repeating in a lovely voice: "I decided not to save the world." The boy is a 2011 product of Mircea Cantor and the mausoleum is the extremely lugubrious shelter in Ciprian Mureșan's film, *Dog Luv* (2009). The aesthetics of gray – resembling both the neighborhood of blocks of flats and the factory – marks the entire exhibition by the fact that the bricks are used over and over again in the internal architecture of the rooms. Moreover, this simple, "industrial" scene fits perfectly with *Luv Dog*, Saviana Stanescu's theatrical performance imbued with cruel irony and its staging by Mureșan. In the half hour video, through the lead character, a puppet-dog (*Mad Dog*), we glimpse at the divine comedy of human wickedness and misery, listening, for example, for minutes, from the mouth of some giggling dogs, to the cultural history of torture, from cooking one in oil to impalement and decapitation (of course with a blunt ax), until the more :"humane" methods in the modern era.

While the environment-adapted installation of this puppet movie here in Budapest – in the immediate vicinity of Romania, namely on the ruins of "soft" and "strong" dictatorships, and, moreover, within a writhe caught in the net of the dialectics of forgetting and remembering, etc. – seems pretty unequivocal. However, Cantor's "boy," a little too "sweet", guides us towards a more complicated issue. Mureșan's work, with its grotesque, even tragic-comical accents, bears an actual political message, which may be best described by the sublime expression "post-totalitarian critique." While the meanings of Mureșan's work (despite the ironic, "infantile" staging) thrive on the field of political philosophy, the place of Cantor's work is somewhat more complex. On the one hand, it is certainly the product of its region (in the market sense of the term) and its representative, since it even borrowed its title to a Tate Modern exhibition.[3] On the other hand, it reflects strongly not only on the region, but also on the situation of contemporary art and theory in general. The little boy may be not only the average person suspicious about the artistic and political avant-garde, but also the artist who, thus, on the one hand, says he is tired of the warlike, communist ideas which characterized his homeland until recently and, on the other hand, says he is also tired of the not less engaged (on the contrary!) activities of the leftist critical art. In addition, while the first aspect stood out especially at Tate Modern, the second one prevails at Műcsarnok. All these rightly reveal not only the issues of post-socialist art, but of the entire "post-Soviet condition," where the behavior of generations growing up during this period is marked by the double helix of forgetting and remembering, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, the whole issue of "politics" may be easily pushed aside on the ground and under the shelter of the genuine tabula rasa operated by capitalism or the global entertainment industry (be it *Ice Age 4* or *Alien 5*).

This ambivalent "political" situation is further aggravated by the fact that for the general public everyday politics may still be more interesting than the internal matters of art, and this seems to have also marked the "main characters" in the "Romanian" exhibition in Budapest. Cantor's work *Cucuruzul de diamant* (Diamond corn) (2005) seems to be a most visible reference to the ambivalent critical position of Damien Hirst's famous *Diamond Skull* (even if it was made two years before the latter!), while the "boy" who

[3] At the exhibition *I Decided Not to Save the World*, produced jointly by Tate Modern and SALT in Istanbul and open between 14 November 2011 and 8 January 2012, one could see works by Mounira Al Solh, Yto Barrada, Mircea Cantor and the group „Slavs and Tatars". Barrada received the title Guggenheim Deutsche Bank Artist of the Year in 2011 (https://www.db.com/csr/en/art_and_music/artist_of_the_year_2011.html; http://www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/programme/current/event/594/riffs /), while Cantor won the Marcel Duchamp Prize in France, which also included an exhibition at Centre Pompidou (http://www.adiaf.com/english/index.htm).

would appear later also works perfectly outside the framework of contemporary art. But we may also consider the relationship between the beautiful, white (very allegorical) female figures sweeping the sand (*Tracking Happiness*, 2009) and the earlier homage to Beuys (*Departure*, 2005 – the ghostly "dance" of a stag and a coyote) and the fact that the video *The Landscape Is Changing* (2003) allows, too, for an artistic-historical reading. Beyond the obvious political parable – the crowd carries mirrors instead of banners – the work evokes Robert Smithson's 1969 legendary Mexican work (*Yucatán Mirror Displacements*), also based on mirrors, while building a grand monument of dedicated to the transformation of the world into image and even to the possibility of this transformation. Similar observations can be made regarding Mureșan, too, since the challenging drawing *Sânge românesc* (Romanian blood) (2004) or the video *Alege* (Choose) (2005) are understandable to everyone (maybe too understandable) and the paraphrases of Maurizio Cattelan and Yves Klein only work well when they are not scrambled by art history references. It is true, however, that both paraphrases are effective conceptually and ideologically, because in the first one Mureșan exchanges Pope John Paul II with the legendary head of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Teoctist, who served well during the Ceaușescu regime and after; and in the second one he shows – like a true Eastern European realist artist – how the extraordinary flight of Yves Klein above Paris (could have) ended. However, that tells the viewer that in reality the most powerful stories are the parallel ones, that is, those in which politics and aesthetics are parallel, enabling the collective re-writing of a given segment of European history. So I will discuss below such "re-writings" which play, on the one hand, with different views of global space and, on the other hand, with the dimensions of time and divergent conceptions about it. Previously, however, under the hypnosis of a decolonization which is more often spoken of, it would be good to state where we start, that is, from where and how "we" watch, here, in the former Eastern Europe, and the current conditions of this visibility.

First Excursion: the Post-Soviet Condition

While postmodernism or post-structuralism have had (at least in pop culture) their emblematic, theoretical landmarks, the post-socialist, post-communist or post-Soviet condition does not have such authors. This is due to the fact that, on one hand, the time and the rhetoric formula of the "post" has passed, and, on the other hand, to the fact that Jean-Francois Lyotard's suspicion about the grand narratives has also spread with lightning speed through the major critical theories (including Lyotard's). However, there still are one or two great writers of theory who like to focus on present questions. One of them is the American philosopher Susan Buck-Morss, who, walking in the footsteps of the Frankfurt School, throws new light on the war of the worlds and the Cold War logic.[4] According to her thesis, which is greatly indebted, of course, to Fredric Jameson and others, there was a radically new situation in 1992, because the bipolar world order, which served both the interests of capitalism and communism, dissolved.[5] Therefore, not only today's Eastern Europe is in a post-Soviet condition, but the whole world is, and the failure of the Eastern European version of modernization strongly influences the whole modernist project. Buck-Morss argues that not only state social ism is a utopian system, but so is its former opponent, liberal democracy. Before 1992, however, the delay for making the utopias true could have still been set down to the Cold War, while after the collapse of the Eastern bloc, it quickly became clear that not only communist welfare, but also the capitalist one are globally valid only as ideologies.

The other leading theorist of post-communism is, perhaps not accidentally, a Russian philosopher, Boris Groys, who attempts to discuss in a more nuanced manner than ever

[4] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworlds and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2000.

[5] Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995.

another dichotomy, the one between art and politics, namely that of independent culture and power.[6] Groys tries to free, in a revolutionary way, socialist realism and its post-Soviet appropriation from the cage of propaganda and kitsch; he interprets socialist realism as a kind of postmodern technique of quote and collage, which can be paralleled with the American pop art. He also notes that after 1992, the "original" context has a pronounced tendency to disappear and the post-Soviet mark merges more and more with the Western cultural production, while the aforetime ideological "pluralism" is simply exchanged for the market doctrine, which is much more idolatrous than the totalitarian systems. Thus, Groys thinks that iconoclasm is the only critical tool of the visual arts, which entails art to be, paradoxically, propagandistic. In addition, art is faced with another paradox, the task of iconoclastically creating images, having to achieve the critique of the image by a means of expression which is the image itself.

Our region (which, in relation to such great narratives – Buck-Morss starts with 1492, and Groys at least with the Enlightenment – is much narrower) begins to write its own little narratives, among which Piotr Piotrowski's work stands out. In his most recent book, he suggests a topological perspective instead of a geographical one, namely one that focuses its research on cities and centers of culture and increasingly leaves aside the great national or ideological frameworks.[7] Moreover, in the Polish title of his new book – *Agoraphilia* – Piotrowski also found an excellent metaphor to describe the Eastern European (cultural) situation after 1989 (respectively, 1992). On the one hand, it is because, in terms of liquidating the dictatorships, the term contains the intense openness of the region's art towards social and political issues, respectively towards those of the public space – while beyond these issues there also occurs the possibility of making associations of ideas about the conquest of the world capitalist market (or at least about the exigency of such a conquest). On the other hand, it is because agoraphilia, that is, the love of space, provides an explanation for the success of Eastern European artistic initiatives – which research the specificities of the place and the past – which rhymes well with the transformation of the global focus to a mere "glocalization", an expression that introduces the latest critique of globalization to the culture industry.

One of the interesting cases of this critical topographical, or antiglobalist perspective, is Ovidiu Țichindeleanu's post-Marxist cultural critique, which seeks an explanation for the failure of the new left theories to root in the former socialist countries. The reason is all too obvious: anti-communism, which looks for simplistic explanations not only for past sins, but focuses, in an all too unilateral manner, on the West and on market values, while distorting the evaluation of the socialist modernity and, essentially, allows only one way for the future: the global capitalism.[8] (Maybe that's why it would be neither good nor fortunate to evaluate the Cluj success story from the perspective of the Market.) One should not forget, however, that the assessment of the new Eastern European artistic trends is influenced by "the force of surprise" since, as Boris Buden writes, during the evaluation of post-communist politics and culture, the West pretty much infantilizes the East, which – not by chance – is a well-known colonial strategy.[9] However, the exotic "very-near-East" (that is, the "Balkans") tries to show lately that it not only speaks its own language very well, but it also speaks the language of the Other (that is, the West), at least in terms of culture and art history.

The appropriation of the Western point of view and obtaining a "European" identity do not necessarily provide a way out of the Second, or Third World. According to some authors, just like colonialism, postcolonial criticism, too, remains stuck in the old trap of the power hierarchy, of which, more recently, a movement that comes from South America seems to find a way out. Țichindeleanu and the other well-known Eastern European theoretician of decolonization, Marina Gržnić, already joined the initiative related to the Argentinean cultural historian Walter Mignolo, who launched a research group at Duke University

[6] Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2008.

[7] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, New York, Reaction Books, 2012.

[8] Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, „The Modernity of Postcommunism", Idea #24, 2006. http://idea.ro/revista/?q=en/node/41&articol=404. Anti-communism has another two distinguishing features that are related to each other. One is the strengthening of clericalism and the other the strengthening of nationalism in the region. Along Țichindeleanu and Piotrowski, this issue is also dealt with extensively by Edit Andras, „The Unavoidable Question of Nationalism", *Springerin*, 10, 3, 2010. http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft.php?id=64&pos=0&textid=0&lang=en.

[9] Boris Buden, *Zones des Übergangs. Vom Ende das Postkommunismus*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2009.

called eloquently the Transnational Decolonial Institute.[10] Mignolo and its South Americans or Eastern Europeans allies engaged on a "third way" which is neither Eastern nor Western, but is based mainly on the Latin American results of the culture theory (hybridization, liminality, interbreed ing).[11] The goal of the decolonialist aesthetics springing from here into step outside of both the capitalist and communist ideology of modernity and modernization, while keeping an eye on local factors, in order to break away from the colonial relations of subordination and superiority and, within the culture theory, instead of the multi cultural market, to emphasize non-hierarchical and intercultural views.[12] From here, from our perspective, it is really interesting to see which are the premises that determine in Europe, the visual culture of fine arts on the ruins of the aforetime Second and Third World – that is, during the time of the globalized modernity. Will we be able to define ourselves not in relation to 1492 or 1992, but, say, to 1955, that is, in relation to the Conference in Bandung, where 29 African and Asian countries have tried to create the system of points of view for a peaceful coexistence?

The Second Excursion: the Post-Medium Condition

If we believed that the Anglo-Saxon theory only works in the big "Western" cities, we would probably be wrong. This is well proven by the example of the *Idea* magazine in Cluj,[13] which not only translates but also interprets and inculcates the latest trends (which are often leftist). Similar things have been discussed in the footsteps of Rosalind Krauss and Peter Weibel (who comes after the former, yet precedes her with the expression *pittura immedia*)[14] at a recent conference in Bratislava, which was named "Painting in the Postmedial Age". Krauss' concept of "post-medium condition" – which is also the heir of Lyotard's "postmodern condition" – is not so much rooted in epistemology, as in the material (*noch da zu* artistic) field, namely in Clement Greenberg's modernist formalism, which imposed the medial self-reflection as a task of the avant-garde or critical art, with an effect still influential today. According to Krauss – after the triumphant march, the institutionalization and the vulgarization of conceptualism – the truly progressive and full of content art deals with reality in such a way that in the meantime, it reflects on its own medium and conditions.[15] In other words, new art, focusing on the means of representation, especially researches what tools and assumptions it uses to create an image of the world and what lessons may arise from here in regard to the logic of the totality of science, media and communication. If we read Krauss from an Eastern European point of view – as Weibel also did – then we find two interesting moments. The first is in reference to the fact that, as regards Krauss, she never got to us (spatially), which also means she cannot consider, for example, local chronology or, therefore, the requirements of decolonization. The second aspect is that Krauss (and Weibel, too), think within a frame of a universal, "scientific" epistemology[16] with reference to the concept of "post-medium condition" which even in politically motivated works mostly highlights the medial views and those of the theory of knowledge.[17]

Jacques Rancière has recently initiated an attempt, well received in the art world, to solve this problem, namely the reconciliation of the two opposing views, that of the particular policy and the universal aesthetics. Just like Krauss and unlike Groys, he does not believe that the spectacular image and the formalist aesthetic tradition are intolerable and should be criticized. Although it is also true that, to him, formalism often comes from a radical avant-garde strategy, from the situationists' practice that (it is said) have appropriated the wellknown products and methods of capitalist image production especially for their political goals. Ranciere brought Debord down to earth, for he claims that the image and the spectacle are not necessarily the ultimate evil, because, if we recognize and emphasize their functioning mechanisms, they can be used for our own good. Hence, it

[10] Marina Gržnic', „Biopolitics, Necropolitics, De-Coloniality", *Pavilion*, 14, 2010. http://www.pavilionmagazine.org/pavilion_14.pdf

[11] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options (Latin America Otherwise)*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011.

[12] The 2011 Manifesto, called *Decolonial Aesthetics*, is signed by fifteen authors: Alanna Lockward, Rolando Vasquez, Teresa Maria Diaz Nerio, Marina Gržnić, Michelle Eistrup, Tanja Ostojic', Dalida Maria Benfield, Raul Moarquech Ferrera-Balanquet, Pedro Lasch, Nelson Maldonado Torres, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Hong-An Truong, Guo-Juin Hong, Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, Walter Mignolo. http://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/ The decolonial aesthetics even throws a new light on the recent Eastern European deployments of the postcolonial critique, namely, the topics of self-colonization advanced by Kiossev and its counterpart: the cultural practice of the Soviet colonialism. According to Kiossev, Eastern Europe, which was sacrificed on the altar of national development, voluntarily and cheerfully puts its head in the mod erni zing yoke of the West; however, according to David Chione Moore, Eastern Europe roots the post-colonialism locally merely by exchanging America (or England and its allies) for the Soviet Union. The decolonial aesthetics and politics aim to deconstruct the very hierarchy of power as such, in order, finally, for Eastern Europe and South America to be determined not according to the ideological center, respectively to an economic and political power [but starting from themselves]. Cf. Alexander Kiossev, „Notes on Self-Colonizing Cultures", http://www.kultura.bg/media/my_html/biblioteka/bgvntgrd/e_ak.ht

simply results that Rancière sees the possibility of progress in art by the creative self-reflexive use of the means of expression, and it is not incidental that he thinks within temporal boundaries similar to those of Krauss, as one of his paradigmatic authors is no other than Broodthaers' contemporary, Jean-Luc Godard.[18] In a way, this genealogy shows also that in Krauss and Rancière – in their "post-modern" "post-Marxist" coordinates – we are shown both the deconstruction of the image, of the means of expression, and of art, with the difference in emphasis that Krauss rather allies with the literal readings of the early and poststructuralist Derrida, while Rancière, like the mature, political thinker in the *Cosmopolitans of the World, One More Effort!*, does not study the system producing significance in its autonomy.[19] That sends us back to the way Groys raises a similar question, namely to the perspective – on the basis of conceptual art's criticism – that contrasts the political "propaganda" and autonomous art, the critique and the spectacle, in a way that leads one to think it does not want to accept the possibility of an inclusive logic. However, this precise possibility could be the key to the Cluj phenomenon, whose artists do so well both in the Academy and in the Marketplace.

Double Look

Thus, after having equipped ourselves with the recent optics of politics and aesthetics, it is worth returning to the starting point, where, already in the first room, one can see the large and pleasant paintings of Adrian Ghenie, who, along with Victor Man and Șerban Savu, is usually considered one of the most successful "Cluj painters."

Ghenie and Savu bring to the exhibition the quality and individual perspective that one expects from them, which testify, for both of them, for the thorough knowledge of art history and contemporary art in general. From a certain point of view, they represent two sides (among others) of the Romanian surrealism, with Ghenie "decomposing," in the footsteps of Max Ernst and Francis Bacon, and with Savu "blurring" as if combining Giorgio de Chirico and Luc Tuymans with the tradition following the Baia Mare School. In fact, Ghenie was inspired rather by David Lynch (and *Twin Peaks*) and Savu's perspective seems to translate Edward Hopper and the American realists into the language of the social relations in post-communist Romania. But before getting down to the facts, let us switch to the decolonial mode: the list of names is, as far as I am concerned, the application of a known ironic, Western, colonial strategy, linking Eastern European cultural products to the names of known and successful artists. *The New York Times* art critic assessed Ghenie's and Savu's painting using a similar rhetoric (respectively, on the Hungarian side, Zsolt Bodoni and Attila Szucs), when he likened them to Gerhard Richter and Luc Tuymans in relation to the exhibition *After the Wall.*[20] This strategy, from the market perspective, seems to be quite good, since it places unknown Eastern European names in a context, although unfortunately it does not emphasize in the right way the Otherness and the cultural translation technologies, which would be the immovable prerequisite of the autonomous legitimacy.

From here, Ghenie's homage to Duchamp is an excellent example of how decolonial pictorial deconstruction works, by placing a significant emphasis on the combination of different visual technologies (film, photography, collage, frottage). One can find there not only the father-master of conceptual (as well as critical) art, the Westerner Marcel Duchamp, who, not incidentally, wanted to get rid of the retinal painting, but also the communist cult of wakes and burials and, not last at all, the necessity and lack of post-communist mourning work. Ghenie covers all these with a filter half real, half "decomposed" – Tibor Csernus had done the same thing with the socialist realism fifty years ago; what a pity that the West would not taste something like this then – and caught in defiantly vivid oil colors the memory of the aforetime "killer" of painting. In his other

m and David Chioni Moore, „Is the Postin Post-Colonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique", *PLMA*, vol. 116.

[13] http://www.idea.ro/editura/

[14] In 2005, Weibel organized in Graz an exhibition entitled *Postmediale Kondition*, which was partly inspired by Krauss' book, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (1999), which familiarized the public with the term of „post-medium condition" related to Marcel Broodthaers. Weibel, however, departed from the horizon related to the specific means of expression as theorized by Krauss or, more precisely, he retranslated the horizon by applying it to media art (not the U.S., but its Austrian version) which also inspired Krauss when she developed her concept.

[15] The concept appeared in Krauss in the second half of the nineties, in a reflection, among other things, on the art of Christian Marclay, James Coleman, William Kentridge and Sophie Calle. Cf. Rosalind Krauss, *Perpetual Inventory*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2010.

[16] While it is true that if Krauss and the *October* magazine relate more to the Duchampian paradigm, Weibel and *Ars Electronica* belong to the Turing paradigm. In media art, Lev Manovich was the first to mention two paradigms or areas which he characterized through the name of Duchamp, respectively of Turing. The first is more oriented towards philosophy and social critique issues, while the second towards issues raised by science and technology. Cf. Lev Manovich, „The Death of Computer Art" (1996). http://rhizome.org/discuss/view/28877/

[17] On the different interpretations of what postmedia and postmedium condition mean, see, for more details, the 2011 book by Domenico Quaranta, whose introduction is in English: "The Postmedia Perspective". http://rhizome.org/editorial/

works, he does the same with important politicians of the past, for example, the collector Hermann Goring, while using a ghostly color, reminiscent of the *film noir,* with strong medial accents. In other words – just like his colleagues in Cluj – he simultaneously tries to develop a post-Soviet and a post-medium painting. The other "local hero", Savu, uses to a perhaps higher degree the local specifics and the local traditions of realism, which are also to be found in the new Romanian cinema, for example, in Cristian Mungiu, who has been awarded at Cannes Festival for *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days* (2007). From a regional perspective, this shy, pale, ghostly, deserted surrealism, together with the empty squares of modern social reality, evokes for the Budapest spectator the (earlier) painting of Attila Szűcs, who presents a similar atmosphere and visual culture. The post-communists everyday people, without features and wandering without purpose in the buildings' backyards, the parking lots and in almost abstract spaces occur in Savu's paintings in a fine and decorative color, which somehow aestheticizes the images of ruin, while the artist holds a sophisticated, oblique mirror in front of the stereotypical image of the West about the East.

Victor Man, one of the "Cluj" "painters" with the best reputation (he strengthens the Gladstone Gallery team along with Shirin Neshat, Anish Kapoor and Matthew Barney[21]), politicizes in another way, perhaps more directly. In collaboration with Anna-Bella Papp, Man created an installation that fills an entire room. The Műcsarnok venue is filled entirely with wallpapers imitating some huge frescoes (which is maybe an ironic reference to one of the best export products of the Romanian art: Dan Perjovschi), but there is also a stuffed fox head ,and other enigmatic objects and images, which together are entitled *Those with Teeth and Those Without*; this is also the title of a distinct work present at Man's London exhibition.[22] The huge painting supported by a wall shows, most likely, those who "do not have" teeth; in this work one may "see" some nude women smoking sensually (it would already be an interpretation to call them porn actresses!), but in fact they just cannot be seen, since they are colored in black. (Man, in fact, has become significant just because of his dark, enigmatic, figurative, post-communist paintings.) On the multiplied frescoes, however, caricatured men, respectively males, struggle with each other, but the teeth issue is complicated, however, by the presence of the fox head and abstract art. There's a pregnant surreal and oriental atmosphere, while the duo of artists places even the eroticized and rather macho surrealist culture within the scope of a postfeminist criticism.

Victor Man's example brings us to the great merit of this exhibition, because Angel – somehow just like Man – does not enclose the new figurative trends of the Cluj painting in a profit oriented capitalist ghetto, but displays them in a critical (political) artistic context, which is also good from a medial point of view for the works exhibited, because their pictorial features stand out better next to a video or a post-conceptual (or post-post-conceptual or whatever) object. But the easily digestible, colorful, fragrant and sufficiently figurative paintings somewhat distract attention from the photos and moving images, which, in terms of their gender and visual language, are very much bound rather to the esoteric than to the challenging tradition of conceptual art. Perhaps Cantor's HD video, projected on a large screen, is the only one effectively avoiding this (market) lawfulness, while other films that are not as seductive or bombastic in terms of image, deserve more attention. Istvan Laszlo's star (*Star*, 2011), floating in a toilet and which, of course, cannot be flushed, has become internationally famous for a reason; it's not only political and adapted to the environment, but it contains enough historical and artistic references and, in addition, it is fun. Cristi Pogăcean's video (*Untitled*, 2005) uses a slightly more refined tools and, as such, perhaps more profound; the film shows everyday people who, despite the communist or capitalist order, still make the sign of the cross when passing an Orthodox church, which suggests that religion, the religious culture,

2011/jan/12/the-postemdiaperspective/

[18] Jacques Ranciere, *Le Spectateur émancipé*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2008.

[19] Cf. Jacques Derrida, *La Verité en peinture*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978 and Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!*, Paris, Galilee, 1997.

[20] Martha Schwendener, "18 Journeys Forged in Communism", *New York Times*, 14 January, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/16/nyregion/16artwe.html?_r=1 However, the exhibition After the Fall organized by the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art (Peekskill, NY), held from 19 September 2010 to 24 July 2011 (http:// hycca.org/), also showed that "colonial deconstruction" reviewed by me is not at all a topographic phenomenon, related to Cluj, for artists such as the Czech Daniel Pitin, the Croatian Elvis Krstulovic', the Bessarabian Alexander Tinei and the Hungarian Zsolt Bodoni work in a similar spirit and with the same visual culture.

[21] http://www.gladstonegallery.com/

[22] Victor Man, *ATTEBASILE*, London, Ikon, 26 November 2007 – 25 January 2008 (http://www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/).

does not necessarily operate under the clockwork mechanisms of the nationalist or post-nationalist narrative.

[23] http://www.plan-b.ro/

[24] http://www.bazis.ro/

Pogacean's other work, perhaps the most successful, leads us to this very area, namely the boundary or the buffer zone between East and West (or between several Easts and Wests). In other words, more specifically – and somehow very funny – the buffer zone between one East and the other, since one of the famous photos of the Romanian journalists kidnapped by Arab terrorists is the image on a woven rug. The terrorist act itself shows greatly how, seen from Islam, Eastern Europe is, in fact, part of the Western culture. The title – legitimating my ludic reading – is already almost a blasphemy to the more dubious than ever media: *Răpirea din serai* (Abduction from the Seraglio), 2006, while the humor can hurt equally several political sensibilities. However, it is hard to come to the fore next to such works. Marius Bercea's "deconstructive", postsocialist paintings are well highlighted, but Peter Szabo's very personal slides and his "post it" comments hardly attract any attention (*Grupul stă în cerc* [The group stands in circle], 2011). It's another question whether Szabo, according to some of today's critical standards, is more progressive than Bercea or Mircea Suciu, who is generally marketed as an important successor of surrealism (namely, Borremans'). But the latter manages the traditions of the spectacle, so it's almost impossible to decide whether we are dealing with some painting VJs or with post-medial critical art.

Besides painting, even the otherwise inventive objects are a little obscured. The effect created by Razvan Botiș (although his 2010 bat, filled with whiskey and entitled *Hit the Road Jack*, is a very successful pun) is not as strong as those produced by Ghenie, Bercea or even by Oana Farcaș, to mention only a single "feminine" version, who specifically evokes the figure of Francis Bacon and his studio (but not in the exhibition of which I speak). It is possible, however, that this exhibiting effect is augmented by the profoundly Western nature of object art, while figurative painting maintains well traced relationships with the socialist past, namely with its representative image production (public sculpture and painting). The large films signed by Gabriela Vanga and Alex Mirutziu, which, at a first glance, do not add much to the "grand media art" Western culture, seem a little pale perhaps due to similar reasons. But this only emphasizes the fact that Bercea and Suciu attempt to deconstruct the local cultural traditions and the great narratives of art history, from the Flemish landscapes to Asian horror films, in parallel. Equally interesting are those cliches in which the identity elements reverse the pyramid of local values, respectively split the great post-communist "War and Peace" into its composing elements. In Mirutziu's portraits, homosexuality and sadomasochist culture are being inscribed over the apologetics of the communist and post-communist suffering, while Cristian Opriș combines the perspective of applied art and that of the official (socialist) one with the historical and artistic tradition, namely with the representation of identity, by showing or assimilating his own image to the "legal" system through various means of expression and different styles. The Romanian version of this legal system also occurs in the Duo van der Mixt's "sociography" (*The Very Best of Red, Yellow and Blue*, 2002–2005), which shows how the cult of the Greater Romania covered the everyday life in the shape of objects painted in red, yellow and blue. One of the Duo van der Mixt members is, in fact, a well-known name, Mihai Pop, the founder (along with Adrian Ghenie) of the Gallery Plan B, an almost legendary gallery[23]; the group analyzes with photographic tools the Romanians' strategies of identity construction, an action which is not necessarily separate from its topic, the political propaganda, but illustrates perfectly the Groysian paradox of iconoclasm and manufacturing images. The Bazis artists[24] Zsolt Berszan, Istvan Betuker and Zsolt Veress chose a different strategy, trying to massively connect to the expressionist and neo-expressionist art traditions, and the most surprising thing is that have nothing surprising in terms of local color or decolonialism, despite the fact that they

are the genuine representatives of *Kolozsvár* in Cluj, namely, in its already legendary artistic center, The Paintbrush Factory. Berszan's art opposes the universal and the particular in a very interesting manner, deploying a strategy different from that of "the Cluj painter", as if they would simply not pay attention to the spirit of the place, at least not openly, thematically, but rather "unconscious", through the matter itself. In his works he combines the cult for black of the abstract expressionism and the animality (in the Latin meaning of the word) of abject art. Veress, too, tries to connect to the mechanisms of abject art, namely, he takes the colorful "decomposition" of the face and meat to an abject level. These works, causing strong impulses, lack the most important ingredient, namely time, because these artists have engaged somehow on the side of the atemporality of identity.

Since the exoticism of deconstruction and critical (political) art stems not so much from the place, but from the time, maybe this is the most valuable lesson of the current post-communist condition; at least this is the direction seemingly pointed to by the collecting and the ever more intense canonization of the critical art in the region. More specifically, the alternative image of time and history becomes more interesting for the West, an image that, to us, "somewhere in Europe, but just not really there", can become truly illuminating if, in the spirit of decolonization, it ceases to tell the same stories endlessly, and creates its own alternative stories in which neither Hollywood nor MoMA, the Kremlin or the Security are casting the roles.[25] It's another thing – somehow in the spirit of reality – to inquire about the compromises a "European" post-national artist has to make, an artist who cannot hope for a market the size of the Brazilian, or Indonesian ones, in order to find adequate producers for his little Romanian, Transylvanian or Saxon stories.

Translated by Alex Moldovan

[25] The quote I got quoted Homi Bhabha refers to his reasoning; he said that these transients are enabling the translation of important elements of hybridity, while keeping both the differences, and the relations of power. English-language Indian culture is already almost "white", but not completely. See Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 122.

LES PROMESSES DU PASSÉ: SHAPING ART HISTORY VIA THE EXHIBITION

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In April of 2010 the Centre Pompidou in Paris presented what it would refer to as a long-overdue exhibition on art from the former Eastern Europe. Distinguishing itself from a series of shows emerging immediately after the fall of the Wall, *Les Promesses du Passé* was an effort to actively engage with the writing of a history of art largely forgotten and verging, due to aging artists and a lack of organized documentation, on complete disappearance. The Pompidou recognized that this history would, of necessity, be discontinuous and fragmented, and our vision of it would largely be shaped by the present moment. Through their awareness of these limiting factors, the organizers developed several strategies that can be analyzed in our continued attempts to negotiate the evolving history of art from East-Central Europe. In its multidisciplinary nature, broad geographical and chronological range, and interrogation of its own framing, *Les Promesses* was an important step toward a more dynamic form of art history, capable of addressing both the works' historical past and their present force.

Driven by an initiative from Christine Macel of the department of Contemporary and Prospective Creation (an aggressive acquisitions department) the exhibition had as its aims to assess the influence of lesser-known figures on the emerging generation of young artists and to reevaluate the use of the classification "Eastern European" to define a type of art. Concluding that the term, and the notion of a discrete region that could be defined as Eastern Europe, is no longer valid, the curators relied on influence and exchange both within and across national lines to structure their selection, rather than a pre-determined geographical scope.[1] Beginning with the present generation of artists, Macel, in conjunction with Joanna Mytkowska, formerly of the Pompidou and currently director of the Warsaw Museum of Art, traced out a lineage and identified sites of dialogue, generating a repertoire of artists out of which organizing themes and general tendencies emerged. These pathways led between and beyond the countries of the former Eastern bloc, and included artists from the Middle East, western Asia and the West, disrupting a standard east-west dichotomy. Works were presented from 50 artists, created between 1950 and 2010. The show also included primary documentation, performances, film screenings, lectures and debates.

What the exhibition did not aim to do is equally important in this case: there was no effort or claim to offer a complete vision of a moment or region. Shows and publications focusing on East-Central Europe have frequently called for a coherent interpretive schema to parallel Alfred H. Barr's iconic – but deeply problematic – 1936 diagram of modern art.[2] This model reinforces, rather than challenges, a continuous and progressive version of art history. Rather than positing a comprehensive view, *Les Promesses* pursued one possible thread that was tied as much to Paris and the present as to Eastern Europe and the past.

[1] The Pompidou does, however, present several counter-arguments in the catalogue, including Igor Zabel's call for "the conscious development of an Eastern European identity." Macel, Christine. *Promises of the Past*. Jrp Ringier Kunstverlag Ag, 2010, 211. Hereafter referred to as exh. cat.

[2] Irwin's *East Art Map*, in particular, refers to Barr, and aims "to show the art of the whole space of Eastern Europe in the period from 1945 to 2000, taking artists out of their national frameworks and presenting them in a unified scheme." Irwin (Artist group). *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe.* London: Afterall, 2006, 355.

The title, drawn from Walter Benjamin's 1940 essay *On the Concept of History* reflected both the desire to write a history and an awareness of the Pompidou's own hand in constructing that narrative. Benjamin argued for a non-linear history that would permit multiple narratives to co-exist and for moments from the past to resurface in the present. For Benjamin, "history is the object of a construction whose place is formed not in homogenous and empty time, but in that which is fulfilled by the here-and-now."[3] Thus the Pompidou could only speak from the perspective of the here-and-now, resulting in a discursive exhibition with a sustained focus on Paris's role in a history of exchange with the East and the impact of an earlier generation on contemporary artists. The show brought the past into the same plane as the present, allowing artists from before, after and from either side of the Wall to coexist. This breadth of selection led to unprecedented comparisons. Examples of anti-art tendencies from Hungary (Tibor Hajas), Zagreb (Gorgona), and Slovakia (Julius Koller's "anti-happenings") emphasized both a common sentiment and distinct approaches. Stano Filko's HAPPSOC in 1965 in Bratislava, a work of art encompassing an entire city, finds an echo in Katerina Seda's *There is Nothing There* (2003), in which she asked all the residents of a Moravian village to synchronize their activities for an entire day. Tacita Dean's work displayed a surprising overlap with Mangelo's rhetoric, both using written blackboard text to examine loss and forgetting. The sharp turns of the exhibition layout, discussed below, nonetheless made clear the divergent character within these regions, and the lack of an overarching organizing principle.

Before continuing we should address several possible unspoken motives for the exhibition. First, the Pompidou was using this show in part as a means to fill gaps in its collection. Macel spent two years researching to identify places where the collection was lacking or in need of expansion and to select possible acquisitions.[4] This makes the exhibition doubly beneficial; its research served to both uncover and to legitimate works entering the Pompidou collection. In the institution's larger strategic plan, the exhibition fits within its "Mondialisation et Multiculturalisme" initiative, designed to continue to enrich the collections while traversing new frontiers and giving increasing visibility to artists from regions outside the traditional scope of art history.

Les Promesses follows a rash of shows appearing over the past two decades, all of which have been amply critiqued in an attempt to improve what many see as the representation of the East by the West. The Pompidou's own *Presences Polonaises* (1983) was responded to sardonically in Mieczysław Porębski's essay "Absences Polonaises," quickly demonstrating the problems inherent in attempting to capture a holistic picture of a single geographic region.[5] Piotr Piotrowski has pointed out the inadequacies of the landmark exhibition *Europa, Europa* (1994) claiming it "subjected the art of Eastern and Central Europe to an inspection of the West, an inspection that used its own language and its own value system as the criteria of significance and excellence. The exhibition did not present a possibility of a different, opposing language or languages, nor did it engender a confrontation with the system of power – that is, the Western European art canon."[6] The difficulties in presenting art without a clearly defined history are manifold, but a primary concern is the language in which that history will be written. Language here extends to include the structure and aesthetic criteria of the host institution. Without an established canon, the role of the museum in writing art history is paramount – the artists and objects it chooses to present are those that will be recorded, preserved, analyzed and written about. The exhibition gives rise to a *new reality*, as Alina Serban describes:

> The artwork within an exhibition places the viewer in a relationship with a *new reality*. Once the original context of its production has been distanced, the work becomes a stage set for "performances" of an interpretative type generated by a whole set of relations (formal, aesthetic, social and emotional)

[3] Benjamin, Walter, tr. Dennis Redmond, "On the Concept of History," http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm accessed September 2010.

[4] I was unable to obtain information regarding which works were acquisitioned specifically as a result of this show, however, the catalogue notes "We acquired works from emerging artists… such as Pawel Althamer, Maja Bajevic, Roman Ondák, Dan Perjovschi, Anri Sala, Wilhelm Sasnal or Monika Sosnowska… [and] from major figures of the former Eastern Europe that were absent from the collections, such as Sanja Iveković, Julius Koller, Jiri Kovanda, Nesa Paripovic, Alina Szapocznikow and Rasa Todosijevic, among others." exh. cat., 14.

[5] Porębski, M., "Abscences polonaise", *Cahiers du Musee National d' Art Moderne*, no 12, 1983.

[6] Piotrowski, Piotr. In the shadow of Yalta: art and the avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989. London: Reaktion, 2009, 23.

> between the author's vision and the viewer's expectations, between what the artist proposes as a "scenario" and what the spectator gradually discovers in time.[7]

Here I would add that the curator plays a crucial role in determining that scenario and in facilitating possible encounters for the spectator. In *Les Promesses*, the Pompidou handed over a significant portion of the construction of that new reality – including the physical framework of the exhibition – to the language of East-Central Europe.

The exhibition was presented in two parts. The artworks were installed in the Pompidou's Galerie Sud, a space dedicated to small, specialized shows, while contextual materials and programming were held in the adjoining Espace 315. Before entering the gallery, the visitor heard Marina Abramović's *Airport: Sound Environment* (1972), the familiar sounds of airports creating a sense of departure, moving the visitor into a transitional mode.[8] The gallery itself, a vast open room, held an "architectural sculpture" by Polish artist Monika Sosnowska commissioned specifically for the exhibition. Renowned for her experimental spatial propositions, and particularly her work for the Polish Pavillion at the Venice Biennale in 2007, Sosnowska developed her piece in conjunction with the curators, adapting the physical structure as works were added and their arrangement shifted, until the final product emerged as "a line that has shaped itself".[9] Rather than opening up onto a variety of possible courses, the structure dictated that the viewer proceed sequentially. Nooks and zigzags frequently interrupted the trajectory. At times it gave the impression of an impenetrable center, which it would approach and then veer away from. The path eventually looped around, returning the viewer to the starting point (See exhibition layout, Appendix 1). The artworks displayed ranged in scale from small photographs, like Jiří Kovanda's documentation of his interventions, to Thea Djordjadze's *Pampel*, a large public sculpture. (For a complete list of works included, see Appendix 2). All were embedded as seamlessly as possible into the wall, which worked simultaneously as a whole, a complete sculptural entity, and as a series of smaller encounters with individual works. As one progressed through the show, the preceding works were both there and distanced; one did not really turn back, but kept going, layering the disparate elements atop one another, certain works recurring in flashes of influence and appropriation. One object stood entirely outside the support, a site-specific piece by Daniel Knorr that responded directly to the Pompidou's architecture and aesthetic while engaging with a history of subversion of governmental control. Much of the gallery space remained empty, further highlighting the unusual layout and controlled scope of the exhibition.

One of the primary contributions of *Les Promesses* was in developing this artist-commissioned museography. Both within the ideological frame of any institution and the physical frame of its gallery walls, works of art are subject to the pre-existing constraints of the museum in which they are shown – limited, literally, to walls that have already been built. Sosnowska's sculpture opened a mediatory space between two languages, presenting the collision between the institutional framework and the artworks themselves. The endemic issue of 'framing' is drawn out in the disjunction between the gridded regularity of the Pompidou and the dynamic angularity of the support. Rather than attempting to naturalize the works, to make them fit within the invisible guidelines of the institution, the Pompidou chose to make the frame a visible, integral part of the exhibition. As Sosnowska emphasizes, "it was important to maintain the separation, or separateness, of this installation – it stands *in* a room, not connected to the Pompidou architecture. The museum walls don't participate at all; they just enclose."[10] The Pompidou challenged its own, by now iconic, frame by inviting another sub-frame into the gallery. This move indicates a willingness to permit another language to bear on the Pompidou's own history, a physical parallel to the invitation of Mytkowska as co-curator and the acquisition of works from the exhibition into the permanent collections.

[7] Biennale di Venezia, Alina Şerban, Mirela Duculescu, and Mieke Bal. *The Seductiveness of the Interval*. Stockhom: Romanian Cultural Institute of Stockhom, 2009, 10.

[8] Note that a similar strategy was used in the 1999 exhibition *After the Wall*, curated by Bojana Pejic. Lutz Becker's *After the Wall* was placed outside the museums' buildings, a sound montage of the gradual erosion of the Berlin Wall after its opening. Pejic, Bojana, "East of Art: Transformations in Eastern Europe, What Comes After the Wall?", *artmargins*, 23 March 2003, http://www.artmargins.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=254%3Aeast-of-art-transformations-in-eastern-europe-qwhat-comes-after-the-wallq&Itemid=133.

[9] Wolinski, Michal and Monika Sosnowska, "Monika Sosnowska," *Artforum*, May 2010.

[10] Ibid.

The installation also served to manifest the conditions of the exhibition, to concretize the narrative thread of the show.[11] Akin to leaving the pencil marks visible, Sosnowska's sculpture traced out the curators' decisions and juxtapositions and threw into relief the subjectivity of their pairings. Sosnowska managed to negotiate the space between the theoretical basis of the exhibition and the experience of the viewer. Her jagged trajectory reifies Benjamin's discontinuous history, making the fragmented experience of the exhibition indicative of a larger historical process. By consciously engaging with the space between theoretical ideas and the actual exhibition, simultaneously probing the conceptual underpinnings of the show and the phenomenology of the viewer's experience of it, *Les Promesses* acknowledged its own role in writing the art history of works that were heretofore largely disregarded in the canon of art history.

The second part of the project, held in Espace 315, was dedicated to primary documentation chosen by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez charting out a history of exchange between the former Eastern Europe and Paris. This section was designed to contend with context, an issue that has challenged other curators. One must do justice to historical conditions, which in many cases are requisite for understanding a work, while allowing the work to retain its autonomy as an art object. As Bojana Pejic demanded, regarding her own show *After the Wall* (2003) "First, can an ("Eastern") artwork simply be reduced to the "context" in which it was produced? And second, what remains in/of this artwork if we take it away from "the context"?[12] Irwin similarly cautioned, "All exhibitions, to one degree or another, are struggles between text and context, and can be seen as mediums for advancing the discourse of cultural translation or as sites for ambushing artistic intentions through curatorial presentation."[13] While didactic wall-texts illuminated some of the most pertinent issues regarding the artworks themselves, it is in this adjoining gallery that the Pompidou delved into a more experimental view of what it might mean to exhibit context. Here, the issue of cultural translation involves a meeting of two languages – rather than the direct conversion of one to the other. Instead of attempting to objectively contextualize the historical situation throughout the former East, the curators chose primary documentation focused on Paris. As a destination and, often, a temporary residence for many Eastern European artists beginning in the 1950s, the city was a key site of exchange, though this is often neglected in favor of the myth of Eastern Europe as isolated behind the Iron Curtain. The presentation included selections from the archives of Galerie 1-37, Galerie des Locataires, Pierre Restany and the Paris Biennale. Focusing on the role of the French in the context of these artworks reveals the Pompidou's own interest in reviving this dialogue and reexamining its history. Petrešin-Bachelez explains "the insight should focus on specific chapters from this vivid time and on geopolitical crossovers... to render visible activities that are anchored in the past and present, by exploring their topicality today."[14]

This section also utilized an artist-commissioned layout. Tobias Putrih created a "transitional territory" based on examples of cinema architecture in socialist Eastern Europe. Using simple materials, Putrih built a dramatic architectural environment, whose darkened enclosures contrasted with the presumed objectivity of an archive. The cinema auditorium, for Putrih, was an "in-between space between the hard reality of street experience and the fantastic, theatrical, fictional realm of the film itself."[15] By presenting these contextual documents within a highly aestheticized structure, the exhibition demonstrates a position advocated by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson: "it cannot be taken for granted that the evidence that makes up 'context' is going to be any simpler and more legible than the visual text upon which such evidence is to operate."[16] Context is not given as objective fact by the Pompidou, but animated both by the space in which it is shown and in conversations held in the adjoining auditorium with the directors of Galerie 1-37 and Galerie des Locataires. Throughout the course of the exhibition, the auditorium served as

[11] For the 2009 Venice Biennale, the Romanian Pavilion took up a similar problematic, invoking Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space: the assertion that space and thought continue to be modeled on one another.

[12] Pejic, np.

[13] Irwin, *East Art Map*, 355.

[14] Petrešin-Bachelez, Nataša, "Archives, Sources," in exh. cat., 184.

[15] Collins, Thom, "Beautiful Constructs: An Interview with Tobias Putrih," in exh. cat., 41.

[16] Bal, Mieke and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History: A Discussion of Context and Senders," in Preziosi, Donald. *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. Oxford history of art. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 247.

a platform for debates, lectures, conferences and performances. These events formed a multi-vocal platform with which to challenge the history that was being written *in situ*. The program included prominent theorists, curators and performers, who discussed tendencies and challenges in East-Central Europe and gave testimony to historic events.

An accompanying film series bolstered the multidisciplinary character of the show. Not limited to strictly art objects, *Les Promesses* opened itself to a larger discourse, one more appropriate to an artistic output that consistently relied on non-standard forms of aesthetic engagement. The performances and films especially, but also many of the artworks in this show, were often limited to small audiences and private spaces. This exhibition expanded their viewership for the first time, presenting works that were often, as Sinziana Ravini says of Roman Ondák, "so discreet that you might even miss them or take them for something other than art."[17] As Jiri Kovanda described, discussing his interventions, "The question is when communication takes place. I think it's at the moment when the thing is referred to as art... If no spectators have been invited, however, I think it doesn't take place until afterwards... when it's presented as art."[18] Exhibitions like *Les Promesses* reactualise these works in the present moment, allowing them to fulfill their potential as art and as testaments to a specific history.

Both parts of the exhibition, then, contribute to a particular history, a micronarrative documenting the exchange between Paris and the former Eastern bloc and between present currents in contemporary art and a neglected generation. This history is not stable, but written and re-written throughout the course of the exhibition and beyond: *Les Promesses* will continue to serve as a resource for scholars, gathering together artists and documents from disparate locations; the catalogue is an extensive research tool, with contributions from many diverse voices; and the debates, lectures and conferences served to open a larger discussion and to challenge the limits of the exhibition format.

Academic art history needs to come to terms with the role of the exhibition in shaping its course. These works demand re-viewing, as for Benjamin, the past "demands redemption".[19] The promises of the past: for history, yes, but also for art. In the case of the former Eastern bloc, many artworks were unable to reach audiences or benefit from critical analysis. Despite the methodological challenges, Macel argues, and I agree, "in order to understand background, to explain it, we need to exhibit it... if we want to rewrite history, we need to expose the links which connect [Western artists] to the art of the former Eastern Europe."[20] Rather than writing a history of the former East from a position of authority, the Pompidou created a dialogue in which both East and West were implicated. An artist commissioned museography developed a mediatory space between institutional authority and the subjective viewer experience. Without relying on predetermined geographical or thematic boundaries, the curators uncovered and made visible a history that commented simultaneously on the present moment and the specificity of a historical exchange. By taking their own role into account, while inserting the language of East-Central Europe into the exhibition, the Pompidou avoids the pitfalls of previous shows while opening a space for a more dynamic art history to be written.

Brno, November 2010

[17] Ravini, Sinziana, in exh. cat., 126.

[18] Macuska, Jan, "Interview," in exh. cat., 107.

[19] Benjamin, np.

[20] Macel, exh. cat., 24.

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